

October 1996



How AA STARTED IN

Mexico

In March 1941, Jack Alexander's article about Alcoholics Anonymous appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Among the first people in Mexico to read it and respond by contacting the New York AA Headquarters was an American named Arthur H. who was a resident of Mexico City. Arthur wanted to find out more about this miraculous cure for alcoholism. One year later the mail from Arthur ended and New York never received any more news about him.

About that time a Mexican named Jorge S. living in Mexico City also wrote to New York requesting information. He'd learned about AA from reading a magazine published by the office of public education in Mexico. After receiving the information, Jorge felt motivated to start an AA meeting. An AA from Los Angeles got Jorge's ad-

dress from New York and when he went to Mexico for business he paid a visit to Jorge. Jorge felt greatly strengthened by this contact but early in 1942, the contact with Jorge disappeared.

In 1944 Gilberto M. received the AA message in Los Angeles when he was visiting with his wife Francisca, trying to find a solution to his drinking problem. There he got the addresses of the New York Office and the Cleveland intergroup. Gilberto returned to his home in Monterrey in the northern state of Nuevo Leon. His wife Francisca proved to be an extraordinary woman. She was worried about Gilberto's sobriety and she established a strong communication through the mail with New York. She spread the news in Monterrey and all over Mexico from August 1945 to June 1946. She translated several AA booklets, trans-

lations that were published in local newspapers. Some beer manufacturers tried to stop the publications, but they were too late, thank God. The Monterrey Group was born and with it a new life was opened to all the alcoholics in Mexico. The group was subsequently visited by AAs from the U.S., especially Cleveland. In 1946 the Monterrey Group had twenty-five members and appeared in the AA World Directory. In June 1945 and September 1946 the AA Grapevine published articles with news from the group. (Troubles began, caused by shortages of Spanish literature, and when the American visitors failed to come often, the Mexican AAs were dismayed. By the end of the forties, Gilberto M. was the solitary member of the Monterrey Group.)

In July 1946 an AA named Lester F. from Chattanooga and New Orleans moved to Mexico City and wrote to New York requesting information about starting a group. By September 1946, two other AAs, named Lester and Pauline, who were living in Mexico City, got in touch with New York. A Mexican lawyer, Fernando I. got their address from New York and soon a Mexican doctor, Jesus A., joined them, and the Mexico City Group was born on September 25, 1946. In the April 1947 issue of the Grapevine, an article appeared called "The Mexico City Group Welcomes Visitors." This group is known today as English Speaking Group, and it still opens its doors to all visitors.

Another significant event took place about the same time in Mexico City —

the visit of Ricardo P. an AA from Cleveland, Ohio. He was honorary consul of Mexico in that city and he had one special reason for his visit: passing on the AA message to Mexican society. Ricardo later translated the Big Book to Spanish, work that took him three years to complete. Finally he gave the finished translation to Bill W., and Bill took his personal Big Book and gave it to Ricardo, writing a beautiful note in it.

The first Spanish-speaking group that survived permanently was the Grupo Hospital Central Militar (Military Hospital Central Group). It was founded in December 1956 by a Major Joaquin B. and his wife Irma. They were helped by the Mexico City Group members, especially by a Mexican member, Carlos C. These three people

translated the Big Book; their translation was published by the New York office in 1962 and is still in use.

In 1957, in my homeland of Merida, Yucatan, two AAs were working to start a group and by 1959 the Grupo Panteon Florido (Flowered Cemetery Group) was registered in New York. Our group had its meetings in the installations of a graveyard, and it was said that this was the only meeting in Mexico ever visited by Bill W. He was supposed to have exclaimed: "It's good that we're meeting in a cemetery so we know that our problem is of life and death. We can choose to be here or out in a grave."

By that time in the west of the country, in Guadalajara, Jalisco, there was one English-speaking group, Chapala 100, founded by Harry O. He dreamed

of forming a Spanish-speaking group. Finally he met Estanislao S. and together they formed the Grupo Tapatio in 1961. It was the start of AA in the center and west of the country.

In September 1960 *Reader's Digest* magazine in Spanish reprinted an article called "The Strange Cure of Alcoholics Anonymous," by Paul De Kruif. It was read by a lot of alcoholics and motivated some of them to write New York asking for information. They received literature and suggestions to start meetings. So AA meetings started in some cities like Tampico, San Francisco del Rincon, and Morelia. The nineteen-sixties were distinguished by increasing numbers of groups. I have to mention an American AA, Gordon Mc., who made a tremendous effort to pass the message into Central America, Mexico, Caribbean countries, Argentina, and Colombia. This effort was called the Caribbean crusade. The work of this man succeeded through the sharing of experience through letters, transmitting public information to authorities and professionals, and much more.

In 1964 intergroup offices in Mexico City and Guadalajara were founded, and later in Tampico and Merida. Also in 1964, national congresses began to be held twice a year. In 1969 the first Mexican conference took place and in December of the same year our General Service Office was started. Since then, every four years our AA population has doubled. God has blessed us

with one of the biggest demographic explosions in the AA world. Mexico has the second largest AA population after the U.S.

It would be a lie if I told you that everything is okay. We have troubles, maybe because we AAs are troublesome — or I should say, we Mexican AAs. In 1950, when the AA Traditions were approved, some Mexican AAs thought that they were made for the Anglo way of thinking, and in 1954 they started a movement called AMAR (Mexican Alcoholics in Recuperation Association). AA has good relations with them. In 1963 another movement began: CRAMAC (Rehabilitation Centers of Mexican Alcoholics Association). In 1974 several groups called 24 Horas (24 Hours) started up, working to give lodging and food to chronic and poor alcoholics. Around 1980 a separatist movement was formed, called Seccion Mexico (Mexican Section). It was begun by some former members of the General Service Office. In 1985 this movement caused the separation of eight service areas.

Mexico is celebrating its 50th Anniversary with great faith, as our members and groups are growing in numbers and in strength, experience, and hope. We are used to rowing against the current and in the war against alcoholism know that there are either a lot of battles to fight or a lot of bottles to drink.

Fernando Q., Mexico City, Mexico