

AA Grapevine, February 1958

From AA's Scrapbooks —

1943 (cont.)

OLD TOPERS ASK LADIES TO JOIN THEM ON WAGON

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AIDS ERRING SISTERS

These headlines lead news releases from the Chicago daily press on June 9, 1943. They are the first mention, in the office scrapbooks, of public statements by Bill and one "Margaret Roe" of the difficulties AA was then having in persuading us female drunks to stand up and be counted. The article states in part:

"Alcoholics Anonymous, for years an exclusively male organization, has set out to salvage women inebriates. . . . How to gather more unfortunate sisters into the fold was explained last night at a meeting in the Loop of 400 members, including perhaps a hundred women."

There are no records as to exactly how many members of the distaff side there were in those years but, to quote a fairly recent female AA, "I need only look back to my first meeting three years ago —by coincidence *every* speaker on the program was a woman and at

least half of the audience of 150 or so were well-groomed, attractive and very sober sisters. *Tempus Fugit!*"

The year 1943 also marked the first chapter of one of the most significant and moving of all the AA special services. A modest little story from "The San Quentin News" dated June 17th reads:

"Approximately one year ago a handful of San Quentin inmates, after reading the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, met with Ricardo Maestas, special commissary inmate clerk, and arrived at two definite conclusions. First, they decided they were alcoholics. Second, that they should do something about it in an attempt to prevent future disaster after their release. Despite ridicule of being dubbed 'winos' by their fellow inmates and the bantering challenge of skeptics, this nucleus won the support of Joseph H. Fletcher, Captain of the Yard . . . obtained a go-ahead nod from

Warden Clinton T. Duffy, a small appropriation by the Board of Prison Directors for books and pamphlets to come out of the inmate library fund, and the attention of the Board of Prison Terms and Paroles. Membership now exceeds 225."

This quiet report from the prison paper rings the bell on one of the chapters in AA history that perhaps reflects the most widely copied and publicly acclaimed sections of our fellowship. There are now 319 prison groups and the record of AA parolees in the non-repeat classification is high compared to any other prisoner groups.

As an up-to-date footnote to the above, Bill W. received a letter from Warden Duffy a few days ago in which he said that he had been

asked to speak at a series of meetings planned in Victoria, B. C. on "AA in Prison." Warden Duffy wished Bill to write him "any suggestions, ideas, etc. that I might include in my presentations." Bill has given us permission to quote his reply: "Dear Clinton Duffy—... Respecting your request, we think that to supply you with information about AA in prison would indeed be 'carrying coals to Newcastle.' After all you are the senior pioneer of AA in prisons and it is largely due to your early understanding, persistence and courage that we have witnessed the wonderful flowering of this great work throughout the world. For these reasons you will always be counted in our annals as one of the finest friends that AA can ever have. . . ."