

February 1990



## Fragments of AA History

### Kansas City Number One

Johnny P. from Chicago brought the AA message to Kansas City, Missouri, in early April 1941. He had lived on skid row and tried to kill himself three times before he had stumbled into the Chicago Group the previous summer. Now, with nine months of sobriety under his belt and a job as a candy salesman, he was doing so well that his company was about to transfer him to a new territory. He knew his life depended on finding some drunks to talk to, so he wrote the New York office asking for any information they had on AA groups in Missouri.

New York wrote back saying there weren't any AA groups they knew of, but there were three people who had written to the office in response to Jack Alexander's *Saturday Evening Post* article; a doctor, a druggist, and a certified public accountant.

As soon as Johnny P. arrived in Kansas City, he called the three letter writers and they got together in his

room at the Robert E. Lee Hotel. Dr. Z. Miles N., William "Bill" T., the druggist, and Harvey L., the CPA, scheduled their first real AA meeting as a group a few days later at the Victoria Hotel, then at 9th and McGee Streets. They called themselves the Kansas City Number One group and they placed an ad in the *Kansas City Star* to run each Sunday, giving a post office box number.

As in most other places, the group had to struggle to survive at first. Most of the members had suffered terribly from alcoholism. Some newcomers were so ill they died soon after coming into the program and the sobriety of others was fragile. At one point, they were down to three members and they had so little money they couldn't afford coffee at the meeting. Their treasurer had gotten drunk and disappeared with all of the group's funds: \$3.74. There was always an undercurrent of fear for their survival.

Five months after that first meet-

ing, Ken S. arrived at their doorstep. He was about to lose his bookkeeping job for a second time and be evicted from his home. But the last straw was that his wife, made sick at heart by his drunkenness, was finally threatening to take the children and leave. But she had also seen the ad in the *Star* and written to the post office box asking for help for her husband.

Her ultimatum to Ken came on a Sunday. He quit cold-turkey, promising yet again never to drink if only she wouldn't leave him. He went to work on Monday, too sick all day even to eat. When he got home that night his wife told him two men from AA had called. They came by the house and twelfth-stepped him on Wednesday evening and told him to come to the meeting on Friday.

He did go on Friday and stood across the way watching the group laughing and talking together. He lost his courage at the last moment and was about to turn away and head for a familiar bar across the street. "Then Divine Providence took a hand in my life," he said. One of the men spotted him, came forward and asked if he was looking for the AA meeting. He remained a member of Kansas City Number One for the rest of his life.

A couple of years later, Landon Laird, an extremely popular columnist on the *Kansas City Star* and a friend of one of the members of the group, began to mention AA frequently in his daily column, "About Town," usually giving the PO box

number. Landon Laird did for AA locally what Jack Alexander did for the Fellowship nationally. The Kansas City Number One group was safe and growing by leaps and bounds.

### A Coffeepot and a Resentment

By 1950, the group had grown enormously and there were the inevitable stresses and strains. As sure as taxes a controversy arose which was severe enough to cause fifty or sixty members to withdraw and form the Fellowship Group, which later became known as the Plaza Group because of its location. Wrenching as the experience was, it proved beneficial to AA's growth in Kansas City because members with some sobriety began establishing meetings all over town and by 1970, when the Central Office was organized, there were twenty-nine groups. By 1985, that number had grown to ninety-seven plus almost that many more in surrounding towns in Western Missouri.

Most of the original members of Kansas City Number One have passed away, but in 1985, Ken S. — then 89 years of age and 44 years sober — was still actively serving as manager of the Kansas City Central Office. He was introduced from the stage at the Friday night opening meeting of the 50th Anniversary International Convention in Montreal, and was recognized not only for the longevity of his sobriety and service but also his remarkable record as the only person (other than Lois W.) who had attended every International Convention AA has ever had.