



# Selected Papers of William L. White

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***A Biography of Mrs. Marty Mann: The First Lady of Alcoholics Anonymous*  
Sally Brown & David Brown Hazelden Information & Educational Services,  
Center City, MN USA, 2001 384 pages. ISBN 1-56838-626-5**

## William L. White

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Marty Mann is arguably the most dominant figure in the modern alcoholism movement in the United States. Following her own recovery from alcoholism, she organized the National Committee for Education on Alcoholism in 1944 (forerunner of today's National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence) around five "kinetic" ideas that were developed in collaboration with Dwight Anderson: 1. alcoholism is a disease, 2. the alcoholic, therefore, is a sick person, 3. the alcoholic can be helped, 4. the alcoholic is worth helping, and 5. alcoholism is our No. 4 public health problem, and our public responsibility.

Modeling her reform movement on the success of other public health organizations that had been formed to support education, research and treatment for tuberculosis, cancer and heart disease, Mann spent her life successfully reshaping national policy toward alcoholism and organizing local alcoholism educational and treatment resources throughout the United States. Part of her unique contribution as a

public health pioneer was to heighten the synergy between emerging recovery mutual aid groups (Alcoholics Anonymous), post-Repeal organizations committed to the science-based management of alcohol problems (the Yale Center of Alcohol Studies and the Research Council on Problems of Alcohol) and philanthropic organizations focused on the problem of alcoholism (the Smithers Foundation). Marty Mann had obvious assets to devote to her campaign of public education and policy advocacy. She was bright, articulate, attractive, passionately committed and offered her own life to thousands of audiences as living proof of the reality and transformative power of recovery from alcoholism.

But who was the person behind this powerful persona? This is the question that Sally and David Brown eloquently answer in their biography of Marty Mann. Their biography is based on a meticulous reconstruction of Mann's family history, hundreds of interviews with those who knew and worked with Mann and a review of the

available archival documents related to Mann's contributions. This is a very well researched biography and an engaging story that reveals much about the evolution of attitudes toward alcoholism in America. It also provides a window into the struggles public health reformers experience as they try to balance excessive professional demands, their public personas and their sometimes quite complicated personal lives.

There are disclosures in this book that were carefully hidden when Mann was alive, such as her sexual orientation and long-term relationship with Priscilla Peck and a relapse that Mann experienced very late in her life (the latter being the real bombshell of the

book), but overall this is a detailed account of how a deeply wounded woman who had experienced multiple treatment episodes finally found recovery and dreamed that she could change the world. And she did, with a skill and grace that will inspire many readers. Of the many lessons in this book, I was most struck by the potential for one person to personally touch so many and by doing so reshape history. *The Biography of Mrs. Marty Mann* should be added to the reading list of those aspiring to leadership in this field.