

AA Grapevine, March 1981

Shaping of Principles

While early AA members were going through the personal and group experiences that eventually produced the Steps and the Traditions, they had no idea that they were shaping principles destined to hold good for the million-plus AA members of 1981. In writing the Steps, they simply looked back and figured out what they had done right. They arrived at the Traditions mostly by the reverse route — looking back, seeing where they had gone wrong, and then setting a course in the opposite direction.

Decisions reached through the experiences of one early woman AA affected the growth of at least six Traditions, including the anonymity aspect of the Eleventh. The story is told here by a man who came to AA six years after she did. He was drawn partly by one of those still-unvoiced Traditions. In an earlier Grapevine article, he remembered, "One morning, I found myself crying and saying, 'I've got to get out of this hell, some way.' That promise of privacy, that pledge — implied in the name Alcoholics Anonymous — to keep my shameful record absolutely confidential made it possible for me to show up at the local AA office."

SHORTLY AFTER joining the Manhattan Group in 1945, I met Marty M. when she gave a talk in the old 41st Street clubhouse. She and I were soon friends, and the following year, an enterprise she was involved with proved to be a godsend for me.

Marty was one of the "six ink-stained wretches" (as co-founder Bill W. called them in the first issue of the Grapevine) who started our magazine in 1944. In 1946, I had a bad slip; afterward, another of the "wretches" helped me avoid booze-fighting by letting me type as she dictated Grapevine articles on Sunday afternoons in her Greenwich Village apartment. (Yes, I'm very sentimental about this magazine you are reading and about its founders.)

Because of my slip, I was trying to find spiritual knowledge I had missed. Marty suggested that I read Emmet Fox's *The Sermon on the Mount*, which she described as "the AA bible before we had the Big Book."

Marty's own first encounter with the Big Book had not seemed too promising. Before its publication, a typescript of it was given to her, and its message left her merely rebellious. As one story goes, she hurled

the Multilith pages out a window of the sanitarium where she was confined. Retrieved, the book made a more favorable impression at second reading.

She was given an evening's leave from the sanitarium to go to her first AA meeting, at the Brooklyn home of Bill and Lois. Marty herself recalled the occasion while speaking a few years ago at the Bill W. anniversary dinner held annually by the New York Intergroup Association. Since the group in Brooklyn was all male, she found herself surprisingly timid and fled upstairs, afraid to go down to the meeting. Eventually, Lois came up. She put her arms around Marty and said, "I'm so glad you're joining us. We've all been waiting for you." And they descended the stairs together, arm in arm. Always thereafter, Marty said in her talk, she knew Lois was as much her sponsor as Bill.

Then, she told of having a slip a short time later. She hid out from AAs in the apartment of an old drinking friend, going out only to get booze. Once, she trudged with her package through a bad snowstorm, and almost dropped it when

she arrived back at her hideout to find Bill W. waiting for her on the front steps. Without coat, hat, or gloves, he was pounding his arms and stamping his feet to keep warm. He had, of course, finally figured out where he would be if *he* were Marty on a slip. And sure enough, the shamefaced Marty and the shivering Bill now stood looking at each other in the snow.

He spoke first. "Ready to stop drinking yet?"

"I don't know," Marty replied truthfully.

They stood silent for a while. "I hope you do soon," Bill finally said. "You and I have a long way to go together." It was an almost uncanny prophecy.

Actually, he drove her to New Jersey to sober up in a loaned house he and Lois were then living in temporarily. And Bill's hope was realized: That year, 1939, marked the end of Marty's drinking.

Immersing herself in AA activity, Marty also was hungry for general information about alcoholism. She had good reason to appreciate how life saving knowledge could be. In her school days, she and a chum had both been stricken with "consump-

tion," then a disease as stigmatized as alcoholism. In deep shame, her chum's parents locked up Marty's friend in an upstairs bedroom, and told everyone the girl was at a finishing school in Europe. But Marty's parents sent her to the care of a physician in Arizona. He told her the name of her sickness was tuberculosis. He said she had no reason to be ashamed, and he explained what she should do to recover. She learned all she could about the illness, followed the doctor's program of recovery, and got well. Within one year, however, the childhood friend, closeted in disgrace upstairs at home, was dead.

In 1943, Marty attended the first Summer School of Alcohol Studies at Yale University. There, she took fire and began to blaze with the idea of educating the public about alcoholism. She was well qualified for this task, with experience as a successful public relations and advertis-

*" 'Two Yale Savants
Stress Alcoholism
as True Disease' "*

ing executive and with talent as a public speaker.

The first converts to her campaign were Howard W. Haggard and E. M. Jellinek, founders and directors of the Yale Plan of Alcohol Studies. Marty persuaded them that all the

scientific knowledge being amassed at Yale would be of little value unless it was applied and that it must therefore be made available to the general public. The Yale savants agreed and made Marty head of their National Committee for Education on Alcoholism (NCEA). Among members of the committee were Dr. Bob and Bill W., identified as founders of AA.

Other members included: Dr. Harry Tiebout, the psychiatrist who ran Blythewood Sanitarium and had given Marty the Big Book; Austin MacCormick, penologist, later to become, like Dr. Tiebout, a nonalcoholic trustee on our General Service Board. And oh yes, Dorothy Parker, Mary Pickford, Fulton Oursler, and the Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, to name just a few more.

As Grapevine fans know, the very first Grapevine, dated June 1944 (facsimile copies are available today for \$1.00), featured a big front-page article by Haggard and Jellinek, headlined "Two Yale Savants Stress Alcoholism as True Disease."

Then, for the first time anywhere, the Grapevine announced on its front page in the October 1944 issue the formation of NCEA — to be known within a few years as NCA, the National Council on Alcoholism. The Grapevine article noted that NCEA's executive director, Marty M——, and her secretary, Marion M. (whose full name was not given), were both AA members. It was the only time that this magazine

ever published the full name of a living AA member.

In an interview in that issue, Marty told why she'd decided to reveal publicly her membership in AA. It was "for the good of others," she said. Remember — this was 1944, two years before Bill W.'s Grapevine article on anonymity and other principles that would become our Traditions, and six years before the Fellowship accepted the Traditions at the First International Convention, in Cleveland.

In 1977, Marty told me she had at first been reluctant to break her anonymity at the public level, not because the stigma ever scared her, but because she felt that a "lady lush" would never be acceptable to the public, that it would endanger her credibility and so damage her cause.

In answer to Marty's doubts, Bill and Dr. Bob pointed out that hers was a unique opportunity to spread the AA message as a living example. So, with some trepidation, she decided they must be right. (This story is also told — naming no names — by Bill W. in the article "Why Alcoholics Anonymous Is Anonymous," and by Lois W. in the book *Lois Remembers*, published by Al-Anon.)

For over a year, Marty tried it. She was not the first, of course. In 1940, Bill had courted personal publicity, telling newspaper folks he was a founder of AA. But soon he saw others doing likewise, and recogniz-

ed the danger — not only to alcoholics with power drives like his (self-admitted), but also to the Fellowship as a whole. So he had stopped the practice. But now he and Dr. Bob honestly thought Marty and her committee made a worthy exception.

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In a short time, NCA had to begin fund-raising. Although the appeal letters did not really say AA was involved, reference to our co-founders and mentions of AA left that impression. Some of the letters asking for money went to AA members. And very quickly, the Alcoholic Foundation Headquarters (forerunner of the AA General Service Office) was deluged with complaints from upset AAs. This sticky situation came to be called "the Marty M. incident" and eventually resulted in much good for our Fellowship.

As early as 1940, the foundation had started asking AA groups to support headquarters work with contributions. And in 1945, the foundation trustees decided once and for all to accept no further funds from non-AA sources, nor even large bequests from members.

Now, this new outfit, NCA, seemed to be publicly using its AA connections to try to raise big money.

No wonder AA members were puzzled.

The whole AA-NCA connection had to be rethought. Dr. Bob came to New York, and he and Bill had long, honest, friendly discussions with Marty. Then, the trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation held a special meeting and issued a statement to all AA members and groups. It was printed in the October 1946 Grapevine, saying that "... several local and national organizations are soliciting contributions of money from the public through . . . letters from which the public may infer sponsorship by Alcoholics Anonymous.... No individual or special group . . . has been or will be authorized to solicit funds under the sponsorship or sanction of... Alcoholics Anonymous . . ."

The Traditions so dear to us today were clearly shaping up out of experience, including mistakes. And Many was a central character in the experiences that gave rise to such Traditions as those on our primary purpose, self-support, outside enterprises, public controversy, nonprofessionalism, and anonymity.

She never again identified herself as an AA member when lecturing on her job or in the public prints or on the air. But at AA meetings, she always did, of course, and stuck strictly to her own personal experience, never speaking as an "authority." In public appearances, she identified herself simply as a recovered alcoholic. It is a subtle

distinction, perhaps realized best by those who have come to full appreciation of the value and spiritual nature of the humility called for by our anonymity Traditions.

Bill and Dr. Bob quietly got off the Yale committee. It was a mutually amicable separation. All involved saw that the functions of AA and NCA were entirely different, requiring completely separate methods of operation. Public education about alcoholism is not the same thing as helping alcoholics on a one-to-one basis.

But the unofficial friendship was never ruptured. Bill and Dr. Bob continued, when asked, to say they personally approved of the NCA efforts, although AA itself had to be clearly dissociated from those efforts. And NCA never stopped plugging AA as the best way known to recover from alcoholism.

The NCA board and those of almost all its local affiliate councils have nearly always contained a strong nucleus of AA members, acting not as AAs, of course, but as private citizens. Each wears two hats, in effect: that of a volunteer in a non-AA alcoholism agency and that of an AA member. Marty described herself as "AA's first twatter," since she was paid for her educational efforts in alcoholism. However, she never was paid one cent for being in AA.

For a while, a handful of AAs did not understand this, so they criticized Marty for "making money on

AA." She never did. She never received any pay for recovering from alcoholism, nor for her personal Twelfth Step work, nor for taking the other Steps necessary to stay sober. Today, thousands of AAs employed in the field of alcoholism are grateful to her for blazing a path before them.

For many years, Marty gave anywhere from 200 to 350 lectures a year in the U.S., in Canada, and abroad. She addressed many legislatures and testified before dozens of their committees. Her major book, *New Primer on Alcoholism*, has been issued in five languages.

About twenty years ago, Marty went to Chicago for a meeting of the National Tuberculosis Association. That weekend, some national emergency forced the chief speaker to bow out. He was the President of the United States. Marty was quickly tapped to replace him. She made a fiery, impassioned address about the greatness of a society that cared about people, and thousands cheered her. She did not say so, but her message was straight from the heart of AA, as well as from her childhood experience with another stigmatized illness.

In 1968, Marty left the directorship of NCA, but, as founder-consultant, continued working just as hard.

I was on the plane that took Marty and Lois W. to New Orleans in July 1980 for our 45th Anniversary International Convention. The two women, aged seventy-five and

eighty-nine, enjoyed themselves like school buddies off for a holiday, summoning incredible energy from deep, unseen springs and a rich fund of memories. But mostly, they seemed eager for the new experience ahead. At the Convention, Marty gave her last public talk.

The epilogue to that Convention had a double significance in AA and Grapevine history.

Four days after the New Orleans Convention closed, Helen Evans died of cancer in Tucson, Ariz., July 10, and Lois W. left the Mississippi riverboat Delta Queen that day to fly to Tucson. The July 1979 Grapevine has told about Helen, Bill W.'s half sister (a nonalcoholic), who in 1945 took over three jobs nobody else would have: (1) She was the Grapevine's first paid employee, at \$40 a month; (2) she was Bill's part-time secretary as he began writing the articles eventually refined into our Traditions; and (3) she was part-time secretary to Marty.

The Convention had been over for sixteen days when Marty M. died, on July 22, after a cerebral hemorrhage.

In closing her New Orleans talk, Marty said, "Truly we have a bond, in the disease — a strange way to have a bond! — that is deep and strong. It flows constantly through us, and passes on to anyone who will hold their hand out. And it doesn't stop flowing. I just think we're the luckiest people in the world!"

Anonymous, Manhattan, N.Y.