

June 1954



## HOW IT ALL BEGAN

With this issue "The Grapevine" is ten years old, going on eleven. To celebrate the occasion we asked the original "six ink-stained wretches" who put out Number 1, Volume 1 (and who are still happily sober) to contribute articles. On the following pages they greet us. (Editor's note: drawings are not sketches from life!)

ON the evening of May 22, 1944 several members of AA met in a small midtown apartment in Manhattan for a very special and, to them, exciting session. As they constituted the original editorial staff, they were assembled to inspect and pass judgment on the June 1944 issue, ambitiously headed Volume I, Number 1, of *The Grapevine*. Long weeks of agonizing work, under somewhat difficult conditions, had gone into the preparation of an eight-page, three-column paper, but at last it was ready for distribution to members of AA in the New York Metropolitan area.

A decade is a long time in anyone's life and much longer than the survival of many a new publication. Yet to the astonishment of that original editorial staff and their many willing helpers *The AA Grapevine* has now reached its Tenth Anniversary. "The six inkstained wretches," to quote from an article in the first issue, felt originally they had stuck their necks out a mile in attempting such a paper, even though it was conceived as an entirely local venture. Yet in the second year of publication it became the national monthly journal and is now the international monthly of AA.

We have been asked to recall briefly what some of the early issues were like and whether we had any trials and tribulations. We had a few

of the latter, to be sure! One of our monthly columns during that first year of publication was entitled, "Time on Your Hands," and was designed to give useful suggestions to prevent boredom, the deadly enemy of so many alcoholics. We can assure you that neither the lady editor who had the particular responsibility for that column, nor any other staff member was left with any "time on their hands."

Other regular features of the early issues were a "Guest Piece" by a non-alcoholic friend of AA, distinguished for work in the field of medicine, literature, journalism, etc.; an "Editorial" by an older member of AA; "Points of View" (letters from reader-members of AA); "Central Office Notes"; "The Pleasures of Reading" (very brief reviews or suggestions of books, modern or otherwise, that might interest members); "Along the Metropolitan Circuit," comprising news of the local groups (assembled by a hard-working volunteer); and always, as World War II was still very much in progress, one complete page headed "Mail Call for All AAs in the Armed Forces."

This last mentioned feature was considered by all the editors as an essential part of the paper. All service men and women members of AA whose addresses we could in any way discover, usually through Central Office files,

had automatically been put on our free mailing list for "the duration." We devoutly hoped a monthly AA paper would be especially helpful to them, as usually they were cut off from group meetings and direct contact with other members. We think that it did prove a boon to many. Although the service members furnished most of the material for their page in letters to us, the somewhat harassed Treasurer and "sort of circulation man" was responsible for the editing of the page. It was frankly the part of his job that proved the most enjoyable, and constant correspondence with a number of these members in the service was a very rewarding experience.

When the paper was started, the difficulties to be overcome seemed really fantastic and the odds against its continuance and growth almost insurmountable. However, was this not true of the start of AA itself? We had enthusiasm, faith and fine teamwork as about our only assets. On the financial side, several of our more affluent editors, a long time friend of AA (husband of a member), and one other enthusiastic member had contributed enough to pay for the trial balloon of the first issue. Incidentally, the cost of that first issue of some 1,200 copies was approximately \$125. Today, we are told, each issue costs about \$2,500 for some 30,000 copies, exclusive of mailing costs, but your magazine is now entirely self-sustaining—"mirabile dictu !"

For several months we had no office

and worked entirely, whether assembling copy, proof-reading or mailing out the paper to early subscribers and our free list, in each other's apartments. This was pleasant but not very efficient. With perhaps two exceptions, the staff-members at first were entirely vague as to the meaning of such terms as "masthead," "dummy," "printer's galleys," etc. One of the exceptions was our very capable head editor, selected by the rest of us for her "know-how" and her refusal to be even vaguely perturbed by any of the many problems which confronted us. The Treasurer had had financial training but none in this field and even when, after several months, our energetic "chief" found us a one room apartment conveniently located, for an office, there was no separate set-up for Editorial and Business staffs. We all pitched in on almost anything.

The head editor and treasurer-editor worked frantically, and closely together, on much of the constantly increasing detail, correspondence, new subscriptions, mailing lists, etc. At least twice a month all six of us assembled. The first meeting was largely to select from all available copy the material that might be most helpful to our AA readers and the second to proof-read individually the printer's galley sheets. Our venture seemed wild enough to most of our AA friends and we were determined to produce only a professional looking paper. Alcoholics usually like to do things the hard way and we did just that.

We had no adequate way of knowing after the first month's issue appeared whether we would sell enough copies and have enough subscriptions to pay for the second, but a free copy had been mailed to most of the Group Secretaries across the country (300 at least) and the reply in subscriptions was very gratifying from many areas. Our mailing facilities to take care of subscriptions were at first very clumsy

scarce and we wanted good quality. We got an adequate supply somehow.

When we leased our office, we purchased a long architect's table, six chairs, a big standing lamp and a big coffee pot. At last, we felt we were really in business and now we had a central space for records. Our first meeting in "our office" in September, 1944 was really as much of a thrill to us as the one of May 22



but we enlisted the services of an AA friend, familiar with this type of problem and soon he had made arrangements with a direct mailing house. A reputable bank had finally accepted our account. Our printer (for economy reasons) was located in New Rochelle, 25 miles away and not always convenient as gasoline was rationed and only one of our staff had a car, anyway- so often we had to rely entirely on the mails. Paper was

when we inspected the first issue. We now found many willing hands to help out, still all AA members; experienced proof readers, typists, etc., and not until the very last issues of Volume I came along did we have one part-time paid employee to type letters, manuscripts and help with subscriptions.

We had lots of fun and made the venture stick.

A. T., New York City