

FORWARD

How did it happen that one of the most devoted and loyal individuals in the formative years of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) became an almost completely forgotten figure? Although probably best known for the role she played as the National Secretary of the new organization that was forming its own identity, Bobbie B. essentially functioned as AA's unofficial director of communications in much of its early years. During her tenure at the AA headquarters, she was the central nexus whose letters shaped autonomous groups across the country to become more unified by a common set of principles.

Bobbie's tireless replies to voluminous correspondence contributed immeasurably to the shaping of the Traditions, which took written form during her tenure. Notwithstanding the abundance of biographies that have been written about the founding fathers of AA, this story has never been fully told by anyone—until now. Had her letters throughout the fellowship ever been published, she would have arguably been one of AA's most prolific authors. In the pages that follow, historian Gary Neidhardt reveals the story of this pioneering woman whose guidance letters—at least in the thousands—would have filled more pages than the Big Book itself.

The history of any institution is filled with captivating characters, entertaining drama, and unsolved mysteries. The biographer's task of separating fact from fiction is not an easy one. Yet Neidhardt painstakingly explores uncharted territory with a balance of courage and scholarly rigor. In many instances, this biography uses Bobbie's own words to tell her story. Compellingly writing with a combination of curiosity and compassion, Neidhardt provides an enlightening examination of roughly a thousand letters that have never been published. The result of this effort is a meticulously researched and densely packed account of the woman who was AA's most steadfast correspondent: her early life, her relationships, her countless letters, and her ideals that helped shape the evolving organization into what has become an enduring American institution that has reached across the entire globe.

Many mysteries continue to shroud the life—and untimely death—of the enigmatic Bobbie B., but *The Untold Story of A.A.'s Fantastic Communicator* provides a complete and engaging account of a fascinating chapter in the history of AA. Reading this book is like walking a trail with a guide who is a literary archeologist. Neidhardt has unearthed a wealth of archival materials, documents, and photographs that until now have been hidden away for almost seventy years. Like all great journeys, this one begins with the first steps.

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