

October 1944

MARTY INTERVIEWED ON COMMITTEE

A new committee has been formed. It is to be nationwide in scope. Although it's not an A.A. baby, it's to have a lot to do with A.A. The name of it is the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism, and its executive director is Marty Mann, one of our leading A.A.s in the New York Group, and one of our finest speakers. Marty plans to go all over the country lecturing on alcoholism, and more than this - she hopes to help get local committees started wherever she goes. These local committees in turn will educate their communities on the problem of the alcoholic, and teach the whole public, throughout the country, what we in A.A. already know. That alcoholism is a disease, and a public health problem. That the alcoholic needs to be brought out in the open and helped, not hidden away in shame.

As you see by this article, Marty has shed her anonymity. She talked it over with a great many other A.A.s, and they all felt that view of this larger non-alcoholic field she was entering, she'd have to.

As Marty said in an interview with us yesterday: "I'm going to lecture non-alcoholics about alcoholism. I could be much more convincing, and give them much more understanding, by speaking as an alcoholic - from the inside - and they would be much more likely to listen and believe. That left me with two choices. To say that I was an alcoholic and had recovered, period. And not

mention A.A. Or to give A.A. full credit for my recovery and break the anonymity rule. I couldn't conceive of not publicly giving A.A. all the credit."

We then started to ask Marty questions. Our first question as an A.A. was: "How much has A.A. got to do with all this?"

Marty answered that this way: "In the five and a half years I've been in A.A., I know that a lot of us have wondered and worried about this idea of general education of the public, that goes way beyond A.A.'s specific job.

"I'll talk about myself for a minute, and that'll show you what I mean. In the last five years of my drinking, before I came into A.A., I didn't know what was wrong with me. And neither did anyone else. No one knew what had happened to me, why the quality of my drinking had changed. I thought I was having a nervous breakdown, and that *that* was making me drink too much. I didn't know what an alcoholic was. I didn't find out until I came into A.A. And all of us A.A.s have found the same thing, over and over: that people, on the whole, still don't know anything about alcoholism. Although A.A. has been in existence ten years, and although many authorities on this subject, including doctors, have told me we've done the best education job of all to date, still our first job isn't education of the public. It's work with individual alcoholics.

"For a long time, I've felt the way lots of us older members feel. Namely, that there was a need for a wider program of education. To teach not only individuals, who've hit bottom and come to see us in desperation - but to teach everybody in the whole country that this is not a moral issue, but a health problem. By the way, it's Public Health Problem No. 4. Did you know that?"

"Yes, we said, "But it's true that most people don't. Tell us how you got into all this." "An old friend of mine deserves the credit for that," Marty said. "Grace Bangs. She's director of the Club Service Bureau of the *Herald-Tribune*. That means she has one of the top jobs dealing with clubwomen all over the country. Some time ago I ran into her, and she hadn't seen me since my drinking days. She didn't recognize me, I told her about A.A. and what had happened to me. She asked me and several of us to help her with a relative of hers, a young man. Well, he's just not ready for us yet. But she was terribly impressed with A.A. She felt that more people ought to know about it. She felt they ought to know about alcoholism as a disease. She said, 'Marty, there are a lot of women all over this country, mothers who've unwittingly helped make their children alcoholics, who invariably did all the wrong things about them, and who don't know what to do for them now. Wives who don't know what to do about

their husbands. Even women alcoholics themselves, who are often harder to reach than men, because they feel guiltier than the men do. Now, can't you do something for them? Can't you think of some way to reach these women? I'll back you up and help you any way I can. ' She kept after me, and finally I worked out a plan, based on going out and speaking to organized women's groups all over the country."

Ques. "What did you do then?"

Ans. "Well, we knew we needed scientific backing. We went to Dr. Jellinek. A lot of you know who he is: Director of the Section on Alcohol Studies at Yale University. Now I want to stop and explain a little. Dr. Haggard is director of the Laboratory of Applied Physiology at Yale. For years he's been studying the physiological problems of alcohol. He realized that was only part of the picture, and he started Dr. Jellinek's department to go into all phases of the problem. What interests us A.A.s as much as anything they're doing are the Yale Plan Clinics. Because these clinics are working on alcoholism in the individual. And they're also sending a lot of new A.A.s to their nearby groups.

"Now to go back to Dr. Jellinek. He read the plan. He seemed to like it. He said he thought it would work. He said that educating the country on alcoholism is the next step. All the research that's been done, all that Yale is doing, all that

A.A. is doing, adds up to this: *now* there are plenty of real facts to tell people. Perhaps most valuable of all these, from the human point of view, is A.A. *For A.A. has proved that great numbers of alcoholics can get well.*

"When we started talking about the National Committee, we discovered that interest was more widespread than we had dared to hope. Grace Bang found it easy to form Woman's Organizing Committee - many women, each one important in her field, were immediately interested. When we formed the Advisory Board, it went the same way. And I found an A.A. in the New York Group, Marian M., to be my secretary.

Ques. "Can you tell us now, exactly what your job is, and what A.A.s can do in all this?"

Ans. "My first job is to lecture on alcoholism in general. I'll try to arouse enough interest so that people will want to form a local committee. This committee should include representatives of all groups who have to struggle with this problem. People like doctors, ministers, social workers, magistrates, and above all, A.A.s."

Ques. "What is this local committee going to do?"

Ans. "Its going to carry on the work of education. We'll do everything to help them. (By we I mean the National Committee.) We'll give them plenty of literature, and it will cover every phase of alcoholism. That includes our A.A.

pamphlets. When they're ready, we'll help them set up an information center or a clinic."

Ques. "How are you going to do that?"

Ans. "We'll train anyone this local committee selects to run their information center. They'll go to the Yale Clinics for this training. If they want to set up a clinic, we'll send an expert organizer to help them."

Ques. "But how are you going to get your speaking engagements in the first place?"

Ans. "Grace Bangs and her Woman's Committee will handle most of that."

Ques. "Why, Marty, what about us A.A.s helping? I should think that a special open meeting would be just the place. We ask all the people that you just mentioned to our big open meetings anyway. I should think that any A.A. group that has open meetings, and is interested in this idea, would be a natural - I mean a starting point for a local committee."

Ans. "There's no reason why they shouldn't be. It's my hope that they will, either as groups or as individuals. After all, we A.A.s are the people who understand best how misunderstood this whole thing is."

Felicia G.