



Came to Believe

Robert M., 1955

Bill Dotson – AA Member #3

"The Man On The Bed"

Bill Dotson, the "Man on the Bed," was AA number 3. At his death, he had not had a drink in more than nineteen years. His date of sobriety was the date he entered Akron's City Hospital for his last detox, June 26, 1935. Two days later occurred that fateful day when two sober alcoholics visited him: Dr. Bob Smith of Akron, Ohio, and Bill Wilson, a guest of Dr. Bob's from New York.

A few days before, Dr. Bob had said to Bill: "If you and I are going to stay sober, we had better get busy." Dr. Bob called Akron's City Hospital and told the nurse, a "Mrs. Hall," that he and a man from New York had a cure for alcoholism. Did she have an alcoholic customer on whom they could try it out? She replied, "Well, Doctor, I suppose you have already tried it yourself?"

Then she told him of a man who had just come in with DT's, had blackened the eyes of two nurses, and was now strapped down tight. "He's a grand chap when he's sober," she added.

The nurse told Dr. Bob and Bill that Bill Dotson had been a well-known attorney in Akron and a city councilman. But he had been hospitalized eight times in the last six months. (Bill Wilson sometimes said "six times.") Following each release, he got drunk even before he got home.

Bill's wife, Henrietta Dotson, had talked to Dr. Bob and Bill earlier. When she told her husband she had been "talking to a couple of fellows about drinking" he was furious at her "disloyalty." When she told him that they were "a couple of drunks" Bill didn't mind so much.

Henrietta apparently had quite a conversation with the two men, and she told her husband that their plan for staying sober themselves was to tell their plan to another drunk.

Years later, Bill Dotson reflected on the jumbled thoughts in his mind as his wife left and he began to lapse back into withdrawal stupor: "All the other people that talked to me wanted to help ME, and my pride prevented me from listening to them, and caused only resentment on my part, but I felt as if I would be a real stinker if I did not listen to a couple of fellows for a short time, if that would cure THEM."

So Dr. Bob and Bill talked to what may have been their first "man on the bed." They told him of the serious nature of his disease - how it was an allergy of the

body combined with an obsession of the mind – but also offered hope for recovery. "We told him what we had done," wrote Bill, "how we got honest with ourselves as never before, how we had talked our problems out with each other in confidence, how we tried to make amends for harm done to others, how we had then been miraculously released from the desire to drink as soon as we had humbly asked God for guidance and protection."

But Bill Dotson was not impressed. He said, "Well, this is wonderful for you fellows, but can't be for me. My case is so terrible that I'm scared to go out of this hospital at all. You don't have to sell me religion, either. I was at one time a deacon in the church and I still believe in God. But I guess he doesn't believe much in me."

Like so many of us on first coming to AA, Bill Dotson thought he was "different." But he did agree to see Dr. Bob and Bill again. They came again the next day, and for several days thereafter. When they arrived on July 4, they found Bill's wife, Henrietta, with him.

Eagerly pointing at them, he said to his wife: "These are the fellows I told you about – they are the ones who understand."

Before they could say anything, he told them about his night, how he hadn't slept but had been thinking about them all night long. And he had decided that if they could do it, maybe he could do it. Maybe they could do together what they couldn't do separately.

It was on that day that he admitted he could not control his drinking and had to leave it up to God. Then they had him get down on his knees at the side of the bed and pray that he would turn his life over to God. Before the visit was over, he suddenly turned to his wife and said, "Go fetch my clothes, dear. We're going to get up and get out of here."

He walked out of that hospital on July 4, 1935, a free man, never to drink again. AA's first group was started on that day.

Robert M, a volunteer illustrator for the Grapevine, created the oil painting 'Came to Believe' in 1955, and gave it to Bill Wilson in 1956. It first appeared in the Grapevine in the December 1955 issue, but when the book 'Came to Believe' was published in 1973, the Grapevine editors renamed the reproductions 'The Man on the Bed' to avoid confusion.