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*Grace Cultice, angel of Chicago AA, first secretary, who served for years without pay - a non-alcoholic.*

## *EARLY HISTORY*

**A**S a group, Alcoholics Anonymous in Chicago started 12 years ago this month.

One individual, who had found AA in Akron, his former home, had then been dry a year. Five others, four of whom had also been indoctrinated in Akron, had been on the Program a few weeks. One Tuesday evening in September, 1939, they met in the home of the senior dry in Evanston, Chicago's first suburb on the north, and the Chicago group was born.

Apparently none of those present were aware of the historic nature of the occasion, for to this day they can't agree on the date. However, the important thing, they say, is that on every Tuesday since then there has been an AA meeting in Chicago and the six have now become approximately 5,000.

### **Inspired by Akron**

Looking backward, Chicago AAs believe it was good fortune that brought the fundamentals of the

movement directly from the fountainhead in Akron. The early members accepted the founders' presentation that AA is essentially spiritual, to be practiced with simplicity and humility. During the years, these fundamentals have been passed on from sponsor to new member and as a result the Chicago group has not only shown a healthy growth numerically, but has continued to maintain a strong spirit of unity centered in the basic ideas.

### **From Suburb to Loop**

In Akron, the pilgrims from Chicago had been told, among other things, "If you want to keep this you must give it to others." That was taken to mean in a practical sense that the new group must get out of the suburb and into the Loop if it was to fulfill its apparent assignment as the beginning of the movement in a major metropolitan area. The move was made the next month, in October.

The result was immediately

good, for the new group became a Chicago group in fact, with its appeal and influence radiating from the center out through a populous territory 50 miles across. This pattern of a central group fostering neighborhood groups and providing them with essential services has continued, with 200 plus affiliated groups at present, and has, in fact, become known as the Chicago idea.

### Lake and Wabash Memories

The first downtown meetings were held in the Medical & Dental Arts building, at Lake St. and Wabash Ave. where the top two floors contained a tea room and a lounge with fountain with gold fish. The deal is recalled with misty eyes. Use of the lounge was free in consideration of the group's patronage of the table d'hote dinner, then 65¢.

Thus there was no call for money, which was fortunate, for the group was able to give full attention to feeling its way. The meetings followed procedure in Akron. Members acted as leaders in turn, opening the meeting with a short prayer and then relating personal history.

### "Quiet Time" Approved

At one meeting the leader expressed reluctance to praying be-

fore others. Someone suggested that as a substitute, all present might observe a moment of meditation. The idea was so well received that it was repeated and now the "quiet time" has come to be standard at all group meetings in Chicago. And has, in fact, spread throughout the world where AAs gather.

### AA "For-Family" Plan

These early meetings established the policy that AA is for the family. The non-alcoholic spouses of members were made welcome at the Tuesday group meetings and at the weekly "open houses." Since then, a plan of weekly meetings for alcoholics only has been put into effect, but there also have been special wives' meetings started in some parts of the Chicago area and the main principle of making AA an interest of the whole family has been preserved.

### Separation was solution

Another practice that was adopted early and still is in effect was the separation of the pure AA discussion from the so-called "business" affairs of the group. There wasn't much in the line of business but as long as the meetings afford-



**A table at the daily noon luncheon in Fair store, where from 50 to 100 AAs gather daily**

ed the only opportunity to talk of such things, there was distraction. The solution proposed and adopted was to have a "set-up" meeting before the group session at which any or all members might submit ideas for the material welfare of the order.

### Growth with "Grace"

The Chicago group's business has expanded to keep pace with the needs of the growing group,

but the basic idea of keeping AA meetings free of business is still effective. The daily routine of handling calls by person, telephone or mail is carried on by the central office for the benefit of all the neighborhood groups. Matters of policy, finances and public relations are considered by committees which are representative of all the groups. On the neighborhood level, where the membership averages 20, contacts with the downtown office are handled by a secretary, thus leaving the group meetings free to give full attention to the program.

The history of the Chicago central office, both the idea and the method of organizing it will always bring to mind the memory of Grace Cultice. A non-alcoholic, her position in AA in Chicago was unique. She was the friendly helper of all in the new little group and at the time of her sudden death in January, 1948, this acquaintance was shared with countless AAs from New York to San Francisco.

### The "Mainspring"

While the group was still in the fledgling stage in Evanston, Grace was its mainspring. She did the telephoning and she made the spaghetti for the Sunday open house. When it appeared, a year or so later, that some rudimentary sort of downtown office would be desirable, the group without question turned to Grace. At that time the Chicago group's first venture at a club house was under way in the office building at 127 N. Dearborn Street and Grace established herself at a kitchen table in the entry way to the club room, and with that simple beginning AA's metropolitan service was launched.

By that time the idea of one weekly meeting exclusively for alcoholics had been instituted and was effective throughout the area. At first there were 10 neighborhood districts. Now through sub-division there are more than 200 neighborhood groups all depending for ser-

vice upon the downtown office. It was this system and its quite rapid growth from the beginning that made it possible to move Grace into a more fitting office. The first such was a suite in the Republic building, 209 S. State Street; from there the move was made to 123 W. Madison St. in January, 1948.

Grace didn't live to occupy the new place, but she was the one who selected it and made the arrangements for occupying it. Now her picture hangs in the reception room of the new suite and a brass plate identifies it as the Grace Cultice room.

### Groups Become Autonomous

In the beginning the neighborhood groups were intended only for the benefit of brand new members who could be encouraged to bring out their problems more freely in a small intimate group of alcoholics than at the large open meetings. As time went on they gradually became local entities, with pretty much the same standing as individual groups in any other area so far as conducting their meetings and working with newcomers is concerned. However, there has continued to be a strong attachment to the central office, not only because of the practical services rendered but also as the center for considering matters of policy and as the keeper of local AA tradition.

### Central Office "Idea"

The so-called Chicago "idea" that of a central office from which the local groups have their origin instead of an affiliation of local groups setting up a central facility; in other words from the center out rather than from the rim inward. Chicago AAs claim no superiority for their system. They speak of it rather as a manifestation of the simplicity which the early members

were so fortunate as to inherit from the mother lodge in Akron.

### Auditorium for \$5 a Night

During the time when the central office was coming into existence and the neighborhood groups were growing through fission the Tuesday meetings continued to be attended by all members. The original meeting place in the Medical and Dental Arts building was large enough for a year or so, then sev-

Coffee bar at the Alano club



eral other places were occupied for brief "periods until 1941, when an especially fine arrangement was made with the Central YMCA, 19 South LaSalle Street. A large auditorium was had for \$5 a night and in the cafeteria prime ribs of beef were 40 cents.

### Beginners Meeting Born

It was during the YMCA session period when the beginners' meeting was started. The first session was conducted by a member who found himself with three prospects on hand at once and he got them in one corner of the meeting room half an hour before meeting time.

Before that session was over several others had drifted in to partake of the discussion and the idea of a meeting was formed. Since then the beginners' meeting has been a regular feature at the Tuesday meetings all over town.

### 10 Minutes per Speaker

During this period also the Tuesday meetings, with the larger attendance, necessarily became more conventional. It became apparent at the rate of one speaker a night many would never have the opportunity of appearing on the platform, so it was decided to have three or

four speakers under a chairman. After some experience it became a settled rule that 10 minutes was time enough for a speaker. These things have since acquired the force of tradition in Chicago.

### Magazines Boost Membership

All this time the growth in numbers was brisk and steady. The first noticeable impulse was, as with other groups of that period, the piece printed in Liberty magazine in September, 1939. This was followed in March, 1941 with the first Saturday Evening Post article by Jack Alexander. The new people resulting from these two pieces provided the numerical strength to maintain the facilities and very much enhanced the feeling that AA had definitely proved its merits and was on its way.

The files in the Chicago office tell the same story as those elsewhere. About 50 per cent of those exposed to the Program catch on at once and hang on without trouble. About 25 per cent experience difficulties more or less but eventually find their way back. In some instances individuals in this category have come back after 10 years' absence, lending evidence to the belief no one can be sure that anyone is ever lost. As in other groups Chicago AAs have found the other 25 per cent for some reason or



Corner of conference room at Chicago central headquarters where AAs drop in for chats, help and literature

other, are not able to grasp and practice the principles.

### "Open House" Popular

One of the first activities adopted instinctively by the young Chicago group was the Sunday evening open house. It was attended by members and wives or husbands and afforded a regular meeting in a social atmosphere. Open houses are now held in various parts of

Chicago, most of them on Saturday nights. An outgrowth of the basic idea has been the Sunday morning breakfast.

### Policy Committee Formed

The simple set-up committee started early in the group's history continued to function during the first eight years, the only change being that instead of all members attending, each neighborhood group

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sent one delegate. As an overall advisory body, a policy committee was established, with representatives of the north, south and west side city groups and the north, south and west suburban groups. This committee worked with the set-up committee.

## Public Relations and Finance

It became necessary also to form a finance committee to control the central office budget. Income at that time was entirely from collections taken at the Tuesday meetings and from individual pledges. A committee on public relations also was formed to prepare any news releases that seemed indicated and to deal with requests for speakers before non-alcoholic meetings.

## Area Representation

This simple arrangement was in effect until three years ago, at which time the number of neighborhood groups had increased so that the set-up committee had become unwieldy. It was then decided to substitute a rotating committee whose members, to be chosen by lot, would represent the groups by areas. With some slight modifications this plan is now operating.

## Now — Three Tuesday Meetings

From the beginning the Chicago group has been flexible, ready to change its ideas or methods of administration when such a change seems desirable. The original Tuesday meeting attended by all members from all parts of the metropolitan area has given away to three separate Tuesday meetings, one in the Loop, one on the south side of Chicago and one in Evanston for groups in the north of Chicago and along the north shore. When it seems desirable other Tuesday meetings will be set up.

## Recovery Prime Objective

Such matters of practical nature as have appeared necessary have been attended to but at all times the feeling has been that the principle objective of AA is the recovery of the individual members. The central office and the various committees have one purpose and that is to serve the members. Chicago AAs insist that the Chicago "idea" is nothing more than the principle that AA is found completely in the fundamentals as presented by the founders and these are expressed in the two words, "*simplicity* and *humility*."



Woman with alcoholic problem talks to secretary of Chicago Central office at 123 West Madison Street

THE first two Chicago AA women were contacted in the summer of 1939, a few weeks after the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous* had been released. At that time there was no Chicago group. There was only one man in the area, Earl T., who had effected his recovery through the Akron group and had been sober for two years at that time. AA was without a name and its total membership was less than 200. Women members were scarce.

The two women were advised to go to Akron for a week or two of indoctrination—to see the recovered alcoholics there in action and

learn more about this plan of recovery. Both adopted the Program immediately and one still is an active member of the Chicago group.

There were six persons present at Chicago's first official meeting in September of that year. While the group started to grow slowly from this point, women prospects remained scarce. The handful of women working in Chicago would have found the going difficult had not the men been wise enough to adopt an attitude of complete equality. From the beginning, women in the group were made to understand that sex had nothing to do with

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alcoholism.

The assumption was that a recovered woman had as much to offer a sick prospect as did a recovered male alcoholic. Consequently, women were not limited to working with women alone. Any such curtailment would virtually have deprived the first few women of sufficient opportunities for Twelfth Step work.

Chicago has never segregated nor laid any emphasis one way or the other on its women. The woman is accepted, simply, as another alcoholic, and it is taken for granted that her problems are nearly identical with those of any other member of the group.

"Outside of AA, women may encounter ignorance and a consequent narrowness of view," Chicago's first woman AA commented. "However, within the understanding of her group associates in Chicago she has never been made to feel that her sex may handicap her recovery or place her one jot lower in the social or moral scale than her brother alcoholic."

At the end of the first two years in Chicago, women averaged only 6 per cent of the total membership. Today, 10 years later, their ranks account for 14 per cent of the total. These figures represent only those women actively participating in group life.

The staff of the Chicago central service office is composed of four women, three of whom are active

AAs. Women also serve on the various committees governing the central services as well as the regional activities and have contributed materially in working out plans for and supervision of hospitalization.

There is another group of women for whom Chicago feels deep gratitude. These are the non-alcoholics — the wives, sweethearts, mothers, and sisters with whom it has been blessed. From the very first wife of the very first member, Chicago AAs have received encouragement, sympathy and intelligent cooperation from this important quarter of the group. Their faith in its success and their willingness to give in loving service has added more of stability and serenity to this area than can ever be measured in words.

The Chicago group has become known for its unity, for the absence of friction and for its smooth operation. There is a climate of tranquility in this large area that has existed from the beginning. Those who have watched the development and growth in this midwestern center of AA feel strongly that a great part of this peaceful and harmonious atmosphere is due to the very real fellowship existing among all members of the group. The men and women alcoholics, together with the non-alcoholics, all seem to sense the equal importance of their respective contributions to the working whole.



One of many small group meetings held several times weekly among patients in AA ward of Washingtonian home

## HOSPITALS

**T**HERE is an axiom in AA that when the need arises the need will be filled. This could not be more strikingly borne out than in the evolution of hospital facilities for Chicago AAs.

Enthusiastic cooperation was given the group from the start by many doctors individually. Several health resorts, sanitariums and other institutions of the kind welcomed AA prospects and cooperated with members. State and local government institutions alternately cooperated and cooled toward AA. But for many years the group had no single acceptable hospital where it could take its prospects.

In the middle of the 19th century

a group known as the Washingtonians thrived for a time in combating alcoholism. As the result of this movement there was established in Chicago in 1863 a hospital known as Washingtonian Home, for the express purpose of helping alcoholics. Supported partly by endowments and partly by fees it has continued to treat alcoholics. Many years ago it branched into general hospitalization, because of a lack of enough alcoholic patients.

Success in treating alcoholics was never achieved however. Persons would be dried out, only to return again. The Home supplied all that medicine could. But it found this wasn't enough.

### Experimental AA Ward

In 1948 a group of AAs talked to directors of the hospital, outlined AA hopes and results to date, and convinced the board that an AA ward should be established on an experimental basis. The project was undertaken as an individual one by AAs within the Chicago group, not as a group project.

### More Than Drying-Out

Results were immediate and positive. The hospital, whose not-for-profit charter sets forth its purpose of helping alcoholics instead of merely drying them out, saw hopeless addicts come into the AA ward for treatment. Then soon they were coming back week after week, sober and happy, to talk to new patients. Here was achievement of purpose after more than 75 years of operation. AA by example sold itself and cooperation to most any AA suggestion was immediate.

Regular prices for five days treatment were \$125 for men and \$150 for women. But AA sponsored sick ones were admitted for \$58 for men and \$78 for women.

A ward was set aside and AA prospects were segregated so that their only contacts were with themselves or other AAs. The latest and best medical treatment was provided and AAs were given the run of the place to talk to patients.

### Men and Women's Wards

Thirteen regular beds and seven emergency beds were established in a separate floor of the institution. A game room and meeting room was provided. Every prospect had to be sponsored by another AA and approval for admittance was obtained from the Chicago central service office or from a committee of men who took over the operation of the project.

So successful was the plan that in December, 1949, a small group of women was formed, similar to that of the men, and a women's ward was opened. This contains four beds and four emergency beds. In cases of great emergency additional facilities can be set up. The women's ward operates in the same manner as the men's.

From August 1, 1948, to May 1, 1951, a total of 1,048 men had been hospitalized. From December 1949, to last May 1, 175 women had been handled, or more than 1,200 most of whom came into the group, in two and a half years.

The wards are partially self-supporting, with the four and five day patients helping the nurses and doctors in caring for newer patients. AAs do not help with the hospital care as in some cities.

Formal meetings are held for the patients in addition to personal contacts. This has had a two way benefit, for it provides a constant

source for 12th Step work for members at almost any hour as well as helping sick ones see clearly the path that lies ahead for them if they want it.

### "Washingtonian" Plus AA

Officially, there is no connection between Washingtonian Home and Alcoholics Anonymous, in line with the tradition of not aligning the fellowship with any outside institution, however laudable. The project is merely one of cooperation between the hospital and a handful of AAs within the group. But so successful have been the results of this cooperation that when Chicago thinks of hospitalization it

automatically thinks of Washingtonian.

The hospital has continued to take non-AA cases for treatment – in fact these exceed those sponsored by AA. The two groups, however, are kept severely apart, on the theory that those in the AA ward want sobriety, while many of those in the non-AA section may be there only to sober up or through compulsion.

So impressed is the institution's board, however, that it has indicated unofficially, that it will be glad to confine its alcoholic treatment facilities entirely to AAs if the time arrives when there is a sufficient number to warrant such conversion.

### Two AAs talk to two men in the AA ward at Washingtonian home.

