

BILL PITTMAN (1947–2007)

AN APPRECIATION

One of the foremost authors in Alcoholics Anonymous history and Twelve Step recovery, Bill Pittman died suddenly on Friday, November 9, 2007 at his home in Center City, Minnesota at age sixty. His death will leave a great void in the scholarly community of alcohol and temperance studies.

Bill graduated with honors from the University of Minnesota and held degrees from University of Massachusetts Boston and New York University in applied sociology and archival methods. For the past twenty-eight years he was an historian, author and publisher of numerous books about A.A. recovery and the history of alcoholism. He was known for his generous help to other scholars in the field of alcohol history.

Early in his career he worked for the A.A. Archives at the headquarters in New York City. After that he helped to found Glenn Abbey Books in Seattle, which published some of his first books, including *Beware the first Drink! The Washingtonian Temperance Movement and Alcoholics Anonymous* (1991) with Leonard Blumberg. In 1993 he founded the Hazelden-Pittman Archives in Center City, Minnesota, a major repository of pamphlets, newspapers, tracts and books on temperance history dating from the late eighteenth century. During his ten years at Hazelden, he founded the Hazelden-Pittman Archives Press and was instrumental in the publication of many books about A.A. pioneers, including Sally and David Brown's *A Biography of Mrs. Marty Mann: The First Lady of Alcoholics Anonymous* (2001) and Mary Darrah's *Sister Ignatia: Angel of Alcoholics Anonymous* (1992).

Bill's wrote his University of Minnesota thesis, "Alternative Explanations for the Beginnings of Alcoholics Anonymous, 1934-1939" in 1983. With the help of Nell Wing and Ernest Kurtz his thesis became the book, *A.A., The Way It Began* in 1988. He reissued it in 1999 as *The Roots of Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Bill was a captivating speaker, with a dry wit. His slide presentation on recovery history was well known to temperance and A.A. historians. Known for his gentle humor, kindness and fishing tales, he left Hazelden, according to friends "to go fishing."

[SHAD Editor's Note: Bill was a crucial advocate for the Alcohol and Temperance History Group's publication, the *Social History of Alcohol Review*, which, thanks to Bill, Hazelden published and distributed without charge for several years. The SHAR was the precursor to the journal you are currently reading, and Bill's very active role in keeping the journal going cannot be

overstated.]

We conclude with a few appreciations of Bill's life and work:

KATHERINE NELSON, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY:

I am just one of the many students whom Bill Pittman helped. He was so generous in helping me when I was doing research for my dissertation several years ago at the Hazelden-Pittman Archives near Minneapolis. These archives bear his name because of his generosity in donating his extensive collection of books, treatises and other materials to Hazelden. His knowledge of the temperance movement literature, combined with the extraordinary archival sources, proved invaluable for my dissertation research. I was amazed at how quickly he could pull out relevant information for my topic. His enthusiasm for my subject ("The Temperance Physicians: Developing Concepts of Addiction") seemed to match my own. I will miss him greatly and will continue to be inspired by his work and example.

ERNEST KURTZ, U. OF MICHIGAN.

Bill Pittman and I first met at the Rutgers Summer School of Alcohol Studies in 1980. *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (1979) had just been published, and Bill asked me to autograph a copy. In those days, I appeared at Rutgers as a three-day guest lecturer in the class of Dr. Dan Anderson. My third class had just finished, and in it I had discovered Bill to be an acute questioner, someone well-versed in relevant data.

Conversation with Bill impressed me even more, and so I wrote on the frontispiece of his copy of *Not-God*: "For Bill Pittman, who will write the next comprehensive history of A.A." Bill treasured that dedication, I believe, for he sometimes reminded me of it in later years when the going became rough for him in one way or another.

Why did I write that on such brief acquaintance? Because some of Bill's outstanding qualities were evident the moment one met him: his open inviting, even questioning face. Bill was interested in *you*, not in himself. Or, more accurately, he was interested in anything that you might be able to teach him, in anything that you knew that he had not himself yet discovered.

That openness Bill Pittman connected with a critically discerning eye and mind. One might suggest an answer, but Bill always then had yet another question, usually posed very quietly, in an almost studied offhand manner. On any topic he was at the same time a bloodhound, relentlessly pursuing, a bulldog, hanging onto for dear life, and a terrier, shaking any new datum for all it was worth until its very insides spilled out. Bill was, in other words, the ideal researcher.

Bill was also a collector and a cherisher. Although usually aware of the monetary value of the books and documents he gathered, Bill always seemed to value them more as testimony to a still living history. Because he knew

the stories so well, Bill invested in his things the kind of spirit that only a true lover can bring.

Bill we miss you. But we are grateful for the shafts of light you brought to the ongoing story we all try to live as we study it the story of being fully human though flawed, flawed but fully human.

CHARLES BISHOP

Bill Pittman was co-author with me of two editions of *To Be Continued...The Alcoholics Anonymous World Bibliography 1935-1994*. We first met when he was working at the A.A. Archives and Grapevine in New York City. Searching through the Big Apple's many used book stores, he found I was his main competitor for A.A. and alcoholism literature. He phoned and we immediately became friends. Our paths crossed many times in Seattle, N.Y.C., and at Hazelden in Minnesota. He visited me in Wheeling, WV, often and I recall our trip to Marietta, Ohio, to find Ruth Hock Crocelius, A.A.'s first paid worker. We shared an intense love of A.A. literature. We wrote, published, bought and sold, appraised, debated, collected, donated, researched and devoured A.A.-alcoholism books endlessly.

We laughed ourselves silly over A.A.'s "dirty laundry." Visiting the big Sunday spiritual meeting at the Seattle A.A. International 1990 Convention, Bill looked over the 40,000 in attendance and quipped "pretty big meeting, think they'll split it up?" He spoke at the West Virginia A.A. 50th anniversary convention in 1992.

His contributions at A.A. headquarters, Glen Abbey books in Seattle and the Hazelden-Pittman Press in Minnesota were immense. A few years ago, he left Hazelden "to go fishing" and disappeared. But he will not disappear from A.A. history or from my grateful prayers. I miss him. God speed, dear Fellow Traveler. Amen!

Collected and edited by Katherine Nelson