

Alcoholics Anonymous

Founders Day Celebration

June 6, 2026

91 Years of Hope, Healing & Fellowship

From Cave-Men's Nectar to a World-Wide Fellowship — The Full Story

Speech Outline

Opening

Welcome & Gratitude

Greet the group — old-timers, newcomers, families, and friends. Acknowledge the sacred ground we stand on together.

Personal Introduction

Briefly share who you are and your relationship with the Fellowship — your sobriety date and home group.

Purpose of Founders Day

We gather to celebrate June 10, 1935 — when two broken men in Akron, Ohio changed the world.

A Note on History

Tonight we trace A.A.'s roots deep into history — from ancient humanity to the living rooms of Akron — so we never forget where we came from.

Ancient Roots — Alcohol & Humanity

"The Nectar of the Gods"

Cave-men and ancient civilizations across every culture discovered fermentation. Alcohol was woven into ritual, medicine, and daily life for millennia.

The Ancient Chains

Yet alongside that nectar came suffering. Records from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece document the destruction of compulsive drinking — the chains are as old as civilization itself.

An Age-Old Problem, A Modern Solution

For thousands of years humanity had no answer. It would take until 1935 — and a remarkable chain of people — for a solution to finally emerge.



The Intellectual Roots

Carl Jung & William James

Roland Hazard (1931)

American businessman, hopeless alcoholic — treated by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung in Zürich.

Jung's Honest Verdict

Jung told Roland: medicine could not cure him. Only a profound spiritual experience — a genuine psychic change — offered any hope.

William James

Jung pointed Roland toward William James's "Varieties of Religious Experience" (1902) — the idea that a spiritual conversion could transform a personality beyond what medicine could achieve.

Frank Buchman & The Oxford Group

Frank Buchman (1921)

American Lutheran minister who founded the Oxford Group — a spiritual movement focused on moral inventory, confession, restitution, and helping others.

Rev. Sam Shoemaker

Calvary Church, NYC. Shoemaker was the Oxford Group's American leader. He became the spiritual teacher who would directly shape Bill Wilson's understanding of recovery.

The Bridge to A.A.

The Oxford Group's principles — honesty, surrender, restitution, quiet time — became the direct foundation of what would later become the 12 Steps.

The Messenger: From Roland to Bill

W.

Roland Hazard Returns Home

Armed with Jung's insight and transformed by a spiritual experience in the Oxford Group, Roland came back to the U.S. and began carrying the message to other alcoholics.

Ebby Thatcher (1934)

Roland's message reached Ebby Thatcher — a childhood friend and drinking buddy of Bill Wilson's. Ebby got sober through the Oxford Group and went to see Bill.

Ebby Visits Bill Wilson

Bill was drinking in his Brooklyn kitchen. Ebby sat across from him and shared what had happened to him. Bill was stunned: a hopeless drunk had found a way out.

Bill's Spiritual Experience (Dec. 1934)

After a final hospitalization at Towns Hospital — under Dr. William Silkworth — Bill Wilson had a profound spiritual awakening. He never drank again.



Dr. Silkworth & the Medical Piece

"We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy."

— Dr. William D. Silkworth — "The Doctor's Opinion," Alcoholics Anonymous

Dr. William Silkworth

Physician at Towns Hospital, NYC. Known as "the little doctor who loved drunks." He treated Bill Wilson and gave A.A. its medical framework.

The Allergy Concept

Silkworth proposed that alcoholics suffer a physical allergy combined with a mental obsession — the body cannot process alcohol normally, and the mind cannot stop.

Why This Mattered

This framing removed moral blame and gave suffering alcoholics a medical explanation — they were not weak; they were sick. The Big Book opens with Silkworth's contribution.

Akron — June 10, 1935

June
10
1935

Henrietta Sieberling

Non-alcoholic hostess, Seiberling estate (Stan Hywet area), Akron. She arranged for struggling stockbroker Bill Wilson — in town on a failed business deal — to meet Dr. Bob Smith.

Dr. Bob Smith

Akron surgeon, Oxford Group member, desperately trying to control his drinking. Bill and Bob talked for hours. Bob felt, for the first time, truly understood — by another alcoholic.

Dr. Bob's Last Drink

June 10, 1935 — Dr. Bob took his last drink to steady his hands for surgery. That day is celebrated as the birthday of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Simple Miracle

One alcoholic talking to another, seeking nothing but to stay sober themselves — a principle that has never changed.

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Alcoholic #3 & the Akron First 100

Bill D. — Alcoholic #3 (June 1935)

Bill Dotson, a lawyer, was hospitalized in Akron — violent, hopeless, strapped to his bed. Bill W. and Dr. Bob visited him. They talked as alcoholics. He never drank again.

Why #3 Matters

Bill D.'s recovery proved the principle worked beyond just the two founders. It was reproducible. A.A. had a method, not just a miracle.

The Akron Group Grows

Through 1935–1938, the small Akron fellowship grew to dozens of sober members — meeting in homes, carrying the message one alcoholic at a time.

The First 100

By 1939 when the Big Book was published, A.A. could count approximately 100 men and women who had found sobriety. Their stories fill the back of the Big Book — proof the program worked.

The Big Book, Rockefeller & Early Support

Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick & Riverside Church

Fosdick, pastor of Rockefeller's Riverside Church in NYC, read an early draft of the Big Book and wrote a letter of endorsement — lending critical credibility to the fledgling fellowship.

John D. Rockefeller Jr. — The Dinner (1940)

Bill Wilson sought Rockefeller's financial backing. Rockefeller attended a dinner with A.A. members, was deeply moved — but famously declined large funding, fearing money would spoil the movement.

The Seed Money

Rockefeller's emissary, Frank Amos, assessed the fellowship and Rockefeller provided modest seed money through a trust — enough to allow Bill W. to work on A.A. full-time and publish the Big Book.

"Alcoholics Anonymous" — The Big Book (1939)

Written primarily by Bill Wilson, with input from Dr. Bob and early members, the Big Book laid out the 12-Step program and contained personal stories. Price: \$3.50. It changed everything.

Spiritual Mentors: Shoemaker & Dowling

Rev. Sam Shoemaker (ongoing)

Even after A.A. separated from the Oxford Group (1937), Shoemaker remained a beloved friend and spiritual guide to Bill Wilson. He later said the 12 Steps were "a distillation of what I tried to teach."

Father Edward Dowling, S.J. (1940)

A Jesuit priest from St. Louis — not an alcoholic — who saw parallels between the 12 Steps and St. Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises. He knocked on Bill's door in a snowstorm and became one of Bill's most cherished spiritual advisors.

A Movement Embraced Across Traditions

That a Protestant minister and a Jesuit priest both embraced A.A. signaled its unique spiritual breadth — not allied with any religion, yet deeply spiritual and welcome in every tradition.

What They Gave Bill

Shoemaker gave A.A. its Protestant evangelical warmth; Dowling gave it Catholic mystical depth. Together they helped Bill understand that the program's spirituality was genuinely universal.



A.A. Spreads — Tucson & Beyond

From Akron to the Nation

By 1940, groups had formed in New York, Cleveland, and Chicago. The Saturday Evening Post ran a feature in 1941 — 6,000 letters arrived in weeks. A.A. exploded across America.

Tucson's First 100 AAs

Tucson became an early outpost of the fellowship in the Southwest. Like every city, it began with a handful of desperate people sitting in living rooms, reading the Big Book, and calling each other at 2 a.m.

Bill & Lois — Homeless (1939–1940)

While A.A. was growing, Bill and Lois Wilson had lost their home and lived as guests in the homes of A.A. members for nearly two years. They had given everything to the fellowship.

First International Convention — Cleveland, 1950

5,000 members gathered. Dr. Bob Smith — dying of cancer — gave his last speech. The 12 Traditions were formally adopted. Bill declared A.A. "of age." Dr. Bob died four months later.

Structure: GSO, Traditions & Trustees

The 12 Traditions

1. Common welfare first; personal recovery depends on A.A. unity
2. One ultimate authority — a loving God as expressed through group conscience
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking
4. Each group is autonomous
5. A.A. has but one primary purpose — carrying its message
6. A.A. ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any enterprise
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting
8. A.A. should remain forever non-professional
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized
10. A.A. has no opinion on outside issues
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions

GSO & Board of Trustees

General Service Office (GSO)

Established in NYC to serve groups worldwide — publishing, correspondence, and coordination. Supports but never governs.

Board of Trustees

Non-alcoholic and A.A. trustees oversee A.A. World Services, Inc. — a model of shared accountability that keeps A.A. from being controlled by any individual.

The General Service Conference

Begun in 1951 at Bill's urging — an annual gathering of delegates from every U.S./Canada region, ensuring the fellowship governs itself.

Why Structure Matters

The Traditions and GSO structure protect A.A. from the dangers of money, property, prestige, and controversy — the same forces that destroy other organizations.

A.A. Today — The Numbers

2,000,000+

Members since the 1990s alone

180+

Countries with A.A. groups

130,000+

Groups worldwide

91

Years of one alcoholic helping another

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The Heart of the Program

The 12 Steps

1. Admission & surrender
2. Belief in a Higher Power
3. Decision to turn our will over
4. Moral inventory
5. Sharing our wrongs honestly
6. Readiness for character change
7. Asking for removal of defects
8. Making a list to amend
9. Making direct amends
10. Continued personal inventory
11. Prayer & meditation
12. Carrying the message

Core Principles

- **Honesty**
Rigorous self-honesty in all affairs
- **Open-mindedness**
Willingness to consider new ideas
- **Willingness**
Action is the key to change (H.O.W.)
- **Service**
"We can only keep it by giving it away"
- **Fellowship**
No one recovers alone — we need each other
- **Anonymity**
The spiritual foundation of all our Traditions

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Personal Reflection

"Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path."

— Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 58

What the Program Has Given You

Share your own experience — sobriety, restored relationships, purpose, serenity. This is the most important part of your speech. Make it personal.

A Turning Point

Describe the moment, the meeting, or the person that made the difference on your journey.

Gratitude for the Chain

Roland told Ebby. Ebby told Bill. Bill found Bob. Bob found Bill D. Somewhere in that chain is a link that reaches all the way to you in this room tonight.

The Newcomer & the Next 91 Years

To the Newcomer in the Room

You are the most important person here. Bill Wilson didn't stay sober to save himself — he stayed sober because he needed to talk to Dr. Bob. We need you as much as you need us.

The Unbroken Chain

From a Swiss psychiatrist's consultation room in 1931, through the Oxford Group, through Ebby's kitchen visit, through Towns Hospital, through a Akron living room — to this room, tonight, in Tucson.

Our Responsibility

Carry the message, not the mess. Pass on what was freely given. The still-suffering alcoholic somewhere in Tucson tonight is waiting for the chain to reach them.

The Next 91 Years

As long as one alcoholic is willing to sit with another and say "I've been there" — A.A. will be here. The program is simple. The program works. Keep coming back.

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Closing

"Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now."

— Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 58

Recap the Legacy

From cave-men's nectar to Jung's couch to Ebby's kitchen visit to a Akron living room to this room tonight — 91 years of one miracle repeating itself.

Words of Encouragement

Keep coming back. It works if you work it. And you're worth it.

Closing Tradition

Invite the group to recite the Serenity Prayer together.

God, grant me the serenity...