

Jack Alexander and the Saturday Evening Post (p186)

On March 1, 1941, The Saturday Evening Post published an article titled "Alcoholics Anonymous: Freed Slaves of Drink, Now They Free Others" written by Jack Alexander. The article became a major turning point in Alcoholics Anonymous' history.

The story behind the article begins when the owner of The Saturday Evening Post, Judge Curtis Bok, learned of A.A. from two friends. He was interested in having the Post tell the story of the organization and called upon well-known journalist of The Saturday Evening Post, Jack Alexander, to do so.

"I wish I could adequately convey to you the sense of gratitude that one of us feels towards you and the Saturday Post for what is about to take place. You can not possibly conceive the direct alleviation of so much misery as will be brought to an end through your pen and your good publishers." -Bill W, written to Jack Alexander

Following the March 1, 1941 release of the article, inquiries began to flood in, leaving the small staff of the "A.A. Headquarters," the precursor to the General Service Office, busy. On March 12, 1941 Ruth Hock, first non-alcoholic secretary of A.A., wrote to Dr. Bob, A.A. co-founder, to update him on what was going on in New York. She said that the office had become swamped, 918 inquiries in 12 days as a direct response to the article.

When Jack Alexander passed away in 1975 he was credited in his West Texas Register obituary as the newspaperman who made "Alcoholics Anonymous a major organization by the articles he wrote about its work." Today, the General Service Office Archives still receives inquiries requesting both articles.

AA Publishes the pamphlet "P-12 the Jack Alexander Article About AA" with the full original article.

Cleveland's Plain Dealer Article (p186)

These articles appeared in the main Cleveland newspaper, the Plain Dealer, just five months after the first A.A. group was formed in Cleveland. The articles resulted in hundreds of calls for help from suffering alcoholics who reached out for the hope that the fledgling Alcoholics Anonymous offered. The thirteen reliable members of the Cleveland group handled as many as 500 calls (ref 1) in the first month following the appearance of Davis' articles. The following year Cleveland could boast 20 to 30 groups with hundreds of members (ref 2).

"Elrick B. Davis, a feature writer of deep understanding, was the author of a series of articles that were printed in the middle of the (Cleveland) Plain Dealer's editorial page ... In effect, the Plain Dealer was saying, 'Alcoholics Anonymous is good, and it works. Come and get it.' The newspaper's switchboard was deluged". (Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age, p. 20) Cleveland's power-driving AA proselytizer, Clarence Snyder, told his fellow members that he had found Davis "on a barstool". But, early Cleveland member Warren C. thought otherwise. "Clarence sneaked a Plain Dealer reporter into one of the meetings. He posed as an alcoholic. He wasn't really. He was a writer," Warren said." (Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, p. 203) The articles appeared in the latter part of October, 1939, and were clearly one of the primary factors leading to the explosive growth of AA in Cleveland. There was an almost immediate multiplication of the city 's number of groups, "but the split had less to do with greater numbers than with the Cleveland members' disagreement with Clarence S. over the publicity itself and so over the fellowship's yet uncertain understanding of anonymity". (Not-God, p. 85)

Twelve and Twelve Notes, Tradition 12

A follow-up sermon by Dilworth Lupton on November 26, 1939 – a sermon widely distributed in pamphlet form - "furnished the occasion for further favorable newspaper treatment into 1940". (Not-God, p. 85) AA growth in Cleveland exploded.

1. Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers, New York, A.A. World Services, Inc., 1980, pp 206-207.
2. 'Pass It On', New York, A.A. World Services, Inc., 1984, pp 224-225.

Mr. Rockefeller's Dinner for Alcoholics Anonymous (p186)

In 1940, Mr. Rockefeller gave a dinner for many of his prominent New York friends to publicize A.A. This brought yet another flood of pleas.

Report on the dinner written by Bill W.:

After dinner Mr. Nelson Rockefeller rose to his feet. He expressed his father's regret for being unable to attend. He told how deeply Mr. John D., Jr., had been affected by his experience with this society of Alcoholics Anonymous. Promising a highly interesting evening, Nelson Rockefeller began to introduce the speakers. Dr. Fosdick gave us a most wonderful testimonial and expressed complete confidence in our future. Dr. Kennedy warmly endorsed us and read a letter of protest he had written to the Journal of the American Medical Association because in their review of the book Alcoholics Anonymous they had somewhat ridiculed us. Dr. Bob spoke briefly, and I gave a rapid account of my own experience as a drinker, my recovery, and the subsequent history of our fellowship. As we watched the faces of the guests, it was evident that we had captured their sympathetic interest. Great influence and great wealth were soon to be at our disposal. Weariness and worry were to be things of the past.

Finally the big moment came. Mr. Nelson Rockefeller, visibly moved, got to his feet once more. On behalf of his father he thanked us all for coming. He reiterated that few more affecting things than Alcoholics Anonymous had ever crossed his father's life. His father would be delighted, Nelson said, to know how many guests had availed themselves of the chance to see the beginnings of this most promising adventure of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Breathlessly we waited for the climax - the matter of money. Nelson Rockefeller obliged us. Continuing, he said, "Gentlemen, you can all see that this is a work of good will. Its power lies in the fact that one member carries the good message to the next, without any thought of financial income or reward. Therefore, it is our belief that Alcoholics Anonymous should be self-supporting so far as money is concerned. It needs only our good will." Whereupon the guests clapped lustily, and after cordial handshakes and good-bys all around, the whole billion dollars' worth of them walked out the door.

We were dazed. Why had Mr. Rockefeller gone to all that trouble-just for this? We simply could not figure it out. But a few days later we began to see, and as time passes Alcoholics Anonymous sees ever more clearly what he meant and what he did.

Full transcript of the dinner conversation available at www.barefootsworld.net/aarockdinner.html

Glossary

Aggrieved Feeling resentment at having been unfairly treated. (p185)

Aspirations A hope or ambition of achieving something. (p187)

Buttonholing Attract the attention of and detain (someone) in conversation, typically against their will. (p185)

Intemperance Lack of moderation or restraint. (p185)

Keynotes A prevailing tone or central theme. (p187)

Messiah A leader regarded as the saviour of a particular country, group, or cause. (p187)

“Protective Mantle” A protective covering. (p187)

Stigma A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person. (p186)

“Vaudeville Circuit” A type of entertainment popular chiefly in the US in the early 20th century, featuring a mixture of specialty acts such as burlesque comedy and song and dance. (p185)

Definitions from Oxford Dictionary