

ROBERT A. "BOB" KNOWLTON
(December 10, 1947 - October 21, 2009)

"COUNSELOR TRAINING FUND"

Through his experience on the Cornerstone board of directors, Bob Knowlton understood how difficult it is to train counselors to do the work of Cornerstone, and yet the expanding needs of the community cannot be met without more counselors. No training program prepares students for the alternative peer group concept. They must have impeccable boundaries and unusual maturity, yet relate to the zaniness of adolescence with curiosity and delight. Bob dedicated this fund to the development and training of counselors so that the Cornerstone model can be replicated and expanded.

On March 5, 2009, at the Cornerstone Recovery annual breakfast, Cornerstone president Dr. Anette Edens announced a \$100,000 bequest from board member Bob Knowlton, and then introduced Bob to the 230 guests at the breakfast.

The following is a transcript of Bob's remarks.

"I think it's fair to ask why someone who's been on a board for less than a year would donate this much money to an organization that most people have never even heard of. Well, there are two reasons.

I joined the board because Scott Basinger asked me to. We have an unofficial tradition in recovery that if someone has a need and asks for help, you help if you can. I had some time; Cornerstone apparently had the need; so what the heck. I had no idea, though, about what Cornerstone did, or what an Alternative Peer Group was.

The first thing I noticed on joining the board was that most of the other board members were parents of Cornerstone kids who had successfully completed a three-year program along with their parents. And I saw that they were 100% fanatical about Cornerstone.

And then I met the staff, who work ridiculous hours because they love what they do. Most of them are former Cornerstone kids who are now giving back what was given to them.

And then I began to meet the kids, and that's who I related to most.

Now, that wasn't always the case. I'm not a parent, so I never dealt with teenagers. In fact, I always regarded teenagers as alien, slightly dangerous creatures. I avoided them even when I was one.

When I was young, I was an angry, destructive, depressed, smart, creative, frightened, lonely, isolated kid. I left home at 16 and was on the streets by 18. Through my early life I was saved by the love of a few remarkable people I met along the way -teachers, counselors, adult friends—who seemed to be able to look into me, as if they were saying, "I think there's a pretty neat kid in there. Let's work together and see what he can do."

It still took me a long time to get my life on track. I didn't find my way into 12-step recovery in AA until I was 34. But Cornerstone starts working with kids and their families as early as 13! I began meeting Cornerstone kids who showed more maturity at 19 than I did at forty. They were amazing young people who had learned to grow up in the positive peer environment of Cornerstone Recovery.

The long and short of it is, I fell in love with Cornerstone. And that was the first reason I made this donation.

The second reason was a bit more personal, and had a little more urgency to it. Last December I found out I've got inoperable pancreatic cancer and I have perhaps six to nine months to live; nobody knows for sure. I feel fine right now, but the tumors are spreading. I say this not to be gloomy or put a damper on our event, but to make a larger point.

In the outpouring of good wishes and prayers that came after the diagnosis, there were some like my cousin, who said, "Bobby, you've worked so hard all these years, you should just have fun now. Go to a topless club! Fly to Las Vegas and spend some money at the casinos. Why, you could even drink now!"

Well, anyone in recovery smiles at suggestions like that, since most of us have already tried such things, usually to a fare-thee-well. But there in the hospital I did ask myself what I might do with my remaining time. Since I'm apparently going to have a shorter retirement than I expected, I have the resources and the health and the freedom to go anywhere in the world I want and do anything I want, at least for a while.

So how do I want to spend these precious months?

It didn't take me long to decide that I don't want to change a thing. These last several years have been the happiest and most fulfilling of my life, in every possible way. And I believe it's because I have stayed firmly rooted in recovery, surrounded by a lot of people I love who are also firmly rooted in recovery.

But here's my point: Cornerstone starts young people on the journey that has given me a greater life than I could ever have imagined. What could be a greater mission than that? So I'm going to stay on the board and do the things I've been doing, as long as I can be useful.

These days it seems everyone is worried about the future, because it's obvious we've got a lot of problems in the world. It's tough to know what to believe in, and invest in.

Well, I'd like to invite you to look back there at those young people. Those are Cornerstone kids. They are the future. They are something worth investing in and believing in. I've seen what they can do and become, and I have no hesitation handing them the keys to the future.

If you feel, as I do, that Cornerstone and these kids are worth believing in and investing in, then I ask you to write a check. And if you can, make it a big one. You'll find a card and an envelope at your place setting.

Look, none of us knows what will happen with most of our investments this year and next. But I promise you this one will pay off.

God bless you, and thank you for coming today."

