

# Why Alcoholics Anonymous Will Soon Be Dead



*by Bobby Freaken Beach*

*If it ain't broke, don't fix it.*

If you've been around longer than a few weeks, you've probably heard that one a few times, or more than a few. Why do people say that? The simplest answer is they have heard other people say it. Basically, it's just assumed to be true. Pretty much anytime AA is criticized or some change is suggested "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" gets trotted out. Is supporting evidence of the "not-brokenness" ever offered? Oh yeah. "Statistics" get trotted out such as: "Rarely have we seen a person fail..." and "Of those who really tried..."

*Let me stop you right there, Bobby Beach! I studied statistics at a very fine university and those are **not** statistics!*

*Calm down, Grasshopper. I know that. Bobby Beach recognizes crappola when it's flung at him!*

The pinheads spewing fake stat Number One will also tell you that Willie Wilson favored only one change to the Bigga Booka. "Rarely" should be changed to "Nev-uh." "Nev-uh have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path..."

We don't want to oversell the AA program but it's flawless!

AA *does* have some numbers – membership estimates – and according to those figures, AA is very broken. After years of impressive growth, membership peaked in 1992 at 2,489,541. The last number showing on [aa.org](http://aa.org) is 2021's 1,967,613. That 20% drop is more impactful

still when one considers a population increase of about 30% during the same time frame. We can debate the cause(s), but AA is not doing well.

Let's look back at some of our early history.

AA's Bigga Booka went on sale on April 10, 1939. The working title had been *One Hundred Men* but the presence of Florence Rankin, sober for about a year, caused a review of that name. The group conscience then voted for *A Way Out* but there were (supposedly) several books bearing that name. Besides, Bill Wilson wanted the name *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

It's commonly said that the fellowship took its name from the book but that isn't true. There are 1938 letters using the name "Alcoholics Anonymous" to identify the group, many months before the book was named. Bill Wilson was "acting as if" that were the agreed-upon name. Pretty clever, actually. The One Hundred Men Corporation Prospectus, also crafted in 1938, used the name "Alcoholics Anonymous" as a header on every page – a sort of letterhead.

*What was the One Hundred Men Corporation, Bobby?*

*That was the private publishing company that owned the Bigga Booka.*

But AA self-published their book. AA owned it, right?

*Not so, Pollyanna. St. Bill and Evil Hank sold about 200 shares to finance Hank and the office through the writing of the book and doled out 200 shares each to themselves. Some loans from Charles Towns carried Bill to the publication date. The book was going to bring huge rewards to the shareholders! They got it printed for 34 cents a copy, then retailed it for \$3,50!*

*Wow!!! That's a HUGE markup!!!*

Indeed, Candide.

*Why do you call Hank "Evil Hank," Bobby?*

Because Hank returned to drinking and it's just smart business to blame all the bad stuff on the guy who's not around to defend himself. Read "AA Comes of Age" where Bill W. makes himself look like a turnip farmer from Nebraska as Hank spearheaded the money-making schemes!

In William Schaberg's remarkable 2019 offering *Writing The Big Book: The Creation of AA*, Bill Wilson is called a "mythmaker" in the early pages. Many of the classic AA stories – tales that have been repeated hundreds of thousands of times – have been shown to be factually inaccurate. Schaberg reviewed thousands of pieces of contemporary documentation before coming to his conclusions which were neither the result of speculation nor the spewing of

resentment from an angry agnostic. Bill is agnostic but not at all anti-AA. He does agree that the literature needs to be rewritten.

In any case, AA isn't falling apart because of Bill Wilson's fudging of some stories three generations ago.

Let's return to Florence Rankin.

AA was a men's club created by men for men. Because of Florence the *One Hundred Men* title was jettisoned. Did that make AA co-ed? Not really. We have Bob Smith's post-book remarks reported in *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*: "We have never had a woman. We will not work with a woman." Every minority group has had to fight for its seats at the 12-step recovery banquet. Chapter 8 of AA's Bigga Booka is addressed to spouses and is titled TO WIVES.

Although women alcoholics had a tiny presence, a case could be made that the chapter directed at the spouses of alcoholics and its title had some 1939 validity. Florence was divorced so there was no spouse who was a husband. If one forgives all involved for having ZERO foresight that AA would not maintain its boys' club atmosphere, one can forgive the title TO WIVES in 1939. Yes, even that is a stretch, for sure.

Why is TO WIVES still the title in 2024? That's a much tougher question.

Women form a significant percentage of the AA membership in the modern era – in the range of 36-38%. Their nonalcoholic husbands have a chapter directed to them. It's called TO WIVES. There are hundreds of thousands of men being called wives.

*But Bobby, that's just stupid!*

*Yes, Grasshopper, it surely is, and that's why AA is doomed to arrive at a point of complete irrelevancy in the very near future. We've moved a long way from the world of Ward, June, Wally and the Beav, and even further from the 1930s. **And yet, AA repeatedly refuses to freaken change anything!!!***

By the way, it has already been decided that the Fifth Edition Bigga Booka is coming with no real modification other than to the story section. TO WIVES in all its misogynistic glory will be with us for at least another 20 years. Not that that's all that is wrong with the book, but TO WIVES provides an absolutely glaring example of the powerful voice against change in AA. Hundreds of thousands of partners of alcoholic women in AA have a chapter called TO WIVES.

*Why won't they at least change the title Bobby Beach??*

*Well, my Inquisitive One, that's one of some very small changes that we'll see in November in the Plain Language Big Book, primarily designed to make the AA book more understandable and relatable to readers with limited reading skills.*

Some of the 1939 idiom will be modified. This isn't even the sacred Bigga Booka being altered, but a percentage of members are losing their freaking minds. The ragers seem to be particularly miffed that TO WIVES is being changed to TO PARTNERS. The source of that distress is made clear by the fact that these same folks also vehemently oppose the recent Preamble change from "men and women" to "people." For the more outspoken, this is said to mark the entry of "woke" politics into Alcoholics Anonymous. The GSO is viewed, by many, as having a "progressive" agenda that is at odds with the mainstream membership. *Lordy! Lordy!*

In any case, there is a widely held sentiment against changing anything. How does a 30 year-old prospect regard the Bigga Book, the prayer at meetings, the preachy sharers, the mindless chanting, the chitty coffee?

Will the reaction be better in 10 years? 15? 20?

Of course not.

The 2022 and 2023 member numbers have not been released. Surely we have those by now. They *can't* be good. What will the 2026 membership count look like? 1.5 million? AA is a lot like community theater – you see so many elderly patrons, you have to worry about the future. As the AA geezers die off, will younger peeps queue up to take their seats? Not freaken likely!

I predict that secular AA will sever itself in the not-too-distant future. ZOOM changes the reality that we are still relatively small. The LGBTQ+ folks might do the same. Why keep going where you're not welcomed? Those dissing the new Preamble send a message that is not ambiguous.

*Are you saying we should abandon ship, Bobby?*

It's going down, My Friend. Every opportunity to get with the times has been rejected. AA's death is essentially self-inflicted. The shrinking mutual aid society refuses to change a freaken thing!

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*Bobby Beach has contributed many essays to [aaagnostica.org](http://aaagnostica.org). Many have been feisty but we've never seen him so disenchanting. Lordy! Lordy! Indeed!*

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