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0:00:16 John S: Hello, and welcome to AA Beyond Belief podcast. I'm your host, John S. Today we'll be speaking with Bob K from the Whitby Freethinkers group, and author of Key Players in AA History. In this episode, we'll discuss AA's past, present, and future, including an interesting account of the Greater Toronto Area intergroup's, disenfranchisement of three AA groups, and the resulting action before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal.

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0:00:45 John S: Hey Bob, thank you for joining us. How you doing?

0:00:47 Bob K: I'm doing fine, how are you?

0:00:49 John S: I'm doing wonderful. Been looking forward to talking to you.

0:00:52 Bob K: Yeah, no I have too. We contact all these people via the internet, and sometimes I'm surprised when I hear their voice it sounds different from what I've framed in my head and... I have a couple of guys in Britain that I would... John Stuart is one, and Gabe who wrote the 12 Steps to Serenity thing. I consider myself fairly close to those guys, and I've never met them. Gabe, we did some kind of Skype-ish type of stuff when Facebook chat but... Yeah, anyway it's interesting. Some of the people I know on the internet I know better than the folks from my home group.

0:01:35 John S: Yeah, I'm getting that way too. I spend so much time with Doris, and Thomas, and Roger. [chuckle] Those three people, and they're nowhere near me geographically, but I talk to them probably more than any other AA people there are. But I wanted to thank you Bob, because when Roger first decided to so-call retire, which he never [chuckle] really did, but when Roger decided not to do his Sunday articles, and he suggested that we start AA Beyond Belief, it was just... you were the first person that he had help me. And so we had all these articles from your book, and you were the only person I knew out there [chuckle] that would figure out what to do with the upcoming article. And I wanna thank you for that because it was a scary time to try to figure out what the hell are we involved in here. [chuckle]

0:02:28 Bob K: Yeah, my memories of that is that the AA Beyond Belief didn't jump out of the gate as fast as we were hoping it would. I wasn't getting the readership, and Agnostica was getting contributions from all over the place, and lots of them. I had the same thing with Roger in the early stages of AA Agnostica. And here's one thing to Roger's great credit, and I like Roger better than I like you, and the reason is you're too nice, and Roger's grumpier. He's more like me. [laughter] We're suited to get along better.

0:03:09 Bob K: But one great thing to Roger's credit was he could've blogged every week, he could've written something. He's a marvelous writer, and he's opinionated, and he backed off. The humility thing, he backed off and encouraged other people to come aboard. And there were times he used to phone me and say, "Have you got anything for Sunday that you can put anything together?" This was four or five years ago. I didn't have a book. And I've had interest in writing since I was probably a college student. I was pretty good on the college courses that required essays, and anyway I had an interest in doing it and never did it. And anyway, publishing a book at age 65... When you're 65, different things excite you. [chuckle] This is one of the best things I've done in my life. It was a terrific thing to do.

0:04:05 John S: Was it Roger that encouraged you to do that?

0:04:07 Bob K: To some extent, he encouraged me. He really was really supportive. He liked my writing style, and he was complimentary, and at that time he had need for content, much as you did in the early Beyond Belief first few months, and he wasn't getting it from a lot of sources at that time. So anyways, that prompted me to... I would get the essay up on the internet, get some nice comments, and read it 14 times, and I just liked that whole thing. I'm sure there's an ego element to that, but so I would sit down and research and write another one. And at some point I said, "I have a half a book here." And I actually had about 40%, and I was the Agnostica history guy, and did various essays on Bill Wilson, and some of the minor characters.

0:05:03 Bob K: Yeah, so once I decided to go do a book, I really ramped it up and probably produced the last 60% of the book in maybe 10 weeks. The writing business, and some people out there that'll be listening to this that have some writing experience, I can get going full tilt. It's insane and I get a meditation type of benefit when I'm into it. Like I'll reach for a sip of coffee and it is ice cold because I've been mindfulness into the moment for 90 minutes. Intense 'focused activity', I think they call it. I don't know a great deal about meditation, but a woman in a meeting one time was talking about focused activity, and I just totally related to that. I've heard other musicians talk about a meditative effect from playing the guitar or whatever.

0:06:00 John S: Yeah, I've experienced that with writing too when I really enjoy just the experience and the process of writing and thinking it through, and just getting lost in whatever it is I'm trying to communicate. It is kind of a neat experience.

0:06:15 Bob K: Yeah. Yeah, anyway, something I like and I really enjoyed it and at my age I'm not chasing girls as much as I used to. [laughter] And that's the truth.

0:06:28 John S: Well, it's pretty amazing that you could write this like it's fresh because all of these people have been written about before. So, how did you manage to do that? And did you find anything new when you're doing your research?

0:06:40 Bob K: When I came into AA, and that's 25 years ago, I'm a reader. I'm finding a big percentage of AA members aren't readers, but I was a reader. And I came into AA and I just... Oh, the God stuff was driving me crazy. I wasn't very interested in the program stuff although we read the 12 & 12, a lot of 12 & 12 meetings and but anyway I read Pass It On, I read Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, like the first month and I'm going, "I love this." I just... The history stuff, I was never much of a history guy, but my thinking was "If I'm gonna belong to this organization I wanna know something about it. And I wish there were more books." And there are dozens and dozens and hundreds more books, but they're not on the table at meetings 'cause they're not conference-approved.

0:07:34 Bob K: For somebody like me who's become a bit of a AA scholar, it's an embarrassment to me, I did not read Ernie Kurtz's book Not-God until about six years ago because I didn't see it. And I wasn't an internet guy at all till about six years ago, and I didn't know all these things were on Amazon and... I have easily two shelves full of books that are related directly to AA. And of course, 95% of them are not conference-approved. 'Cause the conference wasn't... Anyway, AA wasn't too interested in publishing books not written by Bill Wilson.

0:08:14 John S: Right, yeah. Still seems to be that way unfortunately, I think. But yeah, I was kinda like that, I like the history too. I remember reading those two books, "Pass It On" and "Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers" pretty early on. I've always liked history though. So...

0:08:29 Bob K: Yeah. I wanna make one point before I forget and people like you and me who are secularists, AA history is the great friend of the secularist, because when I probed into the details of some of this stuff, the fundamentalist party line jargon isn't confirmed always by the history of the events. I'm a bit of a Big Book guy, I used to write a book for Big Book for Toronto Intergroup about 10 or 12 years. And anyway, in the Big Book it says, "We absolutely agree on the solution. Here's a solution that we absolutely agree upon." Well, that asked me to believe that Dr. Bob and Jim Burwell did exactly the same thing, and they didn't remotely do the same thing. The Big Book is a compromise. I think I've put in my book somewhere.

0:09:28 Bob K: I'm a bit of a political junkie and I watch these conventions where there's seven candidates, and we have them in Canada where they'll go from seven candidates and they have all this voting and the lead guy gets 21% and there's a... Bottom two drop out and it goes down through this process and at the end, they have a final vote to unanimously endorse the candidate that 21% of people were in favor of. They did the same thing in the Big Book. I'm sure the Christians were not delighted with God as we understood him. [chuckle] I'm sure Dr. Bob and the troops didn't like that. And here's... Oh, I got a... I'm a book junkie, I got a biography of Bill Wilson that I didn't own. I saw it online, I own every one that I ever see. I've gotta buy it and have it. Anyway, I got a new one the other day. So, I'm pretty up on Bill Wilson. And Bill Wilson was a visionary, he moved AA, probably not enough for me, but he moved it somewhat away from the religious routes. And there are Big Book thumpers in my area who are, "God, God, God, God, God, God, God!" But if AA was Christian they'd probably be somewhere else. Like a lot of the God people in AA aren't Christian at all, other than they love the Lord's Prayer.

0:10:53 John S: When Bill started out when... Okay 'cause he had that experience in Town's Hospital, so was he like a true believer in the beginning, and then he evolved overtime or was he never really...

0:11:04 Bob K: Well anyway, we are left to theorize to some extent. The religious thing is a private matter. I have some very knowledgeable people that refer to Bill Wilson as an agnostic even in sobriety. Anyway, here's... Like the Town's Hospital thing like what the hell happened? Cynical people like us, like to pin it on the drugs that we're administered, and I don't think it's that. Joe C has a rather interesting view on this, he says, "Maybe he just made it all up."

[chuckle]

0:11:44 John S: Yeah. It could be.

0:11:46 Bob K: That's a possibility. Here's, as a history junkie, here is my take on it. Bill Wilson's grandfather, paternal grandfather in 1877, big drinker, went up the mountainside. Probably, we don't know his blood alcohol level at the time on this Sunday morning but I'm guessing it was up there. [chuckle] So, he goes up the mountain side, looks at the sun, is blinded by the light. Mount Aeolus is the name of the mountain right next to their house. Root of Aeolus in Greek is windy so, [chuckle] the wind for him was real. So anyway, Bill Wilson's... So, this guy goes up the mountain, and he never drank again. He had the contact with God, big giant spiritual experience, lived another eight years and as far as we know, didn't drink again.

0:12:43 Bob K: So, Bill Wilson's father was quite a drinker. Bill Wilson acted like I did when I was married. I acted like I was single. I went to bars and came home and Bill Wilson's father's mother owned the inn with the bar and his excuse is, "I'm there helping my mother." Well, he's bartending and getting hammered every night so, Bill Wilson's mother used to tell this grandfather story over and over again, her subtle way of taking a shot at her husband, "Maybe, you ought to do this." And meanwhile, Bill Wilson is listening to this story over and over again and the human brain is interesting. I'm sure Bill could run a movie of these events in his head.

0:13:25 Bob K: So, when the time of great need in December of '34 and he's in the hospital and he knows he's gonna die or something terrible is gonna happen if he doesn't stop drinking within a short period of time, I think he willed the spiritual experience. It was an act of will. What can I do with this? And he just started tossing grandpa's stories through and through in his head. He hints at this in... What's the dull book that I don't like too much? "Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age". He says, "In my mind's eye, blah, blah, blah happened." Well, what does 'in my mind's eye' mean other than in my imagination?

[laughter]

0:14:09 Bob K: Anyway, I think he just lied there and said, "Geez, I wonder if I could will myself to a spiritual experience like my grandpa had and imagine the winds blowing." A cynical bastard that I am, I hint in my book. I said, "Maybe a nurse assisted the wind blowing thing by leaving the window open, cold December day. But reality is we don't know. For those of us that don't think there's a creator, even a lot of people that believe in the creator don't buy into that he reaches down and takes a screwdriver and adjusts alcoholics to fix them. It's a pretty ludicrous idea when millions of infants are starving in Africa. Yeah. Anyway, stuff like that is in my book, and my book is... You asked about research. I did not do original research. What I did was I read 50 books and bring the highlights. So, I would read a book on Clarence Snyder, that not too many people would be interested in reading 300 pages about, and I bring a six-page essay, "Here's the highlights of Clarence Snyder." I did same thing with Carl Jung. I read his autobiography and some other stuff and anyway...

0:15:31 John S: I think it worked well 'cause the way you tied in the Bill Wilson's grandfather story to his experience at Towns Hospital. I've never read that tie-in anywhere else before.

0:15:41 Bob K: Yeah. Well, it's just something I observed. The fundamentalist isn't gonna see that.

0:15:46 John S: No.

0:15:47 Bob K: God came to his room. Not that many people... The grandfather story is in Pass It On, but it's in a little more detail in some of the biographies, I think. Yeah. I don't think... Maybe somewhere, some biographer probably related to that before but I don't know. Maybe, that's an original idea on my part. But I didn't go like the archives guy and dig through files of letters. I was kinda like Reader's Digest. I went and brought the short version of different people. Frank Buchman who started the Oxford Group, I don't know a lot of people who wanna read 400 pages on Frank Buchman, and I plodded my way through that and I brought something about his childhood. Frank Buchman is interesting. His father was a liquor distributor. [laughter]

0:16:37 John S: I didn't know that.

0:16:39 Bob K: Yeah. And his mother... A lot of religious nut-bag mothers in these scenarios. Dr. Bob's mother, total religious nut-bar. Dr. Bob was forced to go to church five times a week as a child, and at university age, he vowed never to set foot in another church again and only violated that by going to a few weddings till 1933. Yeah, interesting stuff. And the AA book, that was really motivated. Why did they do it so fast? They had maybe 70 something guys, maybe 82, depends where you read the number. But Bill Wilson was an exaggerator, he rounded it up to 100 and they did that to make money.

0:17:30 Bob K: Here's the two great failed entrepreneurs, Hank and Bill Wilson, and they're three years sober and things aren't coming together. They're scraping along. They've got this little business going and they got evicted out of their office and had to move to a smaller office. So, these two big-shots, "How we gonna make money?" And Hank lays out the charts to a million books sold and all the money that would pay back to the investors. And Bill Wilson and then Hank, they each owned 33% of the book.

0:18:04 Bob K: The party line story is, "Oh and this organization, AA wanted to own it's own book," and blah, blah, blah. They didn't own the book. Bill Wilson own a third. Hank owned a third, they got those thirds for doing it. And the investors owned the other third. They were gonna get paid off and in 1940, the budding what they call the Alcoholic Foundation, they took Bill Wilson and said, "Hey, you can't do this," and so they worked out a new deal where he got royalties instead of this ownership. That ownership by the way, that one third share, if that would've... Bill Wilson and his heirs we'd be up to \$200 million now.

0:18:52 John S: Wow. That's interesting.

0:18:54 Bob K: Yeah. And Lois Wilson made a lot of money out of book royalties. She was making \$1 million a year in 1986, 1987 towards the end of her life. The fact that the book didn't take off in sales like they projected doesn't change the fact that they were trying to make money at this thing. That's probably the primary reason. And the sad part, if they had waited another five years, I think the book would've been better. Bill Wilson mellowed out a little bit when he threw the spiritual experience appendix in the back of the book, a nice bone to guys like Bob K and John S, you need a personality change. I'm a believer in when you strip away the religiosity, there's some good stuff under there. And it's like when you strip away the drinking from Bob K, there's some bad stuff in there and I'm a resentful son of a bitch. I have fears that I'm embarrassed about as a 40-year-old adult and who wouldn't wanna have less of some of that stuff?

0:20:12 John S: Right. No, I agree with that too.

0:20:13 Bob K: A few years... Yeah.

0:20:14 John S: There's a process that you go through, for me it's through the steps, but it could also just be through the totality of AA. But there's a process you go through to get to know yourself I think and so that you can understand where you need to change. 'Cause I do think that we... I needed to change anyway. I felt like I did.

0:20:32 Bob K: I am a big believer and three years ago another guy and I who thinks like I do, we started a Freethinker meeting in Whitby and where I live is, it's about 20 minutes east of Toronto but the Toronto Downtown meetings, they're like an hour away from me if I'm going in any kind of

traffic. If I went at 3 o'clock in the morning, I could get to door-to-door in 35 minutes. But I live in the fringe of a city of five million people and traffic is insane and rush hour is six hours.

0:21:08 Bob K: Anyway when we started this we were at the planning stage of this probably about 37 months ago, and Joe hooked me up with this Craig C and the reason we have this great group going is because of Craig C. I didn't wanna start an agnostic group and be sitting there with a coffee pot and myself. And anyway we formed a little group and I would recommend this to anybody, try and get some partners in starting the group. And I think most of the ones start that way, two-three guys at least. We had four and we lost two in the first two months. But we came out of the gate with a decent attendance but we weren't hitting the target market right away. We'd get a lot of believer kind of supporters, liberals, and then friends of mine would come and then we're in downtown of a small town. Well not a small, small town about 100,000 people. And we get people... We got our meeting in the book. That's a whole other story, a bit of grief doing that. We got a bit of run around from the local intergroup. We don't read altered steps by the way. I was at the Toronto, most of the intergroup meetings when the witch hunt was at its full fervor and reasonable representatives, reasonable members of AA were convinced that, "Boy, this changing the steps is a bad thing," and...

0:22:45 John S: Would you like to go into that Bob? The whole think about the intergroup from how it all started, because my understanding was when I was talking to Roger that, "Okay, these groups started like in 2011. They had these altered steps that the intergroup itself had on their own website and let these groups read at their meetings."

0:23:05 Bob K: It's even a little better than that. The first Agnostic meeting, Joe and some other people started Beyond Belief. That was September 2009. So that group, I remember hearing it announced and a friend of mine, who I took as a religious guy, or real AA fundamentalist guy but a nice guy and we always get along well. Too many of us, we bristle at the religiosity and we stop ourselves from making friendships with some otherwise nice people and I've been lucky I didn't really do that. So, anyway 2009 the first group comes up, and Larry's group "We Agnostics" which started a short time later. But they had these two groups going and you can put up a page for your group and connect a link off the Toronto Intergroup website. So these groups had a link off the Toronto Intergroup website and they had one of the agnostic versions of the 12 steps up on the website, and Toronto Intergroup would link you after that and that ran fine for about 20 months.

0:24:16 John S: I see. Okay.

0:24:18 Bob K: No big deal, but here is... And again, a bit of speculation but the composure of who is on the intergroup, they change every year, put new committees on and whatever. Anyway, somebody... And these groups who are operating quietly and helping people and I think totally not affecting AA as a whole in a negative way, just targeting a market that is underserved. So anyway, some radicals got wound up about this. So, they brought a motion to boot these groups out and that was in May of 2011. Anyway, there's discussions going on and somebody says, "Geez, we should carry this over till..." Anyway, they just pushed to jam it through. And they jammed it through and there was 25 votes to kick out the groups. And of course, the ones in favor of kicking out the groups, they arrived with prepared speeches and they had rallied some of the other camps. They did good political stuff. Anyway, they only won 25 to 16 with nine abstainers. So, they really only got half of the reps from the people there to vote to kick 'em out. So now, they're out so they immediately write off the list and etcetera. Yeah, the way Toronto...

0:25:41 John S: The groups themselves didn't have a representation, is that right? They weren't

there to vote?

0:25:45 Bob K: Well, they had, up to that point.

0:25:47 John S: Gotcha.

0:25:50 Bob K: I mean, a lot of... What you'll read online, all they did was lose their position on the list. No, they didn't. They got disenfranchised from the Toronto Intergroup. They have no vote. They didn't even get to vote when there was a motion to re-list them. They couldn't vote for themselves. They have no vote in the affairs of Toronto AA that are under the purview of Toronto Intergroup. In the normal procedures, in six months, somebody could bring a motion to revisit the issue and a motion came six months later to re-list the groups. Of course now, they didn't deal with it that night. Now, there's all the delays and people are talking about it.

0:26:32 Bob K: I was at all these meetings. I wasn't at the original one but from here on, I'm speaking from eye witness. Anyway, there's all these speeches, "Should we, shouldn't we?" And they wanted everybody to go back to their groups and they wanted to change the procedures of Toronto Intergroup, which they ultimately did, so that these issues could never come up again. And they passed procedural legislations, changed their by-laws, two-thirds vote. And they had no problem doing this, by the way. In the meantime, they kicked out a third group from Richmond Hill who reads the conventional steps. So what's that all about?

0:27:12 Bob K: There was a lot of vendetta stuff against the agnostic thing. People didn't stand up calmly and say, "Oh, they've changed the steps. They've gotta go." In a crude expression, they threw a lot of shit against the wall to see what would stick. And they just, "Oh, there was people there identifying as addicts," and just whatever they could think of. They made a real issue trying to... And I understand this one in hindsight. They tried to make the position that they had hand-outs of these altered steps, and that would take it outside the group level. If they just read them at the group level. You know, hard to... With our autonomy, the way it is, should be able to do that. I think they were aware of that and they tried to make it more. Oh, there's... They hand out these agnostic steps so that people go home and kill Christian babies and worship Satan.

[chuckle]

0:28:08 Bob K: And they try to build it to more than what it is, with a lot of personal vendetta stuff going on. So here, they changed all the legislation. Then, they voted down the motion to re-list about probably five months after it came to the floor originally. They kicked out the third group. Now, these guys are gone for good and they cannot petition to come back on. There's no motion to re-list even available.

0:28:39 Bob K: Now, what they did at that time, probably unwittingly, is they set up this lawsuit, this civil rights complaint that's probably near the end right now. Anyway, if I had a group of natives, native Canadians, native Americans where you are, if they set up a meeting within Toronto Intergroup and if they read the steps and they substituted Great Spirit for God, is that so terrible? Well, they would automatically be disqualified from membership under Toronto Intergroup in the new legislation and the Ontario government would not be happy with that. I read the Civil Rights Legislation and it is specifically about groups like the Lions Club and AA. You can't disqualify black people. You can't disqualify Muslims. You can't disqualify based on religious discrimination and it's very clearly in the legislation. They're also guaranteeing freedom from religion. Larry, as I

understand it, all indications to me, he's done very well in pursuing his case to this point, and I think it's gonna come out in his favor ultimately. There's a mediation going on right now. I think they're trying to work out some kind of settlement. I think Toronto Intergroup at this point knows they're in the wrong. GSO is involved in this.

0:30:20 Bob K: My suspicion is that they are pushing Toronto Intergroup to settle rather than have more of a court hearing and a ruling that could establish a precedent for elsewhere. It's the same as like these celebrities sued for some sexual wrong activity. And they settle out of court and the people signed a nondisclosure agreement and we go about our business. And Toronto Intergroup, I think the groups will be re-listed and Larry might get some token amount of money which he deserves for his trouble. And I like to see just for the punitive effect, I'd like to see as... Toronto Intergroup by the way, and I was at the meeting on the 29th of November, we're hoping there would be an announcement about a resolution of this suit. And anyway, they have \$264,000 in the reserve fund, which is a lot of money even for a big city AA.

0:31:20 John S: That's what I was thinking.

0:31:21 Bob K: We only have 80 groups that participate. It's not hundreds and hundreds of groups. There are hundreds and hundreds of groups. But most of them don't bother with Toronto Intergroup.

0:31:35 John S: True. That's how KC is.

0:31:35 Bob K: Toronto Intergroup doesn't... Well, Toronto Intergroup has a bad... They kicked out the first gay group.

0:31:41 John S: Geez. [chuckle]

0:31:42 Bob K: They make some excuse, "Oh, well they're bringing in a sect and qualification besides a desire to stop drinking." Anyway, we are so wrapped up into technicalities. The gay group become gay friendly. [chuckle] And now there's not a problem, but there was a problem because it was an anti-gay sentiment 40 years ago. That's why they got kicked out. I have a parent who was of that generation. World War II guy. And came to AA in 1961. That's my late father who I was very close to. But he was a racist and one of those guys. He wouldn't be marching in any rainbow parades. [laughter] And to his defense, my father would be 92 years old right now if he was alive. World War II guy. It helps to be anti-German if you're gonna shoot these people.

[chuckle]

0:32:45 John S: Sure.

0:32:46 Bob K: And anti-Japanese and so anyway, there's racism inculcated into that and nationalism and war plays into that stuff. So yeah, so I have some sympathy in that department.

0:33:02 John S: So when...

0:33:02 Bob K: So Toronto Intergroup... Yeah, go.

0:33:04 John S: I was gonna ask you about this. When they filed the complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, the intergroup, as their defense, their initial defense, was that the groups

must believe in God and practice the AA steps.

0:33:21 Bob K: Yes.

0:33:22 John S: Okay, now, that's not their defense now. But what's going on with that?

0:33:27 Bob K: Yeah, let me tell you what happened there as best I understand it. I have a bit of an intergroup insider so, I'm one of the few heathens that's getting some information from what's going on the other side. So anyway, when this happened, and I got a bit of information from the intergroup guy and I pieced together. Because I've read the legislation, there is an out for religious groups. I can't go into the Catholic Church as a Muslim and say, "Hey you son of a bitch, let's call him Allah."

0:34:01 John S: Right.

[laughter]

0:34:02 Bob K: Here's a branch in the Muslim neighborhood and we want to come into Catholic Church but we wanna dump Jesus and substitute Allah. [laughter] Well, of course in the legislation, religious groups are exempt. So anyway, AA has been protesting to me for 25 years ago that "We're spiritual, we're not religious." Which Larry brought up. But I think it was AA had attorneys and they change attorneys. Toronto Intergroup has changed attorneys as I understand it. Their first attorneys based on this out if they read the AA Big Book. They'd say, "Well, this is a religion."

[laughter]

0:34:45 Bob K: So, we're always trying to get the best of what we want out of a deal. We're not religious even though our book is totally religious and people misunderstand the term religion. They think religion means the church at the corner. Religion in a broader sense is all the God's stuff that's in AA. That's religious stuff. Concerned with how did the universe start. Is there a friendly being that looks over us. That's all religion. But people say, "Oh, I'm not a Baptist. I don't go to church. So I'm not religious." Well, I belong to two religious organizations in my life, John. The first one was a Catholic Church and the second one was AA!

[laughter]

0:35:31 John S: Yeah, I agree with that.

0:35:33 Bob K: So, number two is worst. So anyway, the lawyers used this defense and I talked to Larry and this was some kind of Skypey conference call, I don't know whether it was video or not but anyway, there were New York people represented with their attorneys. There's Larry who's representing himself by the way. Totally kicking ass with no attorneys and the Toronto Intergroup...

0:36:02 John S: I know and I used thing he was a lawyer, but he's not, he's not even an attorney.

0:36:07 Bob K: No, he's not. And smart guy. And stubborn as a pitbull. That's the persistence of this stuff, and I have to salute this guy for one thing specifically, this was a very courageous act.

0:36:24 John S: Yeah, it was.

0:36:26 Bob K: If Larry ends up with 10 grand out of this deal, that's gonna pay him four bucks an hour. He's not doing this for the money, he's doing this for the people yet to come and for the principles and maybe on the negative side he has a bit of resentment against Toronto Intergroup [chuckle] for other reasons too, but yeah. So the lawyers, and this came to the papers in February. People are just hearing about this, this has been going on for a year and a half. And if you and I file a complaint tomorrow to the Human Rights Commission, four months from now we end up in front of somebody, an adjudicator and, "Okay, make your case," and maybe I filed like lawyers do a written presentation and the other side files a response.

0:37:20 Bob K: Anyway, they look at all this stuff and 90% plus of cases are blown away right in the early going and Larry's case was determined to have merit to move on, that was already... Put him in the minority of cases. Most of the groups that move on, there's a settlement in favor of the complainant, whether it goes to a tribunal which is like a trial or whether there's a settlement and the... I mean, the Human Rights Commission hopes both sides will get together and come to a compromise. This is why one of the reasons the process moves so slow. Anyway, since in February is when the lawyers came and said, "Oh, we're going for the... Belief in God is a fundamental requirement being an AA member," well a lot of fundamentalist AA members are still shaking their head over that one. Right, 'cause they're making this spiritual pitch and God can be whatever you want it to be, etcetera. So anyway, they overshot the boundaries there and I think according to Larry the GSO lawyers just went silent like they were in a state of shock.

0:38:28 John S: Oh, I bet. It's like the lawyers for the intergroup didn't really understand AA or what AA purports itself to be, to say... [chuckle]

0:38:37 Bob K: No, I think what they did was... And here's... You have to slap this on the AA intergroup committee and I have some sympathy for this, the current committee, there is not one member on the current committee that was on the committees in 2011 and '12. So this has dropped into their lap, this is dominating their term of office. And these people are mostly good people, they're there to help and work on some committees and supply literature to here and go into jails and organize all that stuff. So they're there to do that and instead they're dealing with this case from years ago.

0:39:14 Bob K: So anyway, here's what I'm thinking and Toronto Intergroup is cheap. They didn't sit down enough with the lawyers and say this, this and this. I think the lawyers, they read the AA literature, they read the complaint and they read the legislation and they said, "Oh, here's our out." And then instead of saying, "We're gonna do this and have some big consultation," I think they told the intergroup guys, "We're gonna get you off this. We're gonna make..." Because my intergroup insider, they did not take this seriously early. I'm asking the guys, "Is Toronto Intergroup, are they...", and this guy's on committees and stuff, "Are they talking about this?" "No, they're not even worried about it." Just... Like the lawyers told them they would make it go away, and they tried to make it go away with this belief in God is required.

0:40:04 Bob K: Well Larry was able, off the top of his head, he was able to blow that out of the water. And, so then once the adjudicators said... This was in February. They made the decision that Larry's case had merit to go to tribunal and now there was a big splash in the Toronto Sun newspaper, second biggest newspaper in the city, probably the third biggest in the country. And there was an article, pretty mystified that AA's taking this position and mystified that why should somebody have to believe in God in order to get sober and mystified that people who don't believe

in God are sent on their way to drink themselves to death. That's certainly not AA's purpose as I understand it. So yeah, anyway then they give them all this time and according to Larry, Toronto Intergroup is just been pushing for delay, delay, delay, delay. And all this negotiating time that that was a period where they could have privately negotiated, from February to this November hearing, the November 18th thing was the start of mediation, well... And I think that got delayed from an earlier date. So Toronto Intergroup has just been pushing it off and I don't know whether it's the committee guys just... This may fall into the next committee I think in January a new set of people takes over. But, yeah anyway they spent 28 grand on legal fees and they're not getting much for their money.

0:41:44 John S: No, so...

0:41:45 Bob K: And this what... Yeah?

0:41:47 John S: They changed their defense though, didn't they? They changed it from the "you must believe in God" then they didn't.

0:41:55 Bob K: Well...

0:41:55 John S: Go ahead.

0:41:56 Bob K: What's happened, that defense got rejected so the judicatures, they listen to that. They listen to what Larry had to say and they said, "No, no, no, no we're not buying this".

0:42:06 John S: [chuckle] Okay.

0:42:07 Bob K: So, I don't know what they've changed it to but they've backed away from that. There was a meeting immediately. I was at the February meeting and now, the intergroup reps, so representing the groups, they've been pretty much kept out of the loop. So they're all at this meeting after reading the paper and people in their groups are reading the paper and so they get down there ask a bunch of questions, find out what's going on. And that was an interesting meeting because here's this board chairman guy who I recognize as a kind of a gentle type. You could see the type and he's in this over his head and, anyway, people are demanding, you know what's going on. They weren't saying much. He didn't have much to say at this point and you could see everybody in the committee was in a semi-state of shock that this hadn't gone away like their lawyers had told them was gonna happen.

0:43:04 John S: Yeah. [chuckle]

0:43:05 Bob K: And that's where they announced that they were gonna change solicitors and go with somebody else and they said "We gotten this information". And anyway, that was the start of them taking it seriously at the intergroup committee level. They thought it was gonna go away. Now, what their defense is now I suppose is, "Oh, you've altered the steps so you're making it not AA anymore, so goodbye, own your own group, form your own group, just don't call it AA." That classic thing what we see online all the time. But I don't think the Ontario government's buying that. You don't have the religious exception to make those demands and here is where they have a problem.

0:43:46 Bob K: Larry's case is a little bit more complicated. But if I file a case tomorrow, saying,

"Oh, they won't admit me because I called God, Allah at our meeting," that would blow through immediately. They can't do that. You cannot do that. Larry's, it's a little harder to see, but the legislation is there I think where he's gonna win and I think Toronto Intergroup knows that now. I think they're arguing about what the settlement is and what they can get away with. Then of course I think they have to bring it back to the groups and get it voted on and that's gonna be a whole other shamazzle, because there's gonna be people not wanna follow the Ontario law. I guess they think they have traditions on their side.

0:44:31 John S: [chuckle] So what's gonna be the ramifications? Either way, if there's a settlement, I guess the settlement would be that they let the groups back in.

0:44:39 Bob K: Yeah. Here's what I see happening. The groups are re-admitted and Toronto Intergroup becomes much more liberal than it's ever been in its 70-year history. And they're gonna stay the hell out of the business of individual groups. I know some fundamentalists who think what they did was wrong because they overstepped their boundaries. There's things that... I'm no expert in the concepts but there's stuff in the concepts about taking no punitive action. Anyway, they took punitive action against these groups.

0:45:14 John S: Right, they did.

0:45:14 Bob K: Hard to deny that. A lot of, like what I see online, is people from Pittsburgh and Los Angeles, they're talking about the Toronto thing. What do you know about it? They're bringing their own slant, no personal information, they're missing at least half the information and but they expound on it based on what they hope happens I guess.

0:45:42 John S: So if there's a settlement, there's no legal precedent or anything and so the...

0:45:48 Bob K: Just to put on the record, to put on the record very clearly and I'm not a lawyer either so... This case was filed by Larry as an individual. This is not filed by a group. I am probably... And the stupid thing, like I'm one of the cool... I'm at the cool table at the mental asylum. [chuckle] I am one of the foremost Toronto area heathens. I'm in the loop with what's going on. I wasn't consulted about "We're thinking of filing a lawsuit", whatever. Larry went and did that. Now, if he talked to a couple of people, I wasn't one of them. But the suit, people think, "Oh, well the groups sued AA." Well no, that's not exactly what happened. Larry as an individual filed this and he's been taking all the action and I'm on the fringe guessing and hear a little tiny bits here and there. But I was at the intergroup meetings, I've read all the press, I read the legislation and of course I'm following it with great interest. If it goes to a tribunal type of situation and there's a decision made, now I expect that would be a legal precedent being set. And different jurisdictions... Often a precedent in one area carry some weight in a different area.

0:47:19 John S: Absolutely.

0:47:20 Bob K: If I'm in Detroit and the state of Michigan has civil rights legislation, if it's anywhere near as close to the stuff in Ontario... A lot of the Americans say this is a Canadian thing. It's actually Province of Ontario, it's like our provinces are like your states. So it's a state legislation, the Province of Ontario biggest province in the country, but that's where the legislation is, that's where the hearings are going on Downtown Toronto. So yeah. So, any jurisdiction with similar legislation, they're gonna look and say, "Well, geez in Toronto this is what happened and here's a decision." And there'll be a 30-page why we decided this and that becomes part of the record. And I

don't think especially Toronto Intergroup's not gonna care too much one way or another. But GSO New York does not want that precedent being set that, we could have 100 lawsuits in the next three weeks in different parts of the country.

0:48:22 John S: Right. 'Cause AA World Services is part of all the suit. They're included with the Toronto Intergroup, aren't they?

0:48:27 Bob K: Yes. What happened was Larry tagged them on. If I sue my ex-wife for divorce and I tag John S on there because he was screwing around with her, it's... [chuckle] I become a co-respondent. And there's some lawyers on groups I'm online with and they're outraged that the Toronto Intergroup wasn't dismissed... No, sorry, the TSO wasn't dismissed. They don't own property in the province of Ontario. Anyway, people just take the position that supports what they want and go with it. Anyway, this is the internet era. GSO sells books to Ontario, they do business in Ontario. The other thing before the 2009 de-listing, Toronto Intergroup did a little consultation with the head office. They said, "We're thinking of kicking out these groups, they read the altered steps." And they got a response saying, "Yeah you're right, you should boot these guys out," which the woman that sent the response later backed off from.

0:49:39 John S: Yeah. Mary Clare.

0:49:41 Bob K: She did a... Was it? Yeah. And her whole apology was in the Toronto Intergroup newsletter in September, but they didn't re-visit the issue. So it's just these guys are gone. So, we kicked these guys out partly on false information. And I don't think Larry even brought up in the suit that Mary Clare thing, which he could have. And I think that ties in. But I don't think GSO was worried that they gonna get slapped with a \$10,000 settlement or whatever. I think they're worried about a precedent being set. And now anywhere, and there's a variety of places that groups aren't listed, it's not just Toronto and Vancouver. I think that there's probably more where they're given grief than not. Our group in Oshawa and Whitby, we're in Oshawa, is the General Motors town just east of me. The intergroup there is for the Suburban East.

0:50:45 Bob K: And anyway, we decided not to read Steps. And here's my thinking on this. I think a group should be able to read whatever they want at their meeting, but reading steps, it's just a matter of principle. I don't think it helps anybody get better. The last time I was at the Beyond Belief meeting downtown, somebody said, "Would you read the steps?" So I'm reading the altered steps and I'm looking around and there's four conversations going on, the same as are there in the other meeting, so we're not saving anybody by reading them this stuff, it's purely a matter of principle. So when we started the group in Whitby, our thinking was we want to help people that are currently not being saved. So we have a prayer-less meeting, we don't read the regular steps. We don't read any steps, we have a minimal of reading. We have a one hour meeting. We get to the meeting meet pretty quick.

0:51:39 Bob K: And we, ironically, we have a step meeting and we don't read the 12 & 12 and we don't read the Big Book, we don't read any of that stuff. But we have, and let's get to an interesting one, we have a Step 3 meeting. We laminated cards with the regular steps on them. So here is where AA is all about formality and format and legality. We read the... We said, "Today we're gonna discuss Step 3 and two other topics we take as our format." So I put up my hand, I'm the group founder but now I'm just a member. I put up my hand and say, "I didn't do it that way because that doesn't make any sense to me. So here is what I did instead." And somebody else said, "Ah, just skip this one," or whatever, whatever. And we are conveying ways to the one-month guy how to

deal with AA and successfully navigate your way to sobriety. And so we felt that if we did the altered steps, we probably would have been kicked out of the... We would have been not listed and we wanted to be listed, we wanted to get the word out there that we're here and the name would be 'Freethinkers'. That identifies us. I think most people understand that that's something different, for good or bad. We've had people come and investigate us. One guy broke a chair in the meeting.

[chuckle]

0:53:06 John S: When we started our group, it was just me and one other guy. And initially, we were gonna write a set of steps and I had written some out. But the more we thought about it, the more we thought no because this is just what our idea is of these steps. Who are we to say what other people should think? So we decided just to use the regular... We just play the regular official 12 steps. And we also have step meetings, but we don't read from the Big Book or the 12 & 12 for it, but we...

0:53:33 Bob K: You're doing it both the same as us.

0:53:35 John S: Yeah, yeah. And it kinda works.

0:53:38 Bob K: And I'm a bit of a process guy. What I see, and I have some experience in it now, what I see in Agnostic AA is what I still call it, what I see in agnostic or not religious AA is too many people come in and say, "I don't like the God stuff," and they end up doing nothing. If you grab the average four-month guy in our group, he doesn't have a sponsor. There's tremendous benefit I've gotten out of self-examination, amends. I think the AA Big Book... Its understanding of alcoholics and alcoholism is brilliant. I don't get into little arguments about allergy. The time that was written, that's distinguishing a moral defect from a physical problem in me that's not in 92% of the population. And I think that's good from that perspective and it nails that. And it nails it for me when I quit drinking because I'm in big trouble like I was doing in 1990. I'm quitting drinking and then I'm going back to it, and I'm quitting drinking and I'm going back to it and the cycle of that in the doctor's opinion is brilliant.

0:54:53 John S: Yeah.

0:54:54 Bob K: Because, once I've been sober for three weeks, I just had all the sobriety I can stand and so I go back to drinking and that's what alcoholics are like. And I believe that 100% and to the core. And that describes me. And if I don't engage in some kind of process. Maybe it's refuge recovery for some people in the modern world. When you and I came in, there weren't a zillion choices. There weren't agnostic meetings in our area, and I'm here at Smart Recovery for years. So I'm in a city of five million people, the closest Smart Recovery meeting to me is 50 minutes away, and I think there's only two nights a week.

0:55:34 John S: Yeah. That's how KC is.

0:55:35 Bob K: So, Smart Recovery a lot of places says next to no penetration, and I'm not gonna knock it, I don't know much about it. I read Jack Trimpey's original book and I saw him on Phil Donahue years ago, the Rational Recovery thing that was at the time, and he was an angry guy. And kinda the "You don't want what he's got type". But he did his thing and stubbornly. And Stanton Peele done some pioneering in favor of the anti-God thing. There's a guy on the internet on that Rowdy Rum website, John C. And he says, "We all get sober the same way. We just label it

differently."

0:56:21 John S: I kind of agree with that.

0:56:22 Bob K: Yeah. And when a man does what a man does... The last two years my parents were alive I parented my parents and I really stepped up to the plate. That's one of the things I'm most proud of in my entire life, more than the book probably. I had a mixed relationship with my parents, some good, some bad. I was good when they were lending me money, and [chuckle] bad in some other ways. But anyway, in the last two years, I had a brother out of town and a sister out of town, and I've two elderly parents that gotta go to the doctor's appointments twice a week and have no car anymore, so I'm doing their shopping. I'm taking them shopping and I'm taking the old man out to two AA meetings a week, 'cause that was his favorite place to go in the world. Rather go to AA meetings than go to Hawaii. And so, anyway I'm doing all that, and that doesn't matter whether I believe in God or not. That's being a decent human being. And I sleep real well at night, they've been dead for 10 years and I don't have a bunch of guilt that I would certainly have if I hadn't done that stuff.

0:57:28 Bob K: So, that stuff comes from AA. I am not an amend-making guy as my default position. I am not a do-the-right-thing guy as my default position. I am do-what's-best-for-Bobby. Anyway that's a change and that's... I think if somebody pressed me and said, "Geez, you're sober 25 years, so have you had a spiritual awakening?" I go, "I don't know!" [chuckle] I don't know. By that label, some days I would say no, other days, "Yeah, I've had a personality change."

0:58:04 John S: There you go. Yeah.

0:58:05 Bob K: That's undeniable and is it sufficient to overcome drinking? Well, I haven't had a drink for a long time and I don't think about it very much. That temptation thing is gone. I'm trying to lose some weight right now. I think of a cheesecake right now, God. When you want it, and you're just keeping away from it, that's hard. That's hard. So, I am not an AA hater. Even today, I belong to a conventional group, and we set this... And we might change this. But the meeting we started in Whitby we set up as a meeting if you know the difference. There's no members and it's a service meeting. There's a couple of benefits to that. One thing, we can't get a bunch of fundamentalists come in, join the group, and make a motion to change the group and pass it 'cause they got 12 new votes. Craig and I have total control.

0:59:01 John S: Gotcha. That's interesting.

0:59:03 Bob K: "When's the next committee meeting?" "I don't think we're having one!" Craig was at a group, and here's his background. Very nice guy, this Craig guy. Was 16 years sober. Totally different story for me, I was an atheist in day one arriving in AA. And I wasn't shy about telling people. Craig came in, and he did everything they told him. A little more like your story, I think. Did everything in the conventional thing like... People said to me, "Pray," I said, "What else have you got?" Craig did the prayer, whatever, and just after 12, 13 years he's solid in sobriety but he knows he's masquerading this thing that he never really believed in. And he decided to be more authentic. And yeah. So that was his interest. Anyway, he was at a group near Oshawa and they passed a motion to get rid of the Lord's Prayer, which is very, very rare in this area. Every group ends with Lord's Prayer it seems to be.

1:00:00 John S: Yeah, same here.

1:00:01 Bob K: That's the nature of... AA is very regional. If it goes one way, that whole region tends to go that way. So anyway, they passed a motion anyway. And here is, I'm sure they wrapped themselves in cloaks of the end justifying the means. But 15 people went and joined that group, brought up the motion the next month, reversed the decision, put the Lord's Prayer back in. Half the people quit the group and anyway, there's a type of manipulation and Toronto Intergroup, when they had the motion to re-list those groups, they did something similar. I was walking from the parking lot to the intergroup meeting, and there were four guys got out of a van. And I'm walking 20 feet behind these guys, and I could hear the conversation. Three of those guys, they were representing groups within the geographical region of Toronto. But they weren't participating in Toronto Intergroup and hadn't for years. But they came here to vote against the anti-God people.

1:01:11 Bob K: So there is the morality of the good side. They politicized and rigged... As it turned out, they didn't need to rigged it. I don't know how much of that there was, but I saw three guys that shouldn't have been there, and I can tell you what side they voted on. But they rigged it. Where's the morality in that? Did God tell you to do that? [chuckle] Maybe, so, yeah.

1:01:37 John S: Well, it's gonna be real interesting to see how this plays out and hopefully, there'll be a settlement. I think there'll be some change in AA overall, probably for the better.

1:01:50 Bob K: Considering I have a couple of book projects going, one of those considering, it will be a great book, The Man Who Changed AA. And that's a Larry story and all the build up to all these. I think this has effects beyond Toronto. Even when they settle, and GSO is not gonna encourage anybody in the intergroups to de-list groups. I think they're gonna discourage, and they're not in charge. So they're gonna do that in a subtle way. But I think they are gonna... Anybody that contacts a GSO asking for advice is gonna be told, "You're very unwise to de-list any groups no matter what they're doing."

1:02:33 John S: Absolutely.

1:02:34 Bob K: And that's a positive change for AA. We're supposed to be inclusive. What is all this? Choose a God of your own understanding. Oh, but don't say it out loud.

1:02:46 John S: [chuckle] Right, right.

1:02:47 Bob K: What's that all about?

1:02:50 John S: Yeah. So talking about, just to wind things up, what do you have? You're working on right now for a new book. What are you doing?

1:02:57 Bob K: Well, just quickly and it's a good thing we burned up all the time because I have started one that I think is fascinating, and it's gonna be a historical fiction regarding Bill Wilson. And I just can't tell you great details about this, because I think it's a genius idea, and I don't wanna talk about it a great deal till I have it just about done, because somebody could hear this and say "Oh, geez, I could get away."

1:03:23 John S: It's okay, [chuckle] exactly.

1:03:26 Bob K: Anyway, I have a way the whole thing starts, that it's very interesting. But it would

get into stuff like Bill Wilson giving us his slant on what happened in Towns Hospital.

1:03:35 John S: I would love that. I would love to read that.

1:03:38 Bob K: Yeah, so it'd be interesting. And then maybe, I don't know how far deep I'm going into the sex thing. But I guarantee you Bill Wilson had a bunch of girlfriends. That was his lifetime pattern through the whole time of his life. And anyway, there'll be some confessional aspect of that, and...

1:04:00 John S: And you have another book coming out that we're hoping you do.

1:04:00 Bob K: Anyway, that's interesting. I have another thing that's in total stall. Last fall, right about this time, I was doing a book, and it was just cranking. It was about addiction treatment pre-AA. And the name of that book, tentatively, is 'The Road to Prohibition, the Road to AA'. And I have two pathways running, all the temperance stuff that led up to prohibition, four chapters on temperance, Carrie Nation. There were a bunch of groups like the Washingtonians. We think that's unique. We just heard about that, the Washingtonians. There were dozens of those groups and the local ones and they all had success. AA didn't open the door to success in treating alcoholics. They opened the door to keep it going for a while. And what happened with these other groups, the main character would die, and the group would die off. Or they would get in some political controversy.

1:04:58 Bob K: And the longer I am around this thing, and the more I know about history, Bill Wilson's biggest contribution maybe the 12 Traditions more than the steps. I don't think the steps are that important. And don't shoot me for this, fundamentalist folks. But I don't think the specifics of the steps are very important. But I have to be doing something. Refuge recovery, which I don't know a great deal about, is gonna work for a bunch of people. They don't have any steps. But they have some kind of process. I need to be doing something to counteract this disease or malady, whatever it is. And so that's good. So anyway, I have stuff like that in the go. I set that project aside last fall to take a break for Christmas and have done hardly anything on it since. And then I am cranking a little bit on the Bill Wilson historical fiction.

1:05:56 John S: I'll look forward to that one.

1:05:57 Bob K: I think that one will sell some copies.

1:06:00 John S: I think so. My wife loves historical fiction by the way.

1:06:02 Bob K: I'm not independently wealthy. I did the first book. If I hadn't lost \$3,000 I can afford that and if I'd ended up with a bunch of copies. But print on demand has changed the whole small special league book business. So anyway, I sell some books and I wish it was more, and I get a little income from the Key Players in AA History that's like an annuity. Amazon sells copies every month.

1:06:28 John S: That's great.

1:06:29 Bob K: And we probably sold more in 2016 than I did in 2015.

1:06:33 John S: That's great.

1:06:34 Bob K: So unlike a novel that comes into the stores, has its two month run and then dies off a bit. Anyway it's just steadily, it's there and people come across it, "This looks interesting" And just the one thing about that and I thank you Roger. Roger said to me one time when I was cranking this book he said, "I think I can get Ernie Kurtz and Bill White to do the foreword.

1:06:57 John S: Amazing.

1:06:58 Bob K: And I almost drove to Hamilton to smell Roger's breath because I thought he had been drinking. That was unbelievable to me to get an association with these two guys, for somebody like me a history junkie these are at the top of the heap.

1:07:14 John S: Oh yeah.

1:07:15 Bob K: Bill White's lesser known, because he has written less specifically about AA, more about the treatment industry in general. But Ernie Kurtz I mean, Not-God, The Spirituality of Imperfection.

1:07:24 John S: That was brilliant.

1:07:25 Bob K: Anybody that's ventured outside conference approved materials this guy is fabulous. And he writes the foreword to my book.

1:07:33 John S: That's incredible.

1:07:34 Bob K: And I almost started crying. Up until we had it I didn't think it was gonna happen and then in the midst of this we don't have the foreword yet and Ernie Kurtz dies. He was very, very sick and they were covering that up and not talking about that, him and Bill White were scrambling to get his legacy put together in the sense of not his personal legacy but materially one here and there. Anyway, the day after Ernie Kurtz died we got a foreword from Bill White and this was the type of person Bill White is, I wish I was like him as a human being. He sends over this foreword and he says, "Ernie has read your book and this stuff in here is my thoughts and his. Even though he is not here to sign off on it, I think he'd be fine with it." And so, we got this foreword. The first thing I am thinking "It's kind of brief", now that I'm thinking, "Brevity is good." I am more likely to read a one-page foreword than I am a four-page foreword.

1:08:34 John S: True.

1:08:35 Bob K: And anyway, there's some great stuff in there about story telling and anyway that ties me to these guys which didn't have the effect on book sales that I hoped it might. But anyway, it's just been, this whole book thing has been a fabulous experience for me. I wish I would've ventured into the writing thing years ago. I have some level of skill, I'm not Leo...

1:08:57 John S: Oh, you are real good at it. Very good.

1:08:58 Bob K: I'm not Leo Tolstoy but I can go get the sources, make notes, and bring together a cohesive essay. 35% of my books is quotations. So, I just bring you what other people have said. So anyway, I think it's a good book.

1:09:13 John S: I sure respect the skill involved with it. I'll tell you what. I really do. Getting more

involved with AA Beyond Belief I respect it more and more all the time how people can put these things together. It's incredible. So, the podcasts are easy. [chuckle]

1:09:25 Bob K: Yeah. Anyway, I think sometimes you're a bit like me. We're maybe reluctant to recognize our own skills. Like Roger said to me one time, he says, "Oh, you are a better writer than I am," I'm going, "Are you crazy? You're fabulous." And he is, he's way better than me but then he would even say that. He was being gracious but it was not totally gracious like, "I'm leaning down to give you a compliment." He meant it. "You are a very good writer," and certainly the equal of him and as he was saying it genuinely and I'm not. But what a nice thing to hear. And I think in a small way. I'm getting to the age now you start thinking get your affairs together. And this is something I'm leaving behind. I think it's a tiny contribution to AA in a way.

1:10:07 John S: Absolutely, yeah.

1:10:08 Bob K: And to people interested in AA history, and I wish more people were [chuckle] to a greater degree. Anyway, I have a brother...

1:10:18 John S: I think it's getting more popular though Bob, there are actually groups in Missouri who have AA history meetings. [chuckle]

1:10:23 Bob K: Yeah. Yeah.

1:10:24 John S: So, I think it's getting more popular.

1:10:26 Bob K: I was approached at one point about putting together a history presentation and taking it around to groups. So at their speaker meeting, instead here is Bob K gonna tell us about history. But it's just I thought it'd be a bit self serving with me there with my stack of 30 books for sale and it just is a bit not AA-ish. Anyway I wasn't unhappy when we didn't pursue that. But I have a brother who is an executive and very well off guy getting ready to retire and won't have to sell his \$4 million house to do that, and anyway he's a financial guy, an accountant. So anyway he says to me he says, "Your genius plan here is you're writing a book about AA that is gonna be pretty much of interest only to AA members?" [chuckle] I said, "Yes, that's correct." "And now from what you've told me that book will not be sold at AA meetings?" "Yes, that's correct." [laughter] So that is an ingenious plan. But there is a conference approve thing. I mean my book if I really pursued it I could probably get for sale at a couple of groups, but the vast majority, they're not gonna take a non-conference approved book.

1:11:40 John S: They would sell that at our intergroup. Our intergroup sells non-conference approved literature.

1:11:45 Bob K: Yeah, so does ours actually. I gave a copy of my book to the office manager and I just haven't followed that up but...

1:11:54 John S: Our director of our central office read your book. When I first met her she was in the process of reading it.

1:12:00 Bob K: Oh, good.

1:12:00 John S: Yeah, she should stock it.

1:12:01 Bob K: Yeah. Anyway, it's been read on different continents and sold in different countries. Yeah, I got some consolation. I've sold 600 or 700 books to this point and that's not very many in the book business, but Ernie Kurtz's Not-God book astonished me. At 35 years after he had written it, they had sold 65,000 copies so, less than 2,000 a year.

1:12:30 John S: Wow.

1:12:31 Bob K: Yeah. So that was a real shocker to me and it put it in perspective. I'm selling 400 a year. I'm good with that in comparison to Ernie Kurtz. I have not done one iota of advertising. The only promotion I did was when the book first came out, I probably sold 100 locally but I've given away 100 too and I'm pretty open about being an AA member. I have a little golf business and I gave books to clients of mine and almost every one, "Oh, my brother is an AA, my next-door neighbor is an AA." So, there's some knowledge of, certainly, we're an organization and I hope we move forward to where we just have a bigger tent and there's room for... The whole secular thing is growing. It's really growing, and AA is not growing. The old answer, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," AA is broke at some level. We have the same membership numbers as 25 years ago. If I was the CEO of AA Corporation, I would be fired. The population's gone up 30%. We're holding even. That means we're going backwards. Anyway, the secular is saying it's gonna bring in a lot of people who wouldn't otherwise have come, and you and I and all the others, we're engaged in a noble mission here.

1:13:51 John S: I think so.

1:13:52 Bob K: Yeah. I do, too, and I get some pleasure out of that. I did a lot of bad stuff for a lot of years and it's nice to be doing some good stuff.

1:14:01 John S: To give something back. Absolutely.

1:14:03 Bob K: Yeah, yeah.

1:14:04 John S: Well, Bob, I sure did enjoy this conversation. I thank you so much for agreeing to do this.

1:14:10 Bob K: Yeah. We went crazy long though.

1:14:11 John S: It's okay. I'll post this on Wednesday, this coming Wednesday.

1:14:16 Bob K: Yeah. That's awesome. I'm gonna be sending out notices to come and watch it and you will get more... Or come and listen to it. Maybe, we'll get more than the normal...

1:14:28 John S: Oh, yeah. You're really good at doing that, by the way. Our most popular article, I think, was Sister Ignatia 'cause you went out on Facebook on that one. [chuckle]

1:14:35 Bob K: Yeah. Well, that I could put everywhere. Some of the stuff I write is very innocent. I've done a couple of things on Beyond Belief, like the anti-fundamentalist rant. I did another essay saying that AA operates a lot like placebo effect and positive affirmations. And boy, there were some people pissed about that. One guy said, "I'll never look at you the same way. What's happened to you? You've changed." Anyway, it's been my pleasure and thanks for having me on here and

thanks for setting up the website that is continuing what Roger started and almost retired from. [chuckle] He's getting pretty active for a retired guy. Anyway, Roger's an activist and I love Roger. I was crushed when he told me that he was gonna shut down the Agnostica thing.

1:15:33 John S: And I'm glad he hasn't completely. I'm glad that he's doing his thing.

1:15:36 Bob K: Yeah. I am, too.

1:15:37 John S: Right now, he's doing a history of... He's working on a book, helping someone with a book about the history of AA in Canada and that will be really interesting to see that come out. I know with him being...

1:15:46 Bob K: Yeah. That could be a dozen seller, a dozen seller. [laughter]

[music]

1:15:56 John S: All right, Bob, you have a good day. I'll talk you...

1:15:58 Bob K: Okay.

1:16:00 John S: All right, bye-bye.

1:16:00 Bob K: Yeah. Thanks very much.

1:16:00 John S: Well, that's it for another episode of AA Beyond Belief, the podcast. I hope you enjoyed it. We'll be back next week with Willow F from Seattle, Washington. Until then, you all take care and be well.

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