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The Eighty - Three

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Area 83 Archives Newsletter

Our Area 83 history through the eyes of those before us... A legacy of gratitude

Creating and saving
our history

David T.

As I come to the end of my term and reflect on the last six years, I thought it would be appropriate to give a recap of how I came to take the position of Area 83 Archivist.

My history in AA goes back to 1971 when I came back into AA for the final time (up to today). In early 1971 Bill W had passed away and AA was now truly in the hands of its members. I was hanging onto my career in the military by a very thin thread when I decided I had to survive by not drinking so I came back to AA. At the time there were a bunch of old-timers at the meetings who talked about coming back from the War drinking up their bonuses waking up and finally coming to AA and everything was great. This wouldn't for me so I joined on of three discussion groups in Ottawa where they talked about the steps.

At the time most of the groups in Ottawa were speaker meetings with a lot of older people in them and not much talk about working the steps but I did learn from some of these older guys who did talk about the steps. This is probably when I met my first mentor, Bob E who had been around a ton of years and was in the Military as

well.

From Bob I learned the importance of service to the Home Group and AA as a whole. Throughout my career Bob followed my progress as he had also been a Non-Commissioned Officer before he was commissioned and stuck very close to the military groups in AA. He also taught me the importance of the history of AA and how it affected the total fellowship.

Bob wrote one of the first histories of Ottawa AA and he taught me to remember what had transpired in the earlier days. Bob linked the start of AA in Ottawa to the Toronto Groups and eventually Dave B from Montreal and Bill W. in New York. I learned the importance of using the history of AA in my 12 Step work to show where we came from.

At the end of my military career I got involved in General Service in Ottawa and eventually Area 83. Unfortunately, my work in General Service was interrupted by some health problems and I had to step away for service for a while. But boredom soon took over and I was asked to submit my name as a candidate for Area Archivist.

Of Special Interest

Contributions to 'The Eighty - Three' should be sent to:
archivisit@area83aa.org

An Archivist Farewell

Because of my military experienced in records management I was chosen as the Archivist for Area 83. And the rest in history.

The growth of archives is still very slow in Area 83 with most of the activity being Toronto, Peterborough, and Ottawa where there is an Intergroup to store the archival material. Many of the districts also have smaller archives and the question is always “where do I start and what do I save”. With the guidance of the Archives chairs we have attempted to improve local archives by providing training at the annual archives workshops.

What to Collect?

Most groups have a box of stuff which they don't know what to do with and they usually store it in someone's basement but it is more important to give this material to the local archives chair so we can record this information and use it to build a local history of AA in your area. If you are lucky, someone will deed you a copy of the first edition of the Big Book or 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. If these are not available, the next best thing is some Oral Histories of the old-timers or longtimers in your community. Warning the older members don't live forever so don't wait too long to get an Oral History.

Some communities may wish to collect copies of Roundup posters or group anniversaries. Whatever is collect should reflect the local community.

Storage of material should be in a dry place where it is possible to keep things at least 4 inches off the floor to avoid having insects infect some of your paper documents. Storage in a dry place will also prevent mold from developing on the documents you are saving.

If your local community has a recovery facility for alcohol and drug addiction your local groups may have contributed to the establishment of information sessions or meetings on Alcoholics Anonymous in the facility. It is important to document how AA may

have contributed to this treatment center. As an example, in Ottawa, the Royal Ottawa Hospital consulted with AA when establishing their treatment center in the early 1970's because of the success of our 12-Step program and it is still the model used today in many recovery homes and treatment centers.

Collections should always be stored in acid free containers like plastic storage containers or acid free or archival boxes. It is recommended that books be stored standing up and folders with documents be laid on their side to protect these documents from developing excess curling of the paper.

Instructions are available from the Canadian Conservation Institute for restoring documents which have become soiled or to remove scotch tape or staples safely from important documents. Take care to follow these instructions carefully or consult with the Area Archivist for assistance.

Whatever you choose to collect, it is important to always handle paper records carefully especially any fragile documents. Wearing lint-free cotton gloves or nitrile gloves will prevent you from damaging your documents further.

Within Area 83 we have been very fortunate to have the leadership of Archives Chairs who are supportive of Archives but this may not be the case in your local community. Always get the support of your local General Service Committee and develop a proper mandate describing what you wish to collect. Because someone dies and their family brings you their AA material is not a valid reason to collect this information. Your district must decide what you are going to save about the history of AA in your local area.

I have enjoyed my time as Archivist and wish all of you success in your service activities. Always remember to ask for help when you are not sure about archival materials.

David T