

'Bible Cure' Transforming Lives of Drunkards at Colony in Blue Ridge Mountains

By OLIVE ANN BURNS
 SHULLA MILLS, N.C. (AP) — A distinguished surgeon arrived one afternoon at Hebron Colony, in the Blue Ridge Mountains, to take the "Bible cure" for alcoholism. "I've never been religious," he said bluntly to the Rev. E. A. Dillard, superintendent. "But I'm a desperate man. I'm going to cooperate if it kills me."

The next morning the surgeon found himself at a prayer meeting. He told Dr. Dillard later: "I knew I didn't have to pray out loud. But I'd promised to cooperate. The only prayer I could remember was Now-I-Lay-Me-Down-to-Sleep, and I knew that would break up the meeting, because we'd just had breakfast."

What the surgeon blurted out when his turn came was the grace his mother used to say: "Lord, make us thankful for these and all other blessings. In Jesus' name amen."

Learn To Pray

Learning to pray is part of the cure here at Hebron, a Christian home for men alcoholics, and at Grace Home for women alcoholics. Anybody in the United States who needs to come in is welcome, free of charge, provided he or she arrives sober, earnestly wants to quit drinking, agrees to stay eight weeks and "to help with the work around the place."

The patients have never been so high from whisky. They're nearly 3,500 feet up on a mountain top, with huge blue sky and white clouds overhead, green valleys below and gigantic blue mountains bulging toward eternity all around. Rugged, prehistoric Grandfather Mountain towers in the distance. When the mockingbirds quiet down, the silence gets so loud a man can hear his soul. Many Stay Sober

"At least 50 per cent of our graduates stay sober, and that's a very high average in alcoholic circles," said Dr. Dillard. "The secret is that the patients change their thinking here. I don't encourage talk about their binges, and we don't dwell on the problems of alcoholism. I teach the patients not to major in staying sober. Instead, they major in building a new life. I'm not here to give good advice. They've all had plenty of that. I'm here to give good news about what God can do for a man."

Treatment starts on the day a patient arrives. For medicinal purposes, Dr. Dillard prescribes 32 Bible verses, printed on a card. He asks the patient to memorize a verse a day and recite it at the breakfast table. A dose of family prayer comes after breakfast. Dr. Dillard leads four evening services a week at Hebron, and meets three times a week with the women at Grace Home for worship and Bible instruction.

Bible Reading
 He prescribes at least two or three hours of Scripture reading a day. "First," he said, "I ask the patient to read through the Gospel of John, underlining the word 'believe.' When he reports to me on that, I ask him to find and list the seven miracles in the first 11 chapters of John. Then I tell him to list the claims of Christ — 'I am the light of the world,' 'I am the door,' etc. Next he reads the book of Romans, underlining the word 'righteousness' whenever it appears, then the word 'know' in the First Epistle of John."

"I emphasize believing. I ask patients to note particularly what the Scripture says Christ did for those who believed. 'If you believe in Christ, these blessings are yours,' I remind them. 'Think of yourself as a child of God. Believe that He loves you, that Christ has redeemed you, that you are not alone.'

"We had a county judge as a patient once. A brilliant attorney. He came to me after a week here and asked when I was going to ram religion down his throat. I said I wasn't."

No Argument
 I don't argue religion with anybody. Certainly not with a lawyer. I just teach religion. But the spirit of the group here is a powerful therapy. No pressure is put on anybody, yet most of the patients change very quickly. There is no tapering-off whisky, by the way. We don't have a drop on the place."

"When you get to Hebron, you just don't want whisky any more," said James Blackwell, a tall, white-haired mail carrier from Florence, S.C. He was washing dishes in the kitchen. "I've gained 20 pounds in less than three weeks here. At home I carry a mail sack over a 12-mile route, and I was really suffering when I had a hangover."

I talked to a young civil engineer, Tom Chewing of Savannah, Ga., who started drinking in high school.

"I've been in all kinds of hospitals," he said, "but I never felt any confidence before that I'd quit. I'd take a month's rest cure thinking 'aw, I can still control whisky.' Then I'd go home drunk. Now for the first time I don't WANT to drink. I've worked all over the world as an engineer, but I've decided to become a schoolteacher."

Useful Work

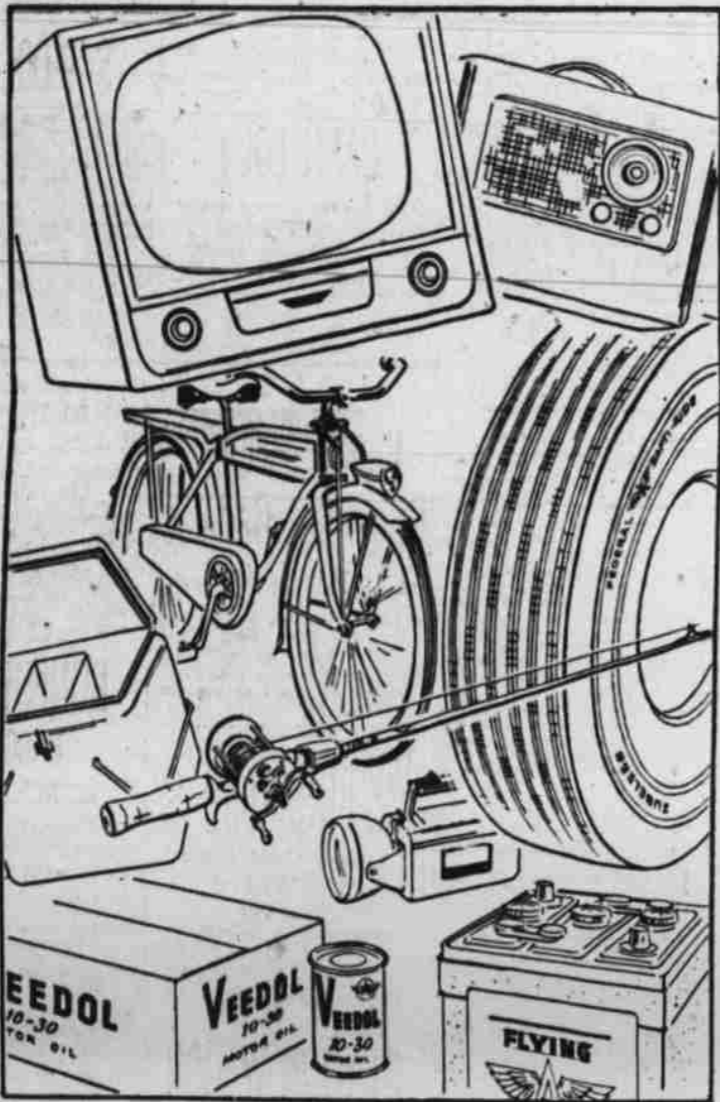
"The useful work we do at this place is as therapeutic as the religion. When you just sit around leathercraft or playing checkers, it gets you. I'd had enough of that. I got talked into coming here by a friend of mine who's been sober since he was at Hebron in 1948." Tom was holding a fence post while he talked. He and a textile worker, Cecil Chapman, were sinking posts on the Hebron farm. Two or three hills away, in a string-bean field, seven alcoholics were laughing and talking and hoeing. Dr. Dillard runs a truck farm and a grazing farm, which he never expected to do when he

decided to be a preacher a long time ago. "Our crops furnish part of our food; we just sell enough to pay for the fertilizer. Besides farming, the men patients do building and repair work and all the cooking and cleaning. At Grace home, besides housekeeping and sewing, the women do canning, gather eggs and vegetables and look after our chickens."

The preacher gives out the work assignments every morning after prayer time. "If a man's shaky, I put him around the house at first," he explained. "Then after he gets his legs back, I put him out in the field — unless he's a good cook." Driving the jeep station wagon back to the house, Dr. Dillard told the history of Hebron. "I was a Presbyterian pastor in Charlotte

for 19 1/2 years," he said. "I'd tried to help some alcoholics in my church — every church has them. But they needed more time than a busy pastor can give. I thought if we had a home where they could live awhile in a Christian atmosphere, the cumulative effect might straighten them out. My wife and I found this property in 1947. A new patient once said Hebron is so far from everywhere

the preacher must've been lost when he found it. Anyway I took an option on the place, asked the public for money, got \$7,000 in a few days, paid \$5,000 down and used the rest for food and furniture. My wife and I and five alcoholics came here and set up housekeeping." Today 25 men patients live at Hebron colony, and Grace home can accommodate 16 women.



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