

Vale “Big” Bob from Wagga:

Bob died on his 19th sobriety birthday; 10th August 2016.

A group of Wagga AA members recently gathered for a memorial meeting for Bob in a local park. Despite the frosty start it was a beautiful sunny day, “A great day to be sober”. Also a great day to be outdoors sharing our memories, laughter (we are not a glum lot) and gratitude for a friend who lived the program to the end. Bob’s sponsor emailed something for us to read out at the meeting as we didn’t give him much notice and he couldn’t make the trip in time. We opened the meeting with this written share. We were all very grateful for it as it was the perfect way to start the meeting. There was a suggestion at the end of the memorial to submit this written share (with his permission of course) to the REVIVER. There was unanimous support for this by those in attendance, so we sort permission and here is his share.

“I would have loved to be at Wagga today, but turnaround time is a bit tight. So hello to all and hope your meeting goes well.

Bob was the third tradition all over; and what that is about is, it doesn’t matter who we are, where we come from or what we look like, the doors are open. He was large and his character was on occasions challenging but Bob loved the AA way and always strived to give away what he had been given. Bob was loyal to the program and to its members. As Tucky would often say, *‘the great American Evangelist Billy Graham says if you want to see a miracle go to AA.’* Bob was a miracle.

Bob and I had a common we were not natives to Wagga, but it became our spiritual home. I first came to know Bob back in 1997 when he first started attending meetings at O’Connor House. I recall a large man drinking diet coke who would sit on the western side of the old upstairs meeting room at O’Connor House. There with the old timers, Joe, Bill D, Fred W, and Tucky. He sat there quietly with his Diet Coke but every now and then would throw a quick word in. But then up and down all meeting replenishing his coke, and make sure it was a smoothie.

When I think back to those days, I get very sad, in the mid to late 1990s there was a core of AA members who would be at meetings all over Wagga. We all looked out for each other, shaking hands, good for a joke but serious about sobriety.

Bob and I became friends and he often rang when I lived at Koorinal. Then I started to pick him up for the South Wagga Sunday Group meeting at O’Connor House. The first time I picked Bob up he got in the car and said *‘Not much room. Lucky I have medication and don’t have fits anymore.’* He then gave that slow laugh he had, and off we would go over Willans Hill, pick up Tucky and off to the meeting.

Bob came to my 40th birthday in 1999 and it was an outing he said he enjoyed. I had a lot of cycling friends there that night and Bob sat in, listened and learnt about cycling. He told me on the way home, *'they all asked me where I knew you from, but I didn't tell them about AA'*.

Like all of us, there is the family afterwards, and the consequences of our alcoholic lives. I think the Big Book describes us *'... as a tornado...'* going through lives. 2002 was the year for me to cross this bridge, and it was a lonely path to the bridge and then crossing the bridge and then finding a new path on the other side of the bridge. This is the bridge I didn't burn, probably a God Bridge. I was guided across. Bob walked with me on this journey; as I had separated from my family and he often rang to check how I was going. He always rang at the time I didn't want to talk, but we engaged and I always felt better after his call. These calls taught me about patience and tolerance.

On the new journey, I moved to Melbourne. During that time, we often rang each other just to check in. The discussion was not always happy as he would tell me, Bill passed away, and then Barry S. We often exchanged Christmas Cards too and his card was simply signed 'from Bob'.

If I recall correctly during this time, Bob's mother passed away in Geelong. He told me he travelled down for the funeral but didn't get a good reception. On a visit to Wagga not long after his mother passed, there was a card on his table from an AA member offering their sympathy. That's the strength of our fellowship, its more than meetings, it's the after meetings stuff too. He also spread his wings in sobriety and saved enough money to travel to Western Plan Zoo, at Dubbo, then off to the Gold Coast and then his reptiles.

In 2010 I was posted back to Wagga be it for two years. It was a great feeling being back where my sobriety began. Catching up with those, I walked the early sobriety road with in the late '90s. I would call around when I was not on the road back home to Melbourne or racing my bike. He was still a member of the South Wagga Group too, but later resigned and joined the Tuesday Group. He often said to me during this time, *'all the old timers are dying'* and I would reply, *'we are taking their place'* and I think he took some satisfaction out of knowing he was getting old in the program.

In 2012, I was posted to Canberra, and the telephone conversations continued, hearing about Fred his snake and conflicts with his neighbours. Work required me to travel to Albury and I would always arrange a work meeting in Wagga the next day. I would visit Bob or if I couldn't, I would attend the Wednesday evening meeting where we would catch up. Sadly in 2012, Bob's sponsor Joe passed away. I still choke about Joe's passing as he had a big influence on all our sobrieties. The last time I saw Joe was at Wagga Base, when I was travelling back to Forest Hill for the night. I called in but did not recognise Joe, as he was a frail man. We had a chat, and sadly it was the last time we talked.

After Joe's passing Bob rang and said, *'will you be my sponsor'* and I told him, *'I needed time to think about it'*. After a large number of follow up calls spanning all hours of the day, with words *'have you decided yet'*, I finally agreed.

On one Albury trip I called Bob and said, *'I'm in Wagga tonight and will bring a pizza over for dinner'*. He said *'that would be nice'*, and I then asked, *'what do you like'*, Bob said, *'I don't mind those meat lover ones.'* So, I called around, we sat, ate, chatted and laughed. He was a great Raiders fan and backed the Bombers too. I told Bob the story about the time the Bombers played the Crows in Adelaide and how Kevin Sheady went on Melbourne TV with a map and gave directions on how to get there. He was also a Blues fan and that is all I'll say about that.

In 2014 I moved back to Melbourne and we maintained weekly contact. Not always getting the time right Bob would ring and miss me. I would ring back and would miss Bob or he wouldn't answer and then send a text with nothing in it. If I got him, it was always *'how do'* or *'Giddy there'*. I rise early for work, generally about 4.45 am and often would find a missed call on my phone and 10.30 pm was a common time. Sometimes I would call and there was little conversation and accepted that Bob was watching a movie.

Sadly, in the last 12 months, the conversations were about his falls and his declining health. In one discussion, I suggested he should go to an aged home, and there was silence then, *'I don't want to talk about that'*. He often rang and said *'guess what, I've done it again'* or I would say *'have you stayed upright this week'*. He was determined to maintain his independence, and live his life.

Our last conversation was the Friday before he passed. He sounded unwell.

I received a text the following week, from a friend of Bob's asking me to call. After reading the text I knew Bob had passed.

I told my wife, who was saddened to hear of Bob's passing as they would talk about growing roses. Our two daughters also remember Bob, from all those years ago and were saddened by his passing. The reason being is that they have seen AA miracles a number of times in their lives.

Thanks Bob for being with us on our journey. You graduated and are a great miracle of our way of life."