

History of Clairemont Men's Meeting & Annual Steak Fry

Here Is Some History of the Clairemont Men's AA Group

The "Thursday Night Clairemont Men's" meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous had its first meeting on a Thursday night, in August of 1964. This meeting is a closed AA meeting. For those who may not know, "closed" means that it's restricted to men who have a desire to stop drinking. We are registered with Central Office as group #301 and the topic is always: "Booze - What it was like, what happened, and what it's like now."

This group's founding father was a man named Chuck Barlow who got sober in 1952. His sponsee's, grand-sponsee's and great-grand-sponsee's, are in this room tonight. Chuck had a lot to share with us regarding recovery and how to go about it. He was known for his "crusty - No B.S." style of AA. He was a solution-oriented man and those of us who were privileged to hear him share were, without exception, positively influenced by his sometimes "lengthy" talks. He'd say, "We're not reformed drunks, we're in-formed alcoholics" and "AA is a school where we learn how to live life comfortably without alcohol." He taught us that "We have to find in AA, what we were looking for in the bottle." On his birthdays, in later years he'd joke, "The trick to getting long term sobriety is simple... Don't drink - and don't die."

Chuck was married to Phoebe who was a recovering alcoholic as well. Many have said that if you walked into Chuck and Phoebe's house at any time of day or night, you were always made to feel especially welcome. There was an energy about them that is impossible to explain. But Phoebe kept Chuck humble. Not without her own sense of humor, Phoebe constantly referred to Chuck as a "newcomer." You see, she got sober in 1948, four years earlier than Chuck and she never let him forget it.

Chuck was very strong on the steps and so are the men in this room. He emphasized service work. Anyone who was sponsored by Chuck was no stranger to hospitals and institutions. Clairemont Men's continues to be a significant supporter of our Central Office, H&I, and other programs that carry the message to other alcoholics.

Sadly, in 1993 at the age of 83, with 41 years of sobriety, Chuck passed on. Within a few years, Phoebe followed him to what he used to call, "The Big Meeting In The Sky".

Those early meetings were held right here at St. David's Church and were attended by as few as 5 or 6 men. A far cry from tonight's meeting... In case you're wondering, the first annual dinner was cooked in the small kitchen next door and the cook "fried" steaks in a pan and the name Steak Fry just stuck.

Some of our early members had wives who attended a woman's AA meeting at nearby St. Mark's Methodist Church, on Clairemont Drive. So in 1971 they decided that, rather than drive to two different locations, they would move the Men's meeting to a small upstairs room right next to the woman's meeting in the same church to save driving time. But this... did not last.

Word spread of the power of this meeting and seven years later, attendance had outgrown the small space and there was reason to move to a larger room. At least that's one story.... Other, more honest opinions suggest that moving the men's AA meeting right next to their wives, in hindsight, was not a good idea. In December of 1977, the Men's meeting moved back here, to St. David's where we've been ever since.

At this meeting we celebrate 90 days of sobriety, as well as annual birthdays or years of sobriety. We looked at attendance records, anniversaries, and other statistics. It has been calculated that this group celebrates about 90 anniversaries per year totaling about 825 years of sobriety. This gives us an average length of sobriety, in this meeting, of an impressive 9 years. It's no wonder that many of our members say that, "this" meeting is the "one" responsible for the sobriety that changed, and even saved their lives.

In 1988 the group of between 80 and 100 regular members, created a Steering Committee that met in the small office in the building next door and consisted of 8 to 10 members. The Steering Committee continues on today, discussing the general business of this meeting. We still meet at 6:45PM on the third Thursday of the month prior to the regular 7:30PM meeting. The steering committee chairman, secretary, treasurer and other positions are elected by the home group members and hold limited terms from 6 months to 2 years. These offices required various minimums of sobriety. When one term is up, the position is filled through election of another home group member. But it was not always this way. Originally, the only position held in this meeting was the secretary and it was a long-term job. It was common for someone to hold the job for over 5 years like Beryl. But the longest secretary's term was held by Mike S. for 9 years. Back then, the secretary did everything. He made coffee, bought literature and a different cake for EACH and EVERY birthday celebrant and since there was no treasurer, he also collected and distributed all of the groups' funds.

As most of you know, San Diego's AA Central Office distributes literature, answers phone calls from the curious and desperate who want to find a solution to their drinking problems. They also help visitors find local meetings and provide a host of other services. Clairemont Men's has been a significant supporter of the central office with the money collected through our 7th tradition. From the financial records published in the Coordinator, the group has contributed every year since 1965. The first entry of our donations found at Central Office was in March of 1965 and the group to that point, had contributed a total of \$105.00. Since then through August of 2008, this group has contributed almost \$31,200.00.

On this, our 46th Anniversary Meeting we think it appropriate to mention a few of our members who have passed on to that "Big Meeting In The Sky" (pause between names)

Chuck B., -- Tommy T., -- Banker Bob, -- Wheelchair Chris, --- Keith G., --- Judge Bill B., --- Bill C., --- Patrick, --- Ray K., --- Michael, --- Dick S., --- Fast Eddie, --- Darrell D., --- George S., --- Doug T., --- Jerry W., --- Roofer Jack, --- Dick S., --- Denning, --- Brud, --- Doug I., --- Big Earl ---, Helmut K, and a new-comer named Joe. There have been many others. --- Not all of these men died sober but, without exception, ALL contributed immeasurably to this meeting, and to our individual sobriety.

So tonight, as brothers, we celebrate the 46th Anniversary of our meetings existence. We also celebrate "us" and our new lives in sobriety as well as the many who are yet to find that new life. We share the hope that those of you new to AA and this meeting, will allow this program to give you what we have received; A way to live life comfortably without booze.

We also celebrate Chuck Barlow's vision and wisdom... and his solutions. Like Chuck used to say, "It don't matter how the jack-ass got in the ditch, what we gotta do is, get him out." Well, God knows he's helped a lot of us out of that ditch. And if, as some say, "this meeting" is responsible for their sobriety, then so to, is Chuck Barlow. What he started here back in August of 1964, has no doubt changed many thousands of lives and, as witnessed here tonight, continues to do so.

Thank you for listening.