

## The 12th Step (And start of the Indiana Prison Meetings)

On March 1, 1941 an issue of the Saturday Evening Post appeared all over America, with Jack Alexander's story as its lead article: "Alcoholics Anonymous: Freed Slaves of Drink, Now they Free Others." The article gave the New York A.A. address to which people could write for more information. Now, three years later, Tim Costello, a convict in the Indiana State Prison at Michigan City, read that article in an old copy of the magazine that was lying around, and realized that this was the only thing that could save his life. At this time there was no other prison meeting(although one was getting ready to start in San Quentin prison in California). In a drunken blackout, Nick had killed a man, he didn't find out until later that he shot the wrong man.

Tim went to the warden and asked if he could write a letter to A.A., and the warden said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, it tells you here, read the article." And the warden said, "I ain't reading no article about alcoholics, I got a whole damn prison full of 'em!" [Laughter] Well Tim says, "Can I write a letter?" "Hell no, they're not related to you. This is a maximum security prison. The only people you can write to are relatives." So Tim went back to his cell, and wrote a kite -- some of you know what a kite is, it goes under the wall. It went out -- in this case, -- it went out through a Catholic priest, then to New York. And then they got it in New York, and they sent it to South Bend, where there were four men sober.

One of these guys was named Harry Stevens. God provides guys like that, --this little, mild-mannered man, who like the fish in the dam, kept butting against the wall. He come up to the prison, said that "I'd like to talk to an inmate named Tim Costello." The warden said, "How do you know him?" He said, "I got a letter from him." [Laughter] The warden said, "No, you can't get a letter from him." He says, "I can't? I got it right here." So the warden went in, and he said to Tim, "How'd you get that letter out, Tim?" Tim said, "Hell, I'd never get another one out if I tell you that." [Laughter] And he said, "You're going into the hole." And in the hole he went, three days in the hole.

Seventy-two hours later, he comes out, walks around the prison saying, "I don't know what the hell went wrong," sat down and wrote another letter. [Laughter] To New York, went back to Harry Stevens. Harry Stevens gets the letter, he comes up to the prison, he says, "Warden, I got to talk to that guy, I got another letter from him." [Laughter] "By gosh, you did, you're not gonna see him." Goes inside, threw Tim back in the hole. [Laughter] Four months without privileges. Had lots of time, so he wrote another letter. [Laughter] God gave us some wonderful power! So Tim writes another letter -- goes to New York, comes back to Harry Stevens, Harry opens the letter, it said, "I don't know what you guys are doing, but don't do that, you're killing me!" [Laughter]

Harry comes back up to the warden, he says, "I can't sleep, I got to see that guy." The warden says, "You better learn to sleep, 'cause you ain't gonna see him." Harry says, "Well, I'd like to talk to 'im."

The warden later said, "That damn Harry Stevens showed up at my house every night, quarter of five. He comes, he's standing out on the porch waiting for me when I come home. I tried being late, he's still there; get there early, he's still there. Can't miss. Well the warden finally broke down and let Harry talk to Tim and a meeting got started.

They rotated chairing the meeting each week, going around to each person in turn until everyone there had chaired a meeting, then starting over again. So the week would come when they would remind someone it was going to be his turn to be the chairman for the next meeting, and the poor guy would be plunged into a week of agony. Whose turn it was next was an automatic, unavoidable process, done in a pre-established rotation, and everyone was expected to do his share.

You couldn't do anything to get out of a meeting, I told them I had planned an escape the next week, ..... They say, "Next week is your week to be chairman, you know, something on the fifth step." so I said "O.K., fine. I can escape the week after."

But then all week long: I got to thinkin we're gonna have the biggest meeting, it's gonna be a drag 'em out, kill 'em dead meeting, man! Best in the world! Wrote stuff, planned stuff, read stuff -- never did make that escape!

Nick was in prison for murder at the time the A.A. group was started there, joined the new group, and became one of their first big success stories. After his release from prison, he not only continued to work with ex-cons for the rest of his life, but was also for many years a major leader and spiritual guide within the A.A. program in the South end area.