Marty Mann’s Birthday Reminds All of Her Contribution to the World

Marty Mann was born October 15, 1904.

In reality, Marty Mann is scarcely a household word, yet she is arguably one of the most influential people of the 20th century and her influence continues into the 21st century.

Marty rose to a triumphant recovery that powered a historic, unparalleled change in our society. Through her vision and leadership, the attitude of America toward alcoholism was changed from a moral issue to one of public health. This was a tremendous shift, especially considering America's long temperance history that culminated in the Prohibition Amendment of 1920.

Her biography, as told in, A Biography of Mrs. Marty Mann - The First Lady of Alcoholics Anonymous is well known.

Born into a life of wealth and privilege in Chicago in the early 1900s, she went to the best private schools. She was blessed with beauty, brains, a powerful will and drive, phenomenal energy and stunning charisma. She traveled extensively. She debuted, and then married into a wealthy New Orleans family.

When she was 14, Marty was diagnosed with Tuberculosis (TB). In those days, drugs for treatment were not yet available and her family sent her to an expensive private sanitarium in California for a year, and then provide her with a private-duty nurse at home for another year or two. She had one recurrence of the disease several years later, and for the rest of her long life she knew that she was always in remission from this ancient scourge.

Marty's drinking was an occupational hazard in her line of work. Within 10 years she went from a bright, assured future to an existence of round-the-clock drinking. She lost one job after another. She became destitute, living off the goodwill of friends, convinced that she was hopelessly insane. Two suicide attempts nearly killed her, and desperate drinking threatened to finish the job.

Five years after she found recovery in AA, Marty had a dream. Her vision was to educate the whole country about alcoholism. She was obsessed with eliminating the historic stigma

attached to chronic inebriation. She joined forces with the Yale School of Alcohol Studies (now at Rutgers), where early significant scientific research into alcoholism was underway. Eventually her nationwide educational efforts led to the creation of a separate organization, the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism (now the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. or NCADD). NCADD has been this country's most important educational, referral source for alcoholics, their families and communities all across the country. (click here to read more about NCADD's Founder, Marty Mann.)

Marty was the right person at the right place and time. She was extremely fortunate to find a wealthy donor, Brinkley Smithers, who was committed to her goals and generously supported her organization. Marty was intensely focused on her mission. More than one person said she was like a train coming down the track -- jump on or get out of the way. Her elegant appearance, captivating charm, intellect and breathtaking charisma swept people off their feet.

By all accounts, she was one of the most spellbinding speakers this land has ever seen. Even audiences initially skeptical of her message, that an alcoholic is a sick person who can be helped, ended up enthusiastically supporting her. For most of her 24 years as director of NCA, she maintained a speaking schedule of over 200 talks annually. The purpose of Marty's talks was to establish local volunteer groups in every major city. These affiliates of NCA would carry out NCA's mission to provide education, information and referral for their respective communities. Government financial support was minimal to nonexistent. Most of the funding for the affiliates came from local, private donations.

When she was 65, Marty retired with some reluctance from active management of NCA. It was not easy for her to relinquish control of her creation and the central focus of her passion for over two decades. As NCA's promoter without peer, she continued a punishing speaking schedule on the organization's behalf for many years, but gave up her personal involvement in day-to-day affairs.

Marty's last talk was before AA's international convention in New Orleans in 1980. Two weeks later she suffered a stroke at home and died very shortly thereafter. She was 75.

Marty's legacy is carried through AA's growth and influence. Wherever she spoke, she generated extensive publicity, and new AA members appeared in droves. Her appearances were especially important in attracting women who were alcoholic. They figured that if a person as impressive and

inspiring as Marty could admit that she was an alcoholic, they could too. Women like Betty Ford are direct inheritors of Marty's example.

If you'd like to read **"What the Alcoholic Owes to Marty Mann. Out of her suffering has been born a network of hope and help for thousands"**, click here.

To read an account of Marty Mann's appearance on the show *To Tell The Truth*, please click here.