

## **History of North Park Men's**

**By Chris N. 4/2012**

The "Friday Night North Park Men's" meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous had its first meeting on Friday night April 4, 1986. This meeting is a closed AA men's meeting, which means it is restricted to men who have a desire to stop drinking, and there is never a selected topic only individual participation. We are registered at the San Diego Central Office as group service #157012 and registered at the General Service office in New York with format #465.

The first members of this group were members of another men's meeting, and the initiation of our meeting was brought forth by a resentment. The two men most directly responsible for the founding of North Park Men's are Kirby W. and "Shotgun" Tom K. Kirby's sobriety date is June 6, 1982, and Shotgun Tom's on December 24, 1984. Both men were regular attendees of the La Mesa Men's meeting, which, like most AA meetings at the time, allowed smoking during the meeting. Kirby W, a non-smoker, did not like the fact that La Mesa Men's did not prohibit smoking indoors. Shotgun Tom was a member of both AA and another fellowship, NA.

As it happened, Tom also attended an outdoor meeting located next to a recreation center on the corner of Oregon and Howard streets in North Park. Tom, a self-described big mouth known for lengthy talks, suggested to Kirby that the recreation center could possibly be used for a meeting where no indoor smoking would be allowed. The two men organized the move to the recreation center. From that time forward North Park Men's was born and has been in full swing to this date.

Other early members included Bobby O., Ron W, Danny O., John C., Will W., and Russell B., the meeting's first secretary. These men as well as others also made up the meeting's first steering committee, which held business meetings once a month before the time the meeting began.

Shotgun Tom purchased a PA system from Radio Shack consisting of a microphone and stand, an amplifier, and two speakers. Every man who was called on to share would speak into the microphone until the system got old

and worn out. Finally, in 2008, the group voted to no longer use a microphone.

In the early years of the meeting, members of both North Park and La Mesa annually gathered on a Saturday afternoon for a picnic and softball game, and every picnic had a particular theme. For example, one of the last known picnic themes was a *Chili Cook Off*, and North Park's coordinator for that picnic was Dave C. As for the softball games, the winning group would walk away with a trophy in the form of a golden brown jock strap. The picnic/softball game tradition ultimately died out sometime in the early 2000s.

It is also worth noting that during the meeting's infancy, although established by straight men, North Park Men's proved to be a catalyst that would appeal not only to straight alcoholic males but also alcoholics who were members of the gay community; this not a typical practice of North Park's sister meeting. Ron W., a Black gay man who is remembered for his active sponsorship and service work in AA, sponsored many early members of North Park Men's. These same members not only sought recovery from alcoholism but also the AIDS virus, which, at the time, was still a relatively new epidemic.

To many in the group, Ron W. was considered the heart and soul of this meeting for a long time. Whenever a fellow group member expressed a challenge to his sobriety, Ron would hold up the Big Book and say "we have the instructions" and a pencil and say "we have the technology", implying that they should write about it. When Ron was diagnosed with colon cancer and incapable of attending the meeting he stayed bed-ridden at the home of Buss L. another member. Ron was so deeply involved that a handful of men felt it necessary to become surrogate caretakers, and brought North Park Men's to his bedside. They did exactly this until Ron lost his battle with cancer and went to that "Big Meeting in the Sky".

North Park Men's is a meeting where recovery knows no boundaries, including extending to the hearing impaired. With the consistency of deaf men in attendance, the meeting financed a sign language interpreter. There was one evening where there were no male signers available so instead a women signer was used in place, marking the only time a woman was present at this closed men's meeting. Even one of our deaf members, Olin F., became the first and only deaf secretary at this meeting. The meeting

was also supportive of its long time member James T, a blind man who passed away in December 2007.

Within a dozen years after its conception North Park Men's attendance had peaked between 90 to 100 men, making it one of, if not, the largest men's meeting in San Diego. Men traveled from all directions and nearly hour long distances to be a part of this meeting. Many others were dropped off by the van loads from numerous recovery centers such as Pathfinders, the MacDonald's Center, and the Navy Alcohol Rehabilitation Center.

In 2008 members of the meeting elected to shorten the time of the meeting from 7:30-9:00. In October 2009 another major change occurred. With the original recreation building rapidly aging and on its way to condemnation, the meeting was relocated to a larger space. Grace Lutheran Church located on Park Blvd. and Lincoln Ave. became and is still the current home of this meeting.

As time passes our meeting's reputation among the AA community is generally considered rowdy, serious, and tolerant. As sober alcoholics strive to live by the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous they also acknowledge that, as a spiritual program, a power greater than themselves does not need to be defined as God. More and more alcoholics, including members of North Park Men's, have categorized themselves as atheists who have taken the steps, helped those in need, and have lived a long life in these rooms without taking a drink, proving that as AA has evolved, so have we.

Despite changes in the foundations of this meeting over the years, there is one tradition that has remained constant and will most likely never end. This is the notorious HUAAH! chant shouted while members sing Happy Birthday. Shotgun Tom implemented this in the early days and it has stuck ever since. It is a reminder of the meeting's uniqueness, which distinguishes it from all the rest.

Each year we have an annual potluck where we celebrate a meeting that has welcomed any alcoholic man regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, age, or occupation. We also celebrate us: educators, doctors, construction workers, transients, judges, attorneys, mechanics, gays, atheists, veterans, the deaf, and blind. This is North Park Men's.