

“...THEY DID IT FOR THE ‘WAR EFFORT’...”

By the time I had joined AA, mother had previously told me that my Dad had attended AA meetings in Napa “in 1944 during the war”. (I wanted to hear this again.) I couldn’t ask Dad myself, since he had died years earlier. She told me the following.

The day the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, she and another woman decided to go to California and to become welders for the “war effort”. (it took the women 3 days to arrive ) and the two women became welders at Mare Island. She lived in a trailer park called “Tall Trees” on what is now Broadway in Vallejo. Her Welding Instructor, R. L. , lived in Napa, owned a welding and machine shop.. He told the other welders about the weekly AA meetings in a Napa bar at the corner of Silverado Trail and Third Street. Mother recalled, “They wanted to stay sober to do a better job for the war effort”. AA was promoted in a friendly way during the war, not as a criticism of anyone... It was like a team spirit, “doing this for the war effort”.

The bar they met in weekly was *Jumbo-Oneil’s Corner*. The two co-owners were a Mr. O’Neil, and Jumbo S. It was 1944. Bill W. had just founded the Northern California Council of AA in Oakland in 1944.

Jumbo was able to recall: A couple of the Napa men drove to Oakland once or more, because they discussed an Oakland meeting. It was not usual they would drive to another meeting , when they had meeting here [Napa, CA].

I recall, the bar was still there when I was a kid walking past it each day to get to Alta Heights school...) I can not remember the year the bar building was removed to make way for a gas station.

Mother had related to me the story that Dad had attended AA meetings in 1944 in a bar. I believe this was information I had during my high school years. I couldn’t ask Dad, as he had passed away years earlier. I had to have known about the “war time AA” and about “meetings that began by covering up the bar bottles”.

When I had graduated Napa High I had a short Summer job as a nurse’s aid before I started Nursing School. Jumbo S. was living there at Piner’s. He was a good historian.

I wanted Jumbo’s version about the AA meeting about 1944. He confirmed the year. He was a co-owner of that bar in town in 1944... the bar that covered up the bottles for the AA meetings once a week. He told the same saga, of men wanting to do their part for the war effort. To get sober, stay sober, do a better job, and yes, those bar bottles were covered for the hour duration of the AA meetings.

Jumbo would not break anonymity to discuss my Dad at the meetings, but mother had related that Jumbo and Dad had known each other well.. The meetings, Jumbo told me, had continued at the bar after the war. He also shared that after a “few years” they got a different meeting place.

Mother added a detail...Her brother traveled to California from the farm in North Dakota. He managed the Machine Shop on Pine Street, so Dad could “teach welding” at Mare Island..during the war. John kept that shop open “for the war effort” during 1944, while Dad was teaching at the “Yard”.

Elmer K. in Napa had a water truck for years, and was able to confirm they had meetings at the Jumbo-O'Neil bar during the war and for a few years after the war they were still meeting at the bar once a week. None of the old-timers could recall an earlier meeting or another meeting in 1944 but they all cited 1944 meetings, and no one mentioned 1943.

I am thankful for the contributions of some of Napa's best older historians to this compiled recollection... early AA in Napa... Jumbo S., Louis S., Marge C, Louis K., and apologize to any whom I may have omitted by error.

I am grateful that as of 2017, AA has been in Napa Valley for 73 years now, the same number of years that NCCAA (Northern California Council of AA), founded by Bill W., has been in California.

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