

June 1954

*One of our early women members
reports on*

AA and the Grapevine . . .

The First Ten Years

*From the June 1954
Grapevine*

IT'S HARD to realize today that when the year 1944 began, alcoholism was still a hush-hush word, not to be uttered above a whisper, taboo to most people, and unknown as a word to even more. The press was afraid of it, afraid of the public's reaction to such an "unpleasant" subject—so much so that even the phenomenal response the *Saturday Evening Post* had received to the now-famous Jack Alexander article on AA in March 1941 had not convinced other publications that they, too, might safely publish articles on alcoholism and AA.

It's hard to believe that in 1944 AA was still struggling to become established in many, many parts of the country; that the membership

was barely 10,000 [in 1979, it is estimated at over 1,000,000 worldwide]; that the cooperation of the medical profession, of hospitals, of employers, and even of the families and friends of alcoholics was still a far-off dream.

It's hard to remember that in 1944 AAs themselves had little opportunity of communicating with one another outside their own small groups; that an AA group in Arkansas had little idea of how an AA group in Ohio or New Jersey conducted its meetings and its affairs; that many AA groups were so small and so anonymous they couldn't be found by a traveling AA who had not taken the precaution of getting names and addresses from the central office; that there were no AA publications beyond the Big Book and one or two pamphlets.

The year 1944 marked a turning point in all this. The spring of 1944 was particularly rich in creative ideas about alcoholism, alcoholics, and AA. None of these ideas were new. They had all been done before in other fields. What was new and creative was their application to our field of alcoholism. In February, the idea for an educational campaign to change public attitudes on alcoholism was born; this became the National Committee [now National Council] on Alcoholism. In March, the idea for outpatient clinics devoted entirely to the diagnosis and treatment of alcoholics became a reality with the opening of the first Yale Plan Clinic. And in April, the idea for an AA magazine—of, by, and for AAs—created the Grapevine.

When Lois K. telephoned and asked if she could come in town and discuss an idea with Priscilla P. and me, we had no conception of what was involved. But when Lois arrived with her little sheaf of papers and plans, we were swept with enthusiasm. We agreed that a monthly publication for AAs in the greater New York area was needed. We agreed that if it was good, it might spread beyond New York. We agreed to help, to try to get such a thing started. And we all agreed on a name—the Grapevine.

We talked with Bill [AA's co-founder]—he liked the idea. We talked with Grace O., Bud T., Chase H., and drew them in on the plan-

ning. Kay M., Felicia G., and others helped, and by June we had an issue ready. It was hard work, after hours when our own regular jobs were done, often far into the night, but it was rewarding, for the new magazine began to take hold.

Subscriptions from outside the New York area started to come in immediately following our first issue. This was so exciting to all of us that no one wanted to miss the opening of the mail. We used to hold the letters from our post office box until we were all present and then make a ceremony of opening and reading them. It relaxed us after hours of editing, cutting, proofreading.

All this time, I was also working on another project, which called for extensive traveling. Everywhere I went (and I traveled over 25,000 miles that first year), I also talked to AA groups—and there I was an emissary for the new Grapevine. I carried copies with me, talked about it with AA members, and brought home material from distant groups and members, names of possible correspondents, and subscriptions.

The Grapevine had its roots deep in AA, and as these roots spread and took hold, it grew in strength and value. Those of you who read this issue today, ten years later, take it for granted. That is good, for it means it is surely and firmly established, built solidly upon the courage it took, back in 1944, to change those things we could.

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