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You've heard about the Jack Alexander article all your AA life.

But have you ever read it?

Publication of "Alcoholics Anonymous," by Jack Alexander, in the *Saturday Evening Post* of March 1, 1941, marked a milestone in the history of this Fellowship.

Although one national article had been published previously, the *Post* report on the First 2,000 men and women who had achieved sobriety through AA was largely responsible for the surge of interest that established the Society on a national and international basis.

The article inspired a deluge of mail, which swamped the small New York office of AA. The response soon overtaxed what co-founder Bill W. described at the time as "a recently enlarged staff, now four." Volunteer AAs and their wives were called in to help write personal replies to the 4,400 often-desperate inquiries that poured in between March and June of 1941. The *Post* article tripled AA membership by the end of that year. It increased the confidence of small, uncertain AA groups already in existence. The prestige and example of the *Post* encouraged many newspapers to inform their readers of this strange Fellowship of former drunks who helped other alcoholics stay sober.

In 1941, over half of our present 1,000,000 members were teenagers, children — or not even born. Old-timers or newcomers, virtually all of us owe a debt of gratitude to Jack Alexander, who died in 1975. His talent, diligence, and insight focused the first strong favorable light on AA. Jack remained a lifelong friend of the Fellowship, serving eventually as a nonalcoholic trustee on AA's General Service Board.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Freed Slaves of Drink, Now They Free Others

By Jack Alexander

THREE MEN sat around the bed of an alcoholic patient in the psychopathic ward of Philadelphia General Hospital one afternoon a few weeks ago. The man in the bed, who was a complete stranger to them, had the drawn and slightly stupid look that inebriates get while being defogged after a bender. The only thing that was noteworthy about the callers, except for the obvious contrast between their well-groomed appearances and that of the patient, was the fact that each had been through the defogging process many times himself. They were members of Alcoholics Anonymous, a band of ex-problem drinkers who made an avocation of helping other alcoholics to beat the liquor habit.

The man in the bed was a me-

chanic. His visitors had been educated at Princeton, Yale, and Pennsylvania and were, by occupation, a salesman, a lawyer, and a publicity man. Less than a year before, one had been in shackles in the same ward. One of his companions had been what is known among alcoholics as a sanitarium commuter. He had moved from place to place, bedeviling the staffs of the country's leading institutions for the treatment of alcoholics. The other had spent twenty years of life, all outside institution walls, making life miserable for himself and his family and his employers, as well as sundry well-meaning relatives who had had the temerity to intervene.

The air of the ward was thick with the aroma of paraldehyde, an un-

pleasant cocktail smelling like a mixture of alcohol and ether which hospitals sometimes use to taper off the paralyzed drinker and soothe his squirming nerves. The visitors seemed oblivious of this and of the depressing atmosphere that clings to even the nicest of psychopathic wards. They smoked and talked with the patient for twenty minutes or so, then left their personal cards and departed. If the man in the bed felt that he would like to see one of them again, they told him, he had only to put in a telephone call.

They made it plain that if he actually wanted to stop drinking, they would leave their work or get up in the middle of the night to hurry to where he was. If he did not choose to call, that would be the end of it. The members of Alcoholics Anonymous do not pursue or coddle a malingerer prospect, and they know the strange tricks of the alcoholic as a reformed swindler knows the art of bamboozling.

Herein lies much of the unique strength of a movement which, in the past six years, has brought recovery to around 2,000 men and women, a large percentage of whom had been considered medically hopeless. Doctors and clergymen, working separately or together, have always managed to salvage a few cases. In isolated instances, drinkers have found their own methods of quitting. But the inroads into alcoholism have been negli-

ble, and it remains one of the great unsolved public-health enigmas.

By nature touchy and suspicious, the alcoholic likes to be left alone to work out his puzzle, and he has a convenient way of ignoring the tragedy which he inflicts meanwhile upon those who are close to him. He holds desperately to a conviction that, although he has not been able to handle alcohol in the past, he will ultimately succeed in becoming a controlled drinker. One of medicine's queerest animals, he is, as often as not, an acutely intelligent person. He fences with professional men and relatives who attempt to aid him, and he gets a perverse satisfaction out of tripping them up in argument.

There is no specious excuse for drinking which the troubleshooters of Alcoholics Anonymous have not heard or used themselves. When one of their prospects hands them a rationalization for getting soused, they match it with half a dozen out of their own experiences. This upsets him a little, and he gets defensive. He looks at their neat clothing and smoothly shaved faces and charges them with being goody-goodies who don't know what it is to struggle with drink. They reply by relating their own stories: the double Scotches and brandies before breakfast; the vague feeling of discomfort which precedes a drinking bout; the awakening from a spree without being able to account for the actions of several days

and the haunting fear that possibly they had run down someone with their automobiles.

They tell of the eight-ounce bottles of gin hidden behind pictures and in caches from cellar to attic; of spending whole days in motion-picture houses to stave off the temptation to drink; of sneaking out of the office for quickies during the day. They talk of losing jobs and stealing money from their wives' purses; of putting pepper into whiskey to give it a tang; of tipping on bitters and sedative tablets, or on mouthwash or hair tonic; of getting into the habit of camping outside the neighborhood tavern ten minutes before opening time. They describe a hand so jittery that it could not lift a pony to the lips without spilling the contents; drinking liquor from a beer stein because it can be steadied with two hands, although at the risk of chipping a front tooth; tying an end of a towel about a glass, looping the towel around the back of the neck, and drawing the free end with the other hand, pulley fashion, to advance the glass to the mouth; hands so shaky they feel as if they were about to snap off and fly into space; sitting on hands for hours to keep them from doing this.

These and other bits of drinking lore usually manage to convince the alcoholic that he is talking to blood brothers. A bridge of confidence is thereby erected, spanning a gap which has baffled the physician, the minister, the priest, or the hapless

relatives. Over this connection, the troubleshooters convey, bit by bit, the details of a program for living which has worked for them and which, they feel, can work for any other alcoholic. They concede as out of their orbit only those who are psychotic or who are already suffering from the physical impairment known as wet brain. At the same time, they see to it that the prospect gets whatever medical attention is needed.

Many doctors and staffs of institutions throughout the country now suggest Alcoholics Anonymous to their drinking patients. In some towns, the courts and probation officers cooperate with the local group. In a few city psychopathic divisions, the workers of Alcoholics Anonymous are accorded the same visiting privileges as staff members. Philadelphia General is one of these. Dr. John F. Stouffer, the chief psychiatrist, says: "The alcoholics we get here are mostly those who cannot afford private treatment, and this is by far the greatest thing we have ever been able to offer them. Even among those who occasionally land back in here again, we observe a profound change in personality. You would hardly recognize them."

The *Illinois Medical Journal*, in an editorial last December, went further than Dr. Stouffer, in stating: "It is indeed a miracle when a person who for years has been more or less constantly under the



nonalcoholic individuals. Their transformation from cop fighters, canned-heat drinkers, and, in some instances, wife beaters, was startling. On one of the most influential newspapers in the country, I found that the city editor, the assistant city editor, and a nationally known reporter were AAs, and strong in the confidence of their publisher.

In another city, I heard a judge parole a drunken driver to an AA member. The latter, during his drinking days, had smashed several cars and had had his own operator's license suspended. The judge knew him and was glad to trust him. A brilliant executive of an advertising firm disclosed that two years ago he had been panhandling and sleeping in a doorway under an elevated structure. He had a favorite doorway, which he shared with other vagrants, and every few weeks he goes back and pays them a visit just to assure himself he isn't dreaming.

In Akron, as in other manufacturing centers, the groups include a heavy element of manual workers. In the Cleveland Athletic Club, I had luncheon with five lawyers, an accountant, an engineer, three salesmen, an insurance man, a buyer, a bartender, a chain-store manager, a manager of an independent store, and a manufacturer's representative. They were members of a central committee which coordinates the work of nine neighborhood groups.

influence of alcohol and in whom his friends have lost all confidence, will sit up all night with a drunk and at stated intervals administer a small amount of liquor in accordance with a doctor's order without taking a drop himself."

This is a reference to a common aspect of the Arabian Nights adventures to which Alcoholics Anonymous workers dedicate themselves. Often it involves sitting upon, as well as up with, the intoxicated person, as the impulse to jump out a window seems to be an attractive one to many alcoholics when in their cups. Only an alcoholic can squat on another alcoholic's chest for hours with the proper combination of discipline and sympathy.

During a recent trip around the East and Middle West, I met and talked with scores of AAs, as they call themselves, and found them to be unusually calm, tolerant people. Somehow, they seemed better integrated than the average group of

Cleveland, with more than 450 members, is the biggest of the AA centers [1941]. The next largest are located in Chicago, Akron, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Washington, and New York. All told, there are groups in about fifty cities and towns. [In 1976, there are almost 28,000 groups worldwide, in ninety-two countries.]

In discussing their work, the AAs spoke of their drunk-rescuing as "insurance" for themselves. Experience within the group has shown, they said, that once a recovered drinker slows up in this work, he is likely to go back to drinking himself. There is, they agreed, no such thing as an ex-alcoholic. If one is an alcoholic—that is, a person who is unable to drink normally—one remains an alcoholic until he dies, just as a diabetic remains a diabetic. The best he can hope for is to become an arrested case, with drunk-saving as his insulin. At least, the AAs say so, and medical opinion tends to support them. All but a few said that they had lost all desire for alcohol. Most serve liquor in their homes when friends drop in, and they still go to bars with companions who drink. The AAs tinkle on soft drinks and coffee.

One, a sales manager, acts as bartender at his company's annual jamboree in Atlantic City and spends his nights tucking the celebrators into their beds. Only a few of those who recover fail to lose the feeling

that at any minute they may thoughtlessly take one drink and skyrocket off on a disastrous binge. An AA who is a clerk in an Eastern city hasn't had a snifter in three and a half years, but says that he still has to walk fast past saloons to circumvent the old impulse; but he is an exception. The only hangover from the wild days that plagues the AA is a recurrent nightmare. In the dream, he finds himself off on a rousing whooper-doooper, frantically trying to conceal his condition from the community. Even this symptom disappears shortly, in most cases. Surprisingly, the rate of employment among these people, who formerly drank themselves out of job after job, is said to be around ninety percent.

One-hundred-percent effectiveness with nonpsychotic drinkers who sincerely want to quit is claimed by the workers of Alcoholics Anonymous. The program will not work, they add, with those who only "want to want to quit," or who want to quit because they are afraid of losing their families or their jobs. The effective desire, they state, must be based upon enlightened self-interest; the applicant must want to get away from liquor to head off incarceration or premature death. He must be fed up with the stark social loneliness which engulfs the uncontrolled drinker, and he must want to put some order into his bungled life.

As it is impossible to disqualify

all borderline applicants, the working percentage of recovery falls below the 100-percent mark. According to AA estimation, fifty percent of the alcoholics taken in hand recover almost immediately; twenty-five percent get well after suffering a relapse or two; and the rest remain doubtful. This rate of success is exceptionally high. Statistics on traditional medical and religious cures are lacking, but it has been informally estimated that they are no more than two or three percent effective on run-of-the-mine cases.

Although it is too early to state that Alcoholics Anonymous is the definitive answer to alcoholism, its brief record is impressive, and it is receiving hopeful support. John D. Rockefeller Jr. helped defray the expense of getting it started and has gone out of his way to get other prominent men interested.

Rockefeller's gift was a small one, in deference to the insistence of the originators that the movement be kept on a voluntary, nonpaid basis. There are no salaried organizers, no dues, no officers, and no central control. Locally, the rents of assembly halls are met by passing the hat at meetings. In small communities, no collections are taken, as the gatherings are held in private homes. A small office in downtown New York acts merely as a clearinghouse for information. There is no name on the door, and mail is received anonymously through a

"... he tells himself... that

post-office box. The only income, which is money received from the sale of a book describing the work, is handled by the Alcoholic Foundation, a board composed of three alcoholics and four nonalcoholics. [The present-day equivalent is the General Service Board, comprising seven nonalcoholic and fourteen alcoholic trustees. Income is now derived from group and individual contributions and from sales of books, booklets, pamphlets, the Grapevine, and various types of service material.]...

Why some people become alcoholics is a question on which authorities disagree. Few think that anyone is "born an alcoholic." One may be born, they say, with an hereditary predisposition to alcoholism, just as one may be born with a vulnerability to tuberculosis. The rest seems to depend upon environment and experience, although one theory has it that some people are allergic to alcohol, as hay fever sufferers are to pollens. Only one note is found to be common to all alcoholics—emotional immaturity. Closely related to this is an observation that an unusually large number of alcoholics start out in life as an only child, as a younger child, as the only boy in a family of girls or the only girl in a family of boys. Many have records of childhood precocity and were what are known as spoiled children.

he can really become a controlled drinker if he wants to."

Frequently, the situation is complicated by an off-center home atmosphere in which one parent is unduly cruel, the other over indulgent. Any combination of these factors, plus a divorce or two, tends to produce neurotic children who are poorly equipped emotionally to face the ordinary realities of adult life. In seeking escapes, one may immerse himself in his business, working twelve to fifteen hours a day, or in sports or in some artistic sideline. Another finds what he thinks is a pleasant escape in drink. It bolsters his opinion of himself and temporarily wipes away any feeling of social inferiority which he may have. Light drinking leads to heavy drinking. Friends and family are alienated and employers become disgusted. The drinker smolders with resentment and wallows in self-pity. He indulges in childish rationalizations to justify his drinking: He has been working hard and he deserves to relax; his throat hurts from an old tonsillectomy and a drink would ease the pain; he has a headache; his wife does not understand him; his nerves are jumpy; everybody is against him; and so on and on. He unconsciously becomes a chronic excuse-maker for himself.

All the time he is drinking, he tells himself and those who butt into his affairs that he can really become a controlled drinker if he wants to. To

demonstrate his strength of will, he goes for weeks without taking a drop. He makes a point of calling at his favorite bar at a certain time each day and ostentatiously sipping milk or a carbonated beverage, not realizing that he is indulging in juvenile exhibitionism. Falsely encouraged, he shifts to a routine of one beer a day, and that is the beginning of the end once more. Beer leads inevitably to more beer and then to hard liquor. Hard liquor leads to another first-rate bender. Oddly, the trigger which sets off the explosion is as apt to be a stroke of business success as it is to be a run of bad luck. An alcoholic can stand neither prosperity nor adversity.

The victim is puzzled on coming out of the alcoholic fog. Without his being aware of any change, a habit has gradually become an obsession. After a while, he no longer needs his rationalizations to justify the fatal first drink. All he knows is that he feels swamped by uneasiness or elation, and before he realizes what is happening, he is standing at a bar with an empty whiskey pony in front of him and a stimulating sensation in his throat. By some peculiar quirk of his mind, he has been able to draw a curtain over the memory of the intense pain and remorse caused by preceding stem-winders. After many experiences of this kind, the alcoholic begins to

realize that he does not understand himself; he wonders whether his power of will, though strong in other fields, isn't defenseless against alcohol. He may go on trying to defeat his obsession and wind up in a sanitarium. He may give up the fight as hopeless and try to kill himself. Or he may seek outside help.

If he applies to Alcoholics Anonymous, he is first brought around to admit that alcohol has him whipped and that his life has become unmanageable. Having achieved this state of intellectual humility, he is given a dose of religion in its broadest sense. He is asked to believe in a Power that is greater than himself, or at least to keep an open mind on that subject while he goes on with the rest of the program. Any concept of the Higher Power is acceptable. A skeptic or agnostic may choose to think of his inner self, the miracle of growth, a tree, man's wonderment at the physical universe, the structure of the atom, or mere mathematical infinity. Whatever form is visualized, the neophyte is taught that he must rely upon it and, in his own way, pray to the Power for strength.

He next makes a sort of moral inventory of himself with the private aid of another person—one of his AA sponsors, a priest, a minister, a psychiatrist, or anyone else he fancies. If it gives him any relief, he may get up at a meeting and recite his misdeeds, but he is not required to do so. He restores what he may

have stolen while intoxicated and arranges to pay off old debts and to make good on rubber checks; he makes amends to persons he has abused and, in general, cleans up his past as well as he is able to. It is not uncommon for his sponsors to lend him money to help out in the early stages.

This catharsis is regarded as important because of the compulsion which a feeling of guilt exerts in the alcoholic obsession. As nothing tends to push an alcoholic toward the bottle more than personal resentments, the pupil also makes out a list of his grudges and resolves not to be stirred by them. At this point, he is ready to start working on other, active alcoholics. By the process of extroversion, which the work entails, he is able to think less of his own troubles.

The more drinkers he succeeds in swinging into Alcoholics Anonymous, the greater his responsibility to the group becomes. He can't get drunk now without injuring the people who have proved themselves his best friends. He is beginning to grow up emotionally and to quit being a leaner. If raised in an orthodox church, he usually, but not always, becomes a regular communicant again.

Simultaneously with the making over of the alcoholic goes the process of adjusting his family to his new way of living. The wife or husband of an alcoholic, and the children, too, frequently become

neurotics from being exposed to drinking excesses over a period of years. Reeducation of the family is an essential part of a follow-up program which has been devised.

Alcoholics Anonymous, which is a synthesis of old ideas rather than a new discovery, owes its existence to the collaboration of a New York stockbroker and an Akron physician. Both alcoholics, they met for the first time a little less than six years ago. In thirty-five years of periodic drinking, Dr. Armstrong, to give the physician a fictitious name, had drunk himself out of most of his practice. Armstrong had tried everything, including the Oxford Group, and had shown no improvement. On Mother's Day, 1935, he staggered home, in typical drunk fashion, lugging an expensive potted plant, which he placed in his wife's lap. Then he went upstairs and passed out.

At that moment, nervously pacing the lobby of an Akron hotel was the broker from New York, whom we shall arbitrarily call Griffith. Griffith was in a jam. In an attempt to obtain control of a company and rebuild his financial fences, he had come out to Akron and engaged in a fight for proxies. He had lost the fight. His hotel bill was unpaid. He was almost flat broke. Griffith wanted a drink.

During his career in Wall Street, Griffith had turned some sizable deals and had prospered, but, through ill-timed drinking bouts,



had lost out on his main chances. Five months before coming to Akron, he had gone on the water wagon through the ministrations of the Oxford Group in New York. Fascinated by the problem of alcoholism, he had many times gone back as a visitor to a Central Park West detoxicating hospital, where he had been a patient, and talked to the inmates. He effected no recoveries, but found that by working on other alcoholics he could stave off his own craving.

A stranger in Akron, Griffith knew no alcoholics with whom he could wrestle. A church directory, which hung in the lobby opposite the bar, gave him an idea. He telephoned one of the clergymen listed and through him got in touch with a member of the local Oxford Group. This person was a friend of Dr. Armstrong's and was able to introduce the physician and the broker at dinner. In this manner, Dr. Armstrong became Griffith's first real disciple. He was a shaky one at first. After a few weeks of abstinence, he went East to a medical convention and came home in a liquid state. Griffith, who had stayed in Akron to iron out some legal tangles arising from the proxy

battle, talked him back to sobriety. That was on June 10, 1935. The nips the physician took from a bottle proffered by Griffith on that day were the last drinks he ever took.

Griffith's lawsuits dragged on, holding him over in Akron for six months. He moved his baggage to the Armstrong home, and together the pair struggled with other alcoholics. Before Griffith went back to New York, two more Akron converts had been obtained. Meanwhile, both Griffith and Dr. Armstrong had withdrawn from the Oxford Group, because they felt that its aggressive evangelism and some of its other methods were hindrances in working with alcoholics. They put their own technique on a strict take-it-or-leave-it basis and kept it there.

Progress was slow. After Griffith had returned East, Dr. Armstrong and his wife, a Wellesley graduate, converted their home into a free refuge for alcoholics and an experimental laboratory for the study of the guests' behavior. One of the guests, who, unknown to his hosts, was a manic depressive as well as an alcoholic, ran wild one night with a kitchen knife. He was overcome before he had stabbed anyone. After a year and a half, a total of ten persons had responded to the program and were abstaining. What was left of the family savings had gone into the work. The physician's new sobriety caused a revival in his practice, but not enough of one to

carry the extra expense. The Armstrongs, nevertheless, carried on, on borrowed money. Griffith, who had a Spartan wife, too, turned his Brooklyn home into a duplicate of the Akron menage. Mrs. Griffith, a member of an old Brooklyn family, took a job in a department store and in her spare time played nurse to inebriates. The Griffiths also borrowed, and Griffith managed to make odd bits of money around the brokerage houses. By the spring of 1939, the Armstrongs and the Griffiths had between them cozened about one hundred alcoholics into sobriety.

In a book which they published at that time, the recovered drinkers described the cure program and related their personal stories. The title was *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It was adopted as a name for the movement itself, which up to then had none. As the book got into circulation, the movement spread rapidly.

Today [1941], Dr. Armstrong is still struggling to patch up his practice. The going is hard. He is in debt because of his contributions to the movement and the time he devotes gratis to alcoholics. Being a pivotal man in the group, he is unable to turn down the requests for help which flood his office.

Griffith is even deeper in the hole. For the past two years, he and his wife have had no home in the ordinary sense of the word. In a manner reminiscent of the primitive Chris-

tians, they have moved about, finding shelter in the homes of AA colleagues and sometimes wearing borrowed clothing.

Having got something started, both the prime movers want to retire to the fringe of their movement and spend more time getting back on their feet financially. They feel that the way the thing is set up, it is virtually self-operating and self-multiplying. Because of the absence of figureheads and the fact that there is no formal body of belief to promote, they have no fears that Alcoholics Anonymous will degenerate into a cult.

The self-starting nature of the movement is apparent from letters in the files of the New York office. Many persons have written in saying that they stopped drinking as soon as they read the book, and made their homes meeting places for small local chapters. Even a fairly large unit, in Little Rock, got started in this way. An Akron civil engineer and his wife, in gratitude for his cure four years ago, have been steadily taking alcoholics into their home. Out of thirty-five such wards, thirty-one have recovered.

Twenty pilgrims from Cleveland caught the idea in Akron and returned home to start a group of their own. From Cleveland, by various means, the movement has spread to Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Indianapolis, Atlanta, San Francisco, Evansville, and other cities. An alcoholic

Cleveland newspaperman with a surgically collapsed lung moved to Houston for his health. He got a job on a Houston paper and, through a series of articles which he wrote for it, started an AA unit which now has thirty-five members. One Houston member has moved to Miami and is now laboring to snare some of the more eminent winter-colony luses. A Cleveland traveling salesman is responsible for starting small units in many different parts of the country. Fewer than half of the AA members have ever seen Griffith or Dr. Armstrong...

For [these] alcoholics, congenial company is now available wherever they happen to be. In the larger cities, AAs meet one another daily at lunch in favored restaurants. The Cleveland groups give big parties on New Year's and other holidays, at which gallons of coffee and soft drinks are consumed. Chicago holds open house on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday—alternately, on the North, West, and South Sides—so that no lonesome AA need revert to liquor over the weekend for lack of companionship. Some play cribbage or bridge, the winner of each hand contributing to a kitty for paying of entertainment expenses. The others listen to the radio, dance, eat, or just talk. All alcoholics, drunk or sober, like to gab. They are among the most society-loving people in the world, which may help to explain why they got to be alcoholics in the first place.