



See Rebellion Dog, See Rebellion Dog Blog July 2014

Get your pride on, AA! AA can learn about the evolution of diversity and inclusion from World Pride

For 30 years, Toronto has celebrated lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual & queer (LGBTQ) Pride. This year, Toronto was host to Word Pride. According to the World Pride Toronto website the full diversity of celebrants June 22 to 29th, 2014 is an estimated attendance of over 1.2 million people honoring the history, courage, diversity and future of Toronto's (and the world's) LBGTTIQQ2SA communities. The full acronym includes: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, 2 Spirited, Allies.ⁱ

What can 12-Step based societies learn from World Pride? Are we ahead of or behind the curve in terms of inclusivity and anti-discrimination? Let's have a look.



Over 100 same-sex couples, who came to Toronto for World Pride, got legally hitched while they were here because same-sex marriages aren't recognized where they live. Lesbian Premier of Ontario (Y'all have Governors of States; we have Premiers of Provinces), Kathleen Wynne, was *out* for the parade. What's so civilized about Canadian politics is an extension of what is healthy about Canadian society. Our heads of state are not subject to narrow questions like, "What's going to be different for Ontario with a queer Premier?" or "How does being a lesbian affect your policy making?" Premier Wynne was grilled about her

policies and service record in the recent election but I don't remember any member of the media asking her about her sexuality. After all, they don't ask other politicians what they do in the bedrooms or back alleys of our nation.

That's what a harassment-free, discrimination-free society can look like; within the society, people are sexually diverse but neither right nor wrong. We are straight but not narrow, LGBTQ—out, closeted or discreet if you prefer. Be proud or conflicted. Neither is abnormal and neither is reserved for any gender identification or sexual orientation bias. Toronto Ontario Canada isn't in a state of happy-ever-after. There is still discrimination, harassment and issues that deserve attention and compassion. To many who visited here last week, Toronto is a breath of fresh air. "To come from such a conservative city where we live in Erie, to here where it is such an amazing, amazing display of people and humanity," Kathy Czarnecki-Smith told CBC News.ⁱⁱ

The Pride Parade finished just before a summer storm hit Toronto and Pride concluded in the streets of Toronto, graced by a rainbow that stretched across the sky.



World Pride week got me thinking about what diversity and inclusion can look like. It's all fine and good to have someone from AA say, "This is Joe from the Beyond Belief group—you know—that group for atheists and agnostics." Why not just say, "This is Joe from the Beyond Belief group"? Every designated *other* through AA history has gone through it: she's an alcoholic—how shameful; We'd like to help the negro alcoholic but we have our reputation to think of; He's an alcoholic but he's so young; Pete's an addict; who can blame him, being gay and all. That is a slice of

real life in our 75 year history. So why should AA members with a natural, not a supernatural, worldview be any different? In tribes, like AA or any other subcultures, the majority marginalize the minority, be it intentional or systemic? Today, typical statements towards members who reject the sobriety-granting God idea, include, “How do you stay sober without God? That sounds like a dry-drunk. Keep coming honey, you’ll get it eventually.”

A highlight at the 1985 World Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous in Montreal, was a talk given by Barry L about our Traditions and great strides made between AA and our relationship with the LGBTQ community. At a gay and lesbian meeting, attended by about one thousand members, Barry recalls, “We weren’t in closets; we were sealed in vaults.” Barry L was making light of when he got sober 40 years earlier, when AA was in our early years and homosexuals were considered to be sexual deviants. In 1945 there was no Gay Pride. There was secrecy. Our Third Tradition suggests to members and groups who can join Alcoholics Anonymous. Membership is not granted; it is an inherent right to anyone with a desire to stop drinking.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (The 12 & 12) presents 24 essays by Bill W about our Steps and Traditions. In the essay on Tradition Three, “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking,” there are three examples that tested our seemingly reckless inclusivity in the early years.

There is the story of a man whom Bill called “Ed.” We know this to be loosely Jim B’s story—the defiant atheist who thought AA would be better without all this God malarkey. He offended many members who wanted him out. And they were about to cast out the one for the betterment of the many. The story goes as follows:

The elders led Ed aside. They said firmly, “You can’t talk like this around here. You’ll have to quit it or get out.” With great sarcasm Ed came back at them. “Now do tell: Is that so?” He reached over to a bookshelf and took up a sheaf of papers. On top of them lay the Foreword to the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, then under preparation. He read aloud, “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.” Relentlessly, Ed went on, “When you guys wrote that sentence, did you mean it, or didn’t you?”

Dismayed, the elders looked at one another, for they knew he had them cold. So, Ed stayed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ed, or Jim B., not only stayed but he helped establish AA in both Baltimore and Philadelphia. He lived sober, outliving both official cofounders. In the 12 & 12, there is a second story of a sexual deviant who sought refuge in Akron AA. In a talk Bill gave at his 35th year of continuous sobriety, he expands on this Third Tradition story:

For example, a fellow came to Dr. Bob and said, “I’m an alcoholic; here is my history. But I also have this other ‘complication.’ Can I join A.A.?” Bob threw it out to all the other deacons, while the poor guy waited.

Finally, there was some kind of hearing on it among the self-appointed elders. I remember how perfectly Bob put it to them. He reminded us that most of us were practicing Christians. Then he asked, “What would the Master have thought? Would He have kept this man away?” . . . The man came in, was prodigious worker, and was one of our most respected people.

So, out of antecedents like this one, our Third Tradition was born: that any person having a drinking problem—if he says so—is entitled to join A.A., and nobody can deny him this right. This, indeed, is a great irony—enormous freedom welling up out of grief and slavery to the bottle.”^{iv}

Imagine asking the question, “What members or groups would Jesus have us exclude from AA?” That’s the standard Dr. Bob asked the God-fearing deacons to measure their actions by.

Another story is told from Barry L’s firsthand account as he was answering the phone and minding the door to the 41st Street (AA) clubhouse. In Barry’s 1985 talk^v, he recalls:

One of the chores you could do is answering the phone, sitting at the desk and greeting visitors. One day a policeman on the corner sent in to see us, a black man. That in itself was unusual in Manhattan in 1945. We had no black AA members then; we did not really start seeing black members in AA until 1946. But the black man came in and he had long blonde hair, a-la Veronica Lake. He was also a master cosmetician. He was a wonder with a

brush on his face. He was absolutely beautiful. Strapped to his back were all his worldly belongings. He said he was just released from prison and he needed help. He began to tell us his problems. Among other things, he was homosexual and he was a dope-fiend. . . I asked a number of the older members who had been around for some time “what should I do?” and they all left. No all, I shouldn’t say that. One dear old soul—a gal named Fanny—stayed and really tried to help the man.

But she didn’t get too far; she didn’t really know the answer to this so I thought I would call the man who had been sober the longest. So I put some coffee down for the man and I called Bill. I told him the story, “We don’t really know what to do, he needs all kinds of help. Bill listened and then he was quiet for a few moments and then Bill said, “Did you say this man is a drunk?” Oh yes, we could all tell that, instantly. “Well,” said Bill, “then I think that’s the only question we have any right to ask.” (Thunderous applause from the Montreal audience).

Montreal Canada hosted the 1985 World Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous



Also, when Barry was almost a year sober, he tells the story of how three AA women took him to lunch to talk with Bill about the ideas of special groups for gays and for lesbians. Barry recalls that Bill said that this could be the best thing to come down the pipe, but he wasn’t sure. Could Barry come and see him again when he was 18 months sober?

At that time Bill thought both Barry and he could think about the matter more. Barry never did return to have that talk because by the time he was 18 months sober, there were so many gays and lesbians it hardly seemed necessary.

Under the employ of Alcoholics Anonymous, Barry was a staff writer. He wrote *Living Sober* and the pamphlet *Do You Think You're Different?* He also recorded the General Service Conference and wrote the General Service Conference Report. By the early 1970s there were many groups/meetings for gays and lesbians. Barry tells the story of this significant crossroad:

It was my job in 1973 and 1974 to write the Conference Report and those were the two years that the question of listing lesbian and gay groups arose. That came about from some pressure from some wonderful people in Southern California. All kinds of wonderful things *come* out of Southern California. They wanted to list themselves as gay groups or lesbian groups and the General Service Office, of course, has a very ticklish job. They really shouldn't do anything that hasn't been done before, without direction from the General Service Conference. So, they brought it to the Conference to decide and it was debated in 1973 to some hot length and finally the chair, getting very smart, said, "I think we'll table the question to next year." But that put it on the agenda for next year so everyone knew about it and it would have to be settled the next year.

If you don't know what the General Service Conference is, ask your sponsor. The Conference has absolutely no power over any of us—not one bit. It has the power of example, it has some moral authority, but that's all. The Conference does not like to do anything by halves or even by bare majority. The Conference proceeds generally on almost complete unanimity.

So in 1974, in the Conference, the question went back and forth, back and forth for two days and two nights. Much of the agenda was wiped out. I remember one man said, "If you are going to list the sex deviants this year, next year you'll list the rapist [groups]." Someone else said something like if you're going to list this kind of deviant, what other type of deviant are you going to list?

The delegate from one of the Northern States—or maybe it was a Canadian Province, I am not sure—was a delightful woman about three feet tall and she went to one of the middle microphones. She pulled the microphone

down to her mouth and said, “Where I come from, alcoholics are considered deviants. (Laughter and cheering from the audience)

The debate went on but when the vote came that night, only two voted against it. It was almost unanimous; I think it was 129 to two.

January 20, 1961, in the presidential inauguration, John F. Kennedy referred to the American Constitution of a century and three quarters prior, stating that human rights were not granted by the generosity of the state but from all mighty God. I imagine Bill W, like many US citizens, listened to, or may have even seen—JFK being the first every TV presidency—this speech. One could imagine AA’s founders reflected on the structure of our fellowship as a society. Ours is a society whereby rights and freedoms are expected. AA protects the rights of members and groups through servitude—not leadership or governance.

It isn’t lost on me that, constitutionally, my rights as an unbeliever are granted by God. What is meant by this? To suggest that if one denies God, one would forgo their human rights bestowed by Him is narrow, if not flawed reasoning. Human rights must be respected by one another. Basic human rights to dignity and freedom are beyond the scrutiny of others. So while atheists ought to respect a believer’s right to worship, the believers ought to respect the freethinker’s right to govern themselves in accordance to their own conscience.

In Canada, as in the USA, everyone has the rights and freedoms of conscience, religion, thought, belief, expression, peaceful assembly and association. Bringing it back to our AA fellowship, these rights that are beyond challenge of critical finger pointers are bestowed upon members and our groups.

We have discussed the individual and how our history shows that, when faced with others that are unfamiliar to us, while our instinct is to marginalize, our Traditions has taught us to embrace our differences. This is especially reinforced by Tradition Three.

What about our groups? Consider the subtle message within Tradition Five, “Our primary purpose of every A.A. group is to carry *its* message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” The key is in the word “its message—not “the message” or “our message” but each group’s message. And how does each group determine its

message? Tradition Two and Four celebrates the autonomy and authority of group conscience. Each group can outline their own message.

A muckers or back-to-basics group's message is that hope and recovery comes through the working of the Twelve Steps, done in a certain way, over a certain time frame. Other groups don't even read the (suggested) Twelve Steps at their meeting. That may give the message that fellowship—the sharing and caring of fellow members—is the secret sauce of contented recovery. So young people's groups, women's groups, nonbelievers meetings or LGBTQ groups don't all talk a uniformed talk or offer exactly the same brand of AA hope. Some AA groups don't bat an eye at talk of drugs (as well as drinking) while others kick up an “outside issue” fuss if you discuss smoking pot or prescription drug misuse. Some meetings include prayer in the formalities. Atheist and Agnostic groups tend to see its AA message as a more secular solution.

AA accommodates and includes new groups, be they special interest or general purpose. Regardless of how or why a new group starts, a collective voice is found and a message of hope is expressed.

What we find at Pride is the celebration of, instead of the narcissism of, small differences. Everyone comes together to celebrate our diverse culture and not to scapegoat or ridicule others for their uniqueness. Sure, Monday comes and many of us will fall back in with our tribe. It's no crime to seek the company of like-minded people. But the point is we came together and we will again. Without shouting out our tenets of honesty, open-mindedness and willingness, the variety of celebrants that come and sing and dance to “We are Family” at Pride celebrations all around the world should inspire us in AA. We have a living program, and an evolving fellowship that, through a spirited language says we are AA members and groups—not all the same, but all equal and all united.

ⁱ <http://worldpridetoronto.com/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/worldpride-parade-party-rolls-through-downtown-streets-1.2691238>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p. 143, 144

^{iv} *Alcoholics Anonymous*, *The Co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous* P-53

^v <http://rebelliondogspublishing.com/files/63409/barry-l-originof3rdtrad.mp3>