

About AA

A.A. Remembers Two Beloved Friends

Within a few short months, A.A. lost two of its best friends in the professional community—Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees emeriti Milton A. Maxwell, Ph.D., of Olympia, Washington; and John L. Norris, M.D., of New London, New Hampshire. These men of vision, one a professor of sociology and the other a physician, helped to guide the Fellowship during crucial decades of growth and to prepare it for a future of continuing strength.

A member of the A.A. General Service Board from 1971-1982, Milton Maxwell served the last four years as chairperson. His fellow Class A trustee and longtime colleague Joan K. Jackson, Ph.D., well remembers "Milton's sensitivity to people and to group processes." He had a special gift, she adds, "for helping people arrive at a consensus. Moreover, he clearly understood A.A.'s Sixth Tradition of 'cooperation but not affiliation' with professionals who work with alcoholics, and how it applies to our relationship with them. He realized that opening lines of communication can work wonders."

Milton first learned about A.A. in 1939, when the fledgling program was barely four years old. In the course of trying to help a friend who was in trouble with alcohol, he read the just-published book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, and subsequently decided to write his Ph.D. thesis on the sociological dynamics of an A.A. group.

With guidance from his friend, now sober in A.A., Milton attended A.A. meetings. "Because I was able to observe A.A. interaction at close range," he later recalled, "I gained a feeling for what was happening." What started out as an academic exercise had far-reaching implications. "Not only did I experience change in myself," Milton noted, "but I also felt a desire to do something to further the welfare of A.A."

Over the years, he did exactly that. His work as a professor

of sociology at the University of Washington did not deter him from making remarkable contributions to public understanding of A.A. In the 1950s, after completing alcoholism studies at Yale University, he authored an in-depth monograph on an A.A. forerunner, the Washingtonian Movement (copies are available from the A.A. Archives). Then, after spending a two-year sabbatical at the Rutgers University Center for Alcoholism Studies (successor to the Yale program), he became director of the Rutgers Summer School on Alcoholism, a position he would hold for nine years. 1984 saw publication of his landmark book, *The A.A. Experience* (McGraw-Hill), which underscores the need to educate professionals about A.A.

Milton Maxwell died in October 1988 at age 81. Some eulogized him as an inspiration to professionals in the prevention and treatment of alcoholism. Many more recalled all the individual alcoholics he had helped to reclaim their lives. To Milton, that would have mattered most.

The same holds true for Dr. John Norris, or "Dr. Jack," as he was fondly known. His trusteeship spanned 27 years, from 1951-1978; and he spent the last 17 of them as chairperson of the board. Until his death in January 1989, at age 85, he remained active in A.A. affairs as trustee emeritus.

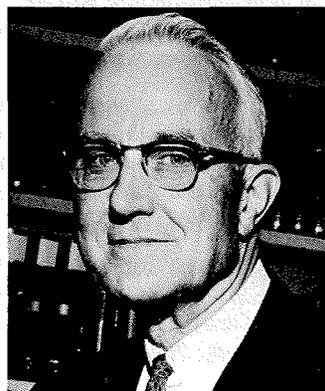
Always ready to poke fun at himself, Dr. Jack used to say that he started out as a doctor who "didn't know his alcohol from his ulcer." As an ambitious young general practitioner with an M.D. and a C.M. (Master of Surgery) from McGill University and seven years of private practice under his belt, he learned the difference quickly, through trial and error, in his position as associate medical director for Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester. Without realizing it, he pioneered an employee assistance program that included regular attendance at A.A. meetings. "After joining A.A.," Dr. Jack later related, "the employees came to accept their alcoholism as an illness and to rely on the A.A. program to arrest it on a daily basis—just as a diabetic comes to rely on a daily dose of insulin to checkmate his disease. It was the difference between abject submission and the disciplinary experience of surrender. Our success rate was astonishing!"

Although Dr. Jack may not have invented the term "bridging the gap" (between active treatment, A.A. membership and sober living), he wrote a definitive paper on the subject in 1978 that is distributed by the General Service Office. He waged a 40-year campaign to improve knowledge of alcoholism and understanding of A.A. among doctors and other professionals, and constantly urged A.A. members to "sponsor your doctor." Outside A.A., Dr. Jack achieved recognition as a foremost authority on alcoholism. He traveled around the world and, wherever he went, he took the A.A. message with him.

Dr. Jack gave what probably was his greatest gift to A.A. immediately after co-founder Bill W.'s death in January 1971. Throughout the Fellowship, members were asking each other,



Milton A. Maxwell, Ph.D.



John L. Norris, M.D.

"What will happen now? Can A.A. survive without Bill?" Dr. Jack's calm, assuring presence was widely credited with keeping A.A. strong during that brief but critical time of transition.

Perhaps more than any others, Dr. Jack Norris and Dr. Milton Maxwell helped to forge A.A.'s sturdy friendship with the professional community – a friendship that has opened the doors to recovery for thousands of sick alcoholics. We miss their leadership. We miss them.

A Look Back at *About A.A.*

The first issue of *About A.A.* was prepared and mailed in 1972. Seventeen years later, it seems appropriate to reflect on the beginnings of the newsletter and to reaffirm its part in trying to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to professionals who may be in contact with the still-suffering alcoholic.

In 1971, the 21st A.A. General Service Conference recommended the formation of a Conference Committee on Professional Relations, "to broaden and supplement the activities of the trustees' committee of the same name established in 1970," as an extension of the work of the Public Information Committee, by an action of the board of trustees, "that a committee be formed to deal with matters concerning cooperation with outside agencies." Both the trustees' and Conference committees were changed to Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.) in 1974. Since the early 1970s, many local C.P.C. committees have formed all over the U.S. and Canada.

Since its early days, A.A.'s growth and well-being have depended on our being friendly with our professional friends who have been so important in helping us carry the A.A. message, and in recent years an ever-growing number of members have been referred to A.A. from treatment centers, court programs and by many other professionals.

Many professionals consider A.A. to be an important source for alcoholics who want help. *About A.A.* began as one tool to foster a good working relationship between A.A. members and professionals so the sick alcoholic will be the winner, receiving help from both.

The newsletter, hopefully, is a reminder that A.A. is not in competition with professionals and vice versa. Alcoholics Anonymous is not in the business of education, research, medicine, counseling, treatment, prevention or funding. We simply have a message of recovery for alcoholics who want it. And the tools we use in C.P.C. work are to communicate to A.A. members and professionals what, who and where we are, and what we can and cannot do. These efforts are designed to find productive and creative ways of cooperating without affiliating. Nonaffiliation with any outside entity is one of the cherished Traditions of the A.A. Fellowship.

At the 1972 General Service Conference, the C.P.C. committee made several suggestions for initiating C.P.C. work in the Fellowship.

Two of those worth noting were "that A.A. members approach the professional community without anxiety or fear, but with confidence that we have something to offer the alcoholic thorough professionals" and "that A.A. members approach the professional with the point of view that we have a mutual interest in helping the alcoholic, and with the idea of sharing our 37 years (now 53) of experience as a resource for alcoholics" *About A.A.* has been one of the primary tools the Fellowship has used to achieve these goals.

Since its inception, *About A.A.* has published myriad articles on subjects that its various editors have felt were timely and of mutual interest to professionals and the A.A. Fellowship.

A survey in 1978 showed a favorable response to the periodical, but many suggestions for improvement indicated we still had much to do to explain that our efforts and literature are only about the A.A. recovery program, not alcoholism in general, education, research, therapy, or legislation.

A number of uses for *About A.A.* were noted, including local use on TV programs, newspapers and public meetings to keep people informed about A.A., for reference by A.A. members talking to professionals, for Fellowship sharing on how local C.P.C. committees work with professionals.

One of the lessons of the A.A. experience seems to be that in order to continue growing and to spread the A.A. message, we must repeat again and again our experience, strength and hope. There are continually new members, suffering alcoholics and, in this case, nonalcoholic friends whom we hope to reach.

Whether it be articles on cooperating with correctional and treatment facilities, hospitals, court programs or employee assistance programs; A.A. events; stories about professionals who serve as General Service Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees; A.A. publications; the loss of A.A. pioneers; A.A. Traditions or whatever, we must realize we have new and larger readership.

We would appreciate hearing, from professionals and A.A. members alike, what types of articles might enhance the working relationship between A.A. and the professional community, and with sharing on what important C.P.C. issues are currently a concern, a problem or a success in communities across the continent.

In repeating, reviewing and reevaluating the scope and purpose of *About A.A.*, perhaps it is appropriate to remember the words of A.A. co-founder Bill W., written about A.A. friends and projects in the field of alcoholism for the A.A. Grapevine in 1958:

"So let us work alongside all these projects of promise to hasten the recovery of those millions who have not yet found their way out. These varied labors do not need our special endorsement; they need only a helping hand when, as individuals, we can possibly give it."

Any person having any questions, criticisms or suggestions for future articles in this newsletter, may send them to C.P.C. Desk, General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.