

ABOUT RAYMOND O'K, PROFESSOR OF LAW EMERITUS

I wanted to write a little piece about my memories of Raymond because he was such a meaningful part of my years of sobriety after 1969, which is when I first met him. For more than 45 years it has been my lot to be an active member of the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, during which period I have met and worked with many outstanding and memorable people, none of whom have left a deeper impression on me than Ray O'K. I spent more time with my sponsors and several others; I worked more closely and for longer periods of time in General Service with yet others, many alcoholic and some non-alcoholic; I had more time and experiences in Institutional AA with still other members; BUT, being fully aware of all that, and not discounting the importance and value of all other associations, I would have to claim and describe Raymond as the most, or most certainly in the top three of the most, memorable persons I have ever met, in or out of Alcoholics Anonymous. If you find that to be rather strong language I am pleased because it was my intention to have it so.

If I were asked for one word to describe my friend Raymond that word would be audacious. I think, for me, that audacity was the key to his character. His humor was his outstanding characteristic but that was so because his humor was so audacious. He could say things and get away with saying things that others would never dare. Many times upon hearing one of his remarks, quips or ripostes, I would think, "My Lord, if I had said that I'd be ostracized or in jail". Meanwhile the entire assemblage would be convulsed with laughter, and Raymond nonchalant with the grin of an innocent ploughboy but with a sparkle in his eye that said, "That was a zinger, Hah!"

In 1969 I was invited to go to Thunder Bay, in Ontario, to speak at the Annual Roundup and slated to give the Sunday morning Spiritual talk. At the Conference Speakers Meeting on Friday evening I was introduced to the other speakers and the Saturday Night Banquet Speaker was Raymond O'K from Larchmont, New York, who at the time was four years sober (I was nine). When Ray finished his talk on Saturday evening it was evident, from the reception afforded him by the audience, that we had uncovered another circuit speaker, and over the next ensuing 35 or more years Raymond continued to demonstrate that again and again. He was our featured speaker at the University Group Spring into Action Roundup in Winnipeg, and he spoke in Manitoba on at least three other occasions. His family was called upon to share him with the Fellowship and he spent many weekends on the road for many years, until his health began to fail him.

By 1972 I had met Jack K. of Westchester County, New York, at a Conference in Las Vegas, and later that year Jack arranged for me to talk at his Group, which I recall was Purdy's Corner in Westchester, and Raymond was at that meeting. Jack had me back a few times to his area and we started Big Book meetings along the lines of the program run by our then Big Book Group in St. Boniface, and Raymond participated in all those New York meetings. When I met with John Mac in 1975 in Denver, and he got International Lawyers in AA started, I naturally referred this new and exciting association to my New York friends and that resulted in both Jack and Raymond became Founding Members of that association. I seem to recall that Jack K. attended every Annual Conference of International Lawyers in Alcoholics Anonymous from the beginning in 1975 (which was held at Niagara Falls, Canada) until his passing in 2006. Raymond, vested with natural leadership qualities as he was, went on to provide leadership to the ILAA fellowship, heading

various Committees, and eventually the Association itself, and many of its projects with State or local Bar Associations.

My dear old friend Donald M. led the Lawyers Recovery Program under the aegis of the Oregon State Bar Association and most certainly did a wonderful job of it. I think I first met Donald in Westchester County when he was relatively new, but I always knew his sponsor was Raymond O'K. As the positive results of Donald's fine work it was my great pleasure and privilege to lead several week-end Retreats for ILAA at various places in Oregon, and wherever I went it was always notable that Raymond had been there before me; sometimes more than once.

One other of my experiences with Ray sticks in my memory and is as vivid today as when it occurred many years ago. Each year the AA folks in Minneapolis hold a Founders Day Celebration and both Raymond and I have done it several times, but on one particular occasion we both were there, on the same program the same weekend, and that was the first time Raymond had been there. That occasion was very meaningful to Raymond because of his older brother Billy with whom Raymond had grown up lavishing all the love and admiration of a younger brother for an elder hero on Billy. Unfortunately Billy was alcoholic and had experienced some difficulty at work and had suddenly left town not to be heard from directly again. Later on the family was notified by the Armed Services that Billy had died a member of the Services in the City of Minneapolis. Raymond learned that Billy had fallen in the street on a cold winter night and was found frozen and expired. When Raymond told the story he would pause at this juncture and say, "Now my brother Billy doesn't have to drink any more." But on that weekend Raymond had never seen Billy's grave and he wanted to do that. He got me to go with him and we went to the military cemetery at Fort Snelling and obtained directions to Billy's grave, for it is a large place, and all laid out in sections, square plots in the center portion but odd shaped or pie shaped at the corners or near the fences. The entire cemetery is serviced by a computerized watering system excepting in the corners, where there are stand-pipes to which hoses may be attached. Billy's grave is in a corner adjacent to a stand-pipe, and suspended from the pipe top by a short length of rusting bent wire was a printed sign in black letters on the same type of white wood as all the crosses on the graves. The sign at Billy's grave read "Don't Drink". Raymond read the sign and said, "My brother Billy doesn't have to drink anymore". Don't hang around with Irishmen, the stuff that happens to them will scare the pants off you.

One of the best fun times we ever had with Raymond was a luncheon served and consumed in our hotel room at the 1985 International Convention in Montreal. My protege, the Levite, and I had a suite in the hotel (by accident) and both Jack K. and Raymond came up for lunch, on which occasion Raymond was at his expansive best. Lunch lasted for more than two hours and both Levi and I were weak from laughter when Jack hauled Raymond out of there.

There is a further incident that I must add, for without it no remembrance of Raymond by me could ever be complete. In 1988 Raymond came to Winnipeg to speak at the University Group Annual Roundup, arriving on the Thursday evening so we might have some time together prior to kick-off. Our Alanon speaker was Elsa C. and we had all gone to dinner together and, being a group of old long-time Fellowship friends, we continued our AA talk and reminiscences until late evening.

I arrived home to my Niakwa Road apartment from dinner about 11:00 P.M., took a shower, and prepared for bed. I spoke briefly to my baby daughter Janet who was studying in the kitchen, being a student at the St. Boniface Hospital School of Nursing, and then went directly to bed. I believe I went to sleep immediately, but the next thing I recall is that I was no longer in the bedroom of the Niakwa Road apartment but appeared consciously to be in the kitchen of our former home in Niakwa Park. I was seated at the kitchen table and the portion of the room where I sat was done in the jonquil motif dcor that had been planned and provided in that home by my wife, Fabiola. My dear wife departed this life on the 5th day of February, 1987 and there she was as large as life, and seated in our former kitchen. Her part of the room being all white, appearing almost like a class room, but with large open Gothic style windows disclosing a beautiful summer landscape with a brook, flowers, and birds actively about.

My wife was very animated and full of energy. She appeared to be about 28 years of age and was, of course, absolutely gorgeous. She was recounting to me her many activities and how happy and busy she was. She told me that she knew what our children were doing and that she was pleased with their lives. She said also that she knew what I was doing and was happy for me with my life in Alcoholics Anonymous. Several times she told me that she loved me and let me know, in other ways that a wife can, that we would be together again. She never actually said that but she let me understand that.

I had some difficulty following everything she was saying, partly because she was wearing a white dress with a gold woven belt that I had given her some years before, and had on her arm a wrist watch that I had given her for our 25th wedding anniversary. The watch caught my attention because the gold was more ornate and there were nine diamonds, one for each of our nine children. The dial-face of the watch had no hands or numerals, but instead featured four concentric circles, distinct from each other by the pattern or grain of the finish, and each alternate circle, from the center outward, was moving clockwise, counter clockwise, clockwise, counter clockwise. My wife saw my interest and gave that wifely knowing look that pleases a wife, and said, "That's how we tell time here." I recall wondering about that and thinking there would be no need for telling time in eternity. Then I remember thinking that time is only the measure of an event, and from what she was telling me she certainly had many events going on, and I remember thinking that she would have need of a means of measure. At the time I had the impression that she was speaking to me with words as in normal conversation. But upon later reflection I concluded that our "talk" had been from mind to mind ♦ instant and direct thought transference.

Suddenly I realized I was off the bed and standing in my own bedroom. I went to the kitchen where Janet was busy at her books and, of course, recounted the whole experience to her, leaving her to face a sleepless night while I returned to my bed and slept soundly all night.

During the weekend Elsa and I chatted several times and at some point I mentioned a "dream" about Fabi. Those two ladies knew and loved each other. On the Sunday after the Roundup had closed Raymond and I were lunching casually awaiting his time of flight departure. Elsa had said something to Raymond and he asked me directly to describe in detail what had occurred. I proceeded to do that, in more detail than I have provided here, being then so fresh in my mind. From time to time Raymond would interject and question me, about things like colors and smells or sounds. Finally he told me that he had been for years associated with the Rhine Institute

at Duke University in Pennsylvania in Study and Research into the subject of Parapsychology and psychic experiences. Ray informed me that Rhine would describe my "dream" experience as a classic example of what the Rhine Research Center termed a "visitation". He explained that the thinking was that people in the next experience, once acclimatized, could save up energy, even as we here save up money, and that once an amount of energy was stored could be used to "come through" to this experience for purposes of a "visitation".

I had, at some point in my reading, come across the name Rhine Research Center and I was aware that it had been founded by Dr. Rhine and his wife, also a doctor, and was located at Duke University which institution was most familiar to me because of its basketball team, and the annual March Madness. One of the blessed things about our beloved program is that we do not have to always come to conclusions about things, but just share the moment, and wait to see how things turn out, secure in the knowledge that our real reliance is always upon the Power. But I shall never forget the interest and the depth of concern and the caring and love that Raymond showed me in sharing that experience with him.

SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI

There may be more added to this from time to time as Memory recalls events.

Tom G.