

(1) Good Afternoon Everyone,
I am Scott and I am an alcoholic.
I would like to first thank both Paige B. & Dennis S. for inviting me To beautiful District 28 for this celebration. I am grateful to have this opportunity to share this 75 year Florida milestone with all of our fellowship.
1941!! WOW 75 years ago!! The First Registered Group of Alcoholics Anonymous in Florida. I would also like to give credit for the ability to bring this story to you from the tedious work of preserving this information by Past North Fl Area Archivist & Delegate Cecilia R. & also one of the participants & FL.founders Tom Sharpe. Without their diligent and important Archive work this all would be lost forever.

(2) January 1941 in Jacksonville Fl was the day when Floridians were able to Step out of the shadows of Alcoholism and given the opportunity to walk in the Sunlight of the Spirit.

(3) Ours is a “Service” story: just as it was back when Alcoholics Anonymous began on June 10 1935. One Alcoholic man seeking another. Our co-founders Dr. Bob Holcomb Smith & Bill Wilson. One alcoholic working with another. When we look back at Florida’s beginnings in Alcoholics Anonymous, the same challenging & pioneering spirit prevailed as it did in Akron & New York. Many of the

same difficulties were surmounted and many blessings received!

(4, 5 & 6) 1935 AA had a rough go of it getting started, not only because of the fragile status of new sobriety; but also the volatile time period we were immersed in.. They had recently been through a World War #1 1914 to 1918 followed by the great Stock market crash & dustbowl depression. Our original members started AA at their bottoms, both themselves & the world around them.

(6, 7 & 8) Florida Founders had their own bottoms and difficulties as well; but as we know these can hopefully be great motivators of change. World War 2 had just begun and we had just survived the terrible Depression. How bad could it get!! One of our members was also Commander in the United States Navy serving aboard the Aircraft carrier (USS Saratoga CV-3).

(9) Our Florida A.A. service Group founders had the additional help of not only AA but also our sister fellowship Al-Anon who also shares a birthday this Month! Al-Anon Family Groups are celebrating 64 years!! At Bill W.'s urging, his wife Lois moves to create a separate fellowship that will formalize these meetings. With Anne B., who had initiated a Family Group in Westchester County, New York, Lois sends a letter to 87 such groups suggesting that they unite under the name of Al-Anon. The response is positive, and Al-Anon Family Groups is born. In January 1952 Lois and Anne shift the growing

organization's office from Bill & Lois's home Stepping Stones to the 24th Street Clubhouse in Manhattan.

(10) So who were the Founders of the very first Registered group in the State of FL. Their names were Junius Lee Cotton & Tom A. Sharpe. They originally met in 1940. Junius Cotton was a United States Navy Commander, and Tom Sharpe was a salesman living and working in Jacksonville Florida. Just as Bill & Bob would give birth & access to our fellowship... Tom & Junius would begin the Florida chapter. Little did they realize.... the lives that would be changed by their spiritual meeting $\frac{3}{4}$ of a century ago.

(11) Junius Cotten was born in McComb, Mississippi in 1895

(12,13) He was one of 3 brothers and lost his father in a saw mill accident when he was only 2. His mother ran a rooming house to make ends meet.

(14) Junius went on to join the Navy graduating from the US Naval Academy in 1917. In reading Juniu's yearbook, you can tell early on he was certainly welcome among our A.A. fellowship. (Read yearbook excerpt)

(15,16) The USS Maine was the first deployment of Junius as a Navy man. By 1923 he switched to Naval Avionics serving aboard the aircraft carrier USS Saratoga.

(16) During Junius' Naval career, he served on the USS Saratoga & built several bases in the South Pacific in the early 1930's.

(17) Eventually Junius's Alcoholism caught up with him. His Navy career was going up in smoke so in 1939 he decided to take an early retirement. This was mostly due to his heavy drinking. He had gotten married had a son & lost his wife in death. He then retired in Pasadena, Calif. And 2nd wife.

(18) 1939 turned out to be a great year to get out of the rat race & make a geographical change for Junius. He had an amazing person in his second wife "Marie". Even without Al-Anon being formed yet, Marie had heard about the newly formed Alcoholics Anonymous. Marie decided to write a letter to Bill Wilson & Ruth Hock in New York and purchased the brand new book they had been working on. Hot off the press! Junius was able to find an A.A. Group in Los Angeles. He had some success in sobriety and was able to put together a few months.

(19) With the onset of World War 2, retired Naval Officer Commander Junius Cotten was recalled back into service.

He was sent out from California to the recently built Naval Air Station in Jacksonville as the First Executive Officer.

(20) Marie (Junius 2nd wife) was once again instrumental in his recovery. With Junius now having to go back to his former job which had so much alcoholic problems associated with it that she was certain her husband would require some help with this problem. Marie had the insight to go to the base dispensary where she contacted local physician Fr. Sullivan G. Bedell. Marie hoped the recently entered the service doctor & Father might be able to help them locate an alcoholic prospect in Jacksonville that Commander Cotton might try to continue his AA sobriety. Dr. Bedell also had a private Sanitarium in Jax where he treated alcoholics.

(21) Marie's prayers were answered when the physician Sullivan Bedell contacted "Babe" Sharpe, wife of Tom Sharpe who had been an alcoholic patient of Dr. Bedell's on several occasions. According to Tom: "A meeting was arranged and we all gathered at the Officers quarters on the Jacksonville Naval Air Station some time in Dec 1940".

(22) Tom Sharpe was born in Darlington, South Carolina in 1904, but grew up in Jacksonville, FL. Graduated from Georgia Tech and was a salesman, sports enthusiast and avid golfer. He had many sales jobs and worked very hard

until his drinking caused problems and he quit before getting fired. During the Depression jobs became difficult to get and by 1940 he was unemployable. He went to many sanitariums to “dry out” but usually drank on the way home. Dr. Bedell was an unforeseen blessing in Tom’s “way of life”!

(23,24) This was the very first meeting of Alcoholics interested in A.A. in State of Fl; Cotton then asked Sharpe if he knew any other drunks in Jacksonville, so they could all get together and start a Group of A.A.? Sharpe rounded up four of his drinking friends and their first Group meeting was held at Tom S. home

(25) The original “first meeting” group of Tom’s friends was attended by Tom F., Henry R., Charles B. and Karl K. Of course none of Tom’s friends were truly interested in sobriety so that group had little success.

(26) In March of 1941 Saturday Evening Post released the Jack Alexander story titled “Alcoholics Anonymous: Freed slaves of Drink, now they free others. This story was supposed to be a “60 minutes type piece” exposing the untruths of A.A.. But Jack Alexander was given complete access & went to meetings where he discovered for himself the spiritual truth about AA. His heart and spirit were moved & Changed. This story put A.A. on the map.

(27) In April of 1941 Tom Sharpe went to the Jacksonville Journal and spoke with city editor, telling him of the National A.A. movement and what they were doing locally. As a result an article written by Lowel Lucas appeared in the April 19th edition. All inquiries that came in to newspaper were given to Tom Sharpe. These people asking questions....were truly interested.... And as a result! The Central Group of A.A. was started! Charlie Peace: the first to answer died with 19 years of sobriety! Bruce Haughton 18 years, and Hugh Carty with 8 years. They met for a while at 2747 Riverside Ave; and then took turns at each others homes. Mac Williams who heard about them from the Post article took the bus from St. Augustine.

(28) The original group were then offered a room in the Windsor Hotel and held weekly meetings there for sometime. Then they were able to rent a room on 2nd floor of 330 W. Forsythe st. They stayed a year & held meetings with a club room also. There were atleast 9 members including Cotton & Sharpe. This is when Commander Cotton was transferred to Newport, Rhode Island. After a year larger quarters were needed, and by 1945 the first offshoot group was formed "The Fellowship Group" At that time ACOAN, Inc. was formed to hold property & act as agent for

A.A. Thomas A. Sharpe was president & JL Andrews was secretary/Treasurer.

(29) The Hotel Seminole was one used for one of the early AA meetings in Florida in 1942.

Bill Wilson actually spoke here.

Bill W's first trip to Jacksonville was in early 1942. The reason for his trip was to visit the Jacksonville Group and speak with one of it's first members, Bruce H. Bruce was a promoter who had Gulf Life Insurance Company give him 10 radio spots 3 to 4 minutes in length to discuss AA. His spots were very successful and many people came to AA. He wanted to expand the radio program nationally and received backing from Prudential and Metropolitan Life insurance Companies. He wrote many letters to the Foundation stating his intent and his answer was a visit from Bill W. Tom S met Bill at the train station and they went to meet Bruce. Bruce never did another radio spot for AA in Jacksonville. After the meeting Bill spoke for the first time in Jacksonville at the Seminole Hotel for 20 to 25 people. Dinner cost \$1.25. This was the first of many times Bill spoke in Jacksonville.

(30 -36) The By Laws from original Jacksonville Group that met in Seminole & Windsor Hotels....from GSO Archives.... Read the highlighted ones

(37) In 1945 the corporation ALCOAN Inc. (to separate property & holdings from AA) was dissolved & was replaced with new charter ALANON Inc. The first alcoholic ladies came in to meetings April 1947 with Wynell Justice & December 47 with Loraine Mathis. This corporation is not to be confused with Al-Anon Family Groups they opened their first office in 1952. But their work was being done already through the likes of Henrietta Seiberling, and Marie Cotton

(38) Tom Sharpe after becoming sober through the chance but spiritual meeting of Florida's co-founder Commander Cotton, went on to continue in service with Alcoholics Anonymous. Tom S. was the very first member of the first Group registered at GSO. He also went on to serve as the 1st Delegate representing Florida at Panel 1 General Service Conference. Our 3rd Legacy in action.

And later he served as a class B trustee of A.A.

Tom Sharpe passed in 1983. Giving all of himself for those of us that followed.

(39) AA in Florida has now reached its 75 year Anniversary, interestingly enough the location of that very first meeting of our founding AA fellowship.... Took place at the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville FL. On Dec 1940. NAS Jax is also celebrating their 75 year anniversary. With their anniversary falling on Oct 1940. These are actual "challenge coins" given out at NAS Jacksonville, FL. Challenge coins bear an organizations insignia or emblem carried by the members (usually military). In practice, challenge coins are presented by unit commanders in recognition of special achievement by a member. Notice the similarity to our A.A. chips.

Tom Sharpe & Junius Cotten challenged themselves in A.A. Service, to carry this message TO the Alcoholic who still suffers. Junius sought out Tom. ; Bill W. went to look up Dr. Bob I heard once the only alcoholic you should look down on is the one you look down at when extending your hand to help them up. If we wish Alcoholics Anonymous to be here another 75 years; we will & must continue the challenge of Service work. It is another way we "live the program". We cannot expect the sick to come to us; we must carry this message "our Message" to the suffering. Father Martin had a saying that is quite apropos, " You know how people say – you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. They reference this saying when talking about newcomers who

aren't willing to call you when you give them your number. Don't wait for them to call you; you're the recovered alcoholic - show them the way. **Think of it this way: You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. But KEEP leading him to the water because you don't know WHEN he is going to get Thirsty.** Each one of us is a light, and I am grateful and humbled when I think of all the individual points of light each of us is in service, carrying this message. Higher power.

(40) Thank you for allowing me to serve, and be a part of! Not apart from