



The Stepping Stones News

A Publication of the Stepping Stones Foundation

Summer 2003

As Henrietta Remembered

Since its beginning, Alcoholics Anonymous has relied on and benefited from the involvement of non-alcoholics. Dr. Silkworth, Sr. Ignatia and Jack Alexander are prime examples. Perhaps the most pivotal friend AA ever had was Henrietta Seiberling who arranged the very first meeting between Bill and Dr. Bob in her home in May, 1935. Soon after Bill's death in 1971, Mrs. Seiberling recollected how it all came about. The following excerpt, from a document in the Stepping Stones archives, has had some publication, but this moving story, told in Harriet's own words, deserves to be read by the widest audience. It illustrates how Bill was literally the answer to prayers.

I would like to tell about Bob in the beginning. Bob and Ann came into the Oxford Group, which, as you know, was the movement which tried to recapture the power of first Century Christianity in the modern world, and a quality of life which we must always exercise. Someone spoke to me about Bob Smith's drinking. He didn't think that people knew it. And I decided that the people who shared in the Oxford group shared very costly things to make Bob lose his pride and share what he thought would cost him a great deal. So I decided to gather together some Oxford Group people for a meeting, and that was in T. Henry Williams' house. We met afterwards there for five or six years every Wednesday night. I warned Ann that I was going to have [a special] meeting. I didn't tell her it was for Bob, but I said, "Come prepared to mean business. There is going to be no pussyfooting around." And we all shared very deeply our shortcomings, and what we had victory over, and then there was silence, and I waited and thought, "Will Bob say something?" Sure enough, in that deep, serious tone of his he said, "Well, you good people have all shared things that I am sure were very costly to you, and I am going to tell you something which may cost me my profession. I am a silent drinker, and I can't stop." This was weeks before Bill came to Akron. So we said, "Do you want to go down on your knees and pray?" And he said, "Yes." So we did.

And the next morning, I, who knew nothing about alcoholism (I thought a person should drink like a gentleman, and that's all), was saying a prayer for Bob. I said, "God, I don't know anything about drinking, but I told Bob that I was sure that if he lived this way of life, he could quit drinking. Now you have to help me." Something said to me – I call it "guidance" – it was like a voice in the top of my head – "Bob must not touch one drop of alcohol." I knew that wasn't my thought. So I called Bob, and said I had guidance for him – and this is very important.

He came over at 10 in the morning, and I told him that my guidance was that he mustn't touch one drop of alcohol. He was very disappointed because he thought guidance would mean seeing somebody or going someplace. And then – this is something very relevant – he said, "Henrietta, I don't understand it. Nobody understands it." Now that was the state of the world when we were begin-



ning. He said some doctor had written a book about it, but he doesn't understand it. I don't like the stuff. I don't want to drink. I said, "Well, Bob, that is what I have been guided about." And that was the beginning of our meetings, long before Bill ever came.

Let me recall some of Bill's words about his experience. Bill, when he was in a hotel in Akron and down to a few dollars and owed his bill after his business venture fell through, looked at the cocktail room and was tempted and thought, "Well, I'll just go in there and get drunk and forget it all, and that will be the end of it." Instead, having been sober five months in the Oxford Group, he said a prayer. He got the guidance to look in a minister's directory, and a strange thing happened.

He just looked in there, and he put his finger on one name: Tunks. And that was no coincidence, because Dr. Tunks was Mr. Harvey Firestone's minister, and Mr. Firestone had brought 60 of the Oxford Group people

down there for 10 days out of gratitude for helping his son who drank too much. His son had quit for a year and a half or so. Out of the act of gratitude of this one father, this whole chain started.

So Bill called Dr. Tunks, and Dr. Tunks gave him a list of names. One of them was Norman Sheppard, who was a close friend of mine and knew what I was trying to do for Bob. Norman said, "I have to go to New York tonight but you can call Henrietta Seiberling, "When he told the story, Bill shortened it by just saying that he called Dr. Tunks, but I did not know Dr. Tunks. Bill said that he had his last nickel, and he thought, "Well, I'll call her."

So I, who was desperate to help Bob in something I didn't know much about, was ready. Bill called, and I will never forget what he said: "I'm from the Oxford Group and I'm a rum hound." Those were his words. I thought, "This is really manna from Heaven." And I said, "You come right out here." And my thought was to put those two men together. Bill, looking back, thought he was out to help someone else. Actually, he was out to get help for himself, *continued on page 2*

VISITING STEPPING STONES ONLINE

Please visit our website at www.steppingstones.org

If you haven't been to our website recently, we invite you to visit it and register. By signing on, you will receive updates, scenes of Stepping Stones throughout the year and our online newsletter with color photos. And as with our postal mailing list, the online register is completely confidential.

Visitors to the site can tour the house, read about the history of Stepping Stones, the biographies of Bill and Lois, make tax deductible contributions and purchase items from our upcoming gift store.

We're interested in what you think. So if you have a comment we'll be happy to have it, and if you've got a question, we'll do our best to answer it, too.



An Interview with Johnny W. Allem

*President
Johnson Institute Foundation*

When one thinks of Johnny Allem's public life, the words that best describe it are – "a life of service."

A former journalist, Johnny has dedicated his considerable energy and intelligence to working in the field of alcoholism and addiction where he has been a major presence for many years. An SSF Board Member, Johnny is President of the renowned Johnson Institute Foundation. His extensive experience in the field is complemented by an impressive background in communications, business, government and political consulting. Woven throughout and a focus of his work today is advocacy and the need for recovered people, without disclosing any 12-Step Fellowship affiliation, to be a voice for recovery and change.

SSF: Why is advocacy of such importance to you and JIF?

JA: The strongest voice for recovery is the voices of recovered people. Every person has a stake in ending the epidemic of alcoholism and addiction because they affect everyone. It's up to those who are recovered or who have benefited from someone's recovery to speak up. One of the greatest and most persistent barriers to recovery is the stigma of alcoholism. Stigmas of all sorts have disappeared in recent years as society evolves to a more enlightened state and medical discoveries dispel misinformation about certain conditions, but the prejudice and shame associated with alcoholism still persists. Just as everyone recovered from addiction has a unique power that others don't – carrying the message of recovery to another suffering alcoholic or addict, they also have a unique opportunity to speak up with authority that recovery is possible. We all know that sharing of our experience with someone still suffering has resulted in saving millions from the worst consequences of addiction disease. And, we know that recovered people are much more effective because we are not only the messenger, we are the example as well. This is very powerful, and barriers to recovery are broken down. But many other barriers keep the news and facts of recovery from reaching a majority of those that suffer. The Johnson Institute has addressed bar-

riers to addiction prevention, treatment and recovery since its inception.

SSF: Tell us how JIF started and what it does.

JA: The organization grew from a church study group at St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis in the 1960s. The church's Rev. Vernon Johnson and a group of others with personal experience in recovery challenged the idea that an alcoholic could not get help until he or she naturally reached a "bottom". They developed a method of "intervention" that penetrated the barrier of denial and helped the alcoholic to accept professional care. So, with help from Minneapolis industrialist Wheelock Whitney, the founders, who included Whitney's wife Irene, crafted a mission for Johnson Institute that would continue to address barriers to recovery. The work has included training thousands of counselors around the world, pioneering in workplace "employee assistance" systems, and addressing family and youth aspects of addiction disease. Intervention has been key in the recovery of many people, most notably perhaps, First Lady Betty Ford. The goal of intervention is to have the addicted person see and accept enough reality to accept his or her need for help.

JIF is still an organization of recovered individuals and family members with a variety of professional skills and a passion for conquering chemical dependency in our lifetime. And JIF supports innovation in science and practice, a strong voice for the recovery community, a family view of the illness, and significant efforts to identify and arrest illness in its earliest evidence.

SSF: What are some of JIF's activities?

JA: Foremost in our current endeavors is the development of the Faces and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) campaign. It's a national, grassroots service organization that trains and mentors local activists in the recovery community to educate all Americans about addiction and recovery. It addresses rational policies in health care, insurance, the workplace, and education. This national voice is our best offense in the fight to end discrimination against the addicted and those affected by addiction.

Another important JIF initiative is support for faith-centered activities that recognize illness, support those affected and promote treatment and recovery, namely Faith Partners. It's a national movement to *continued on page 4*

As Henrietta Remembered *cont. from page 1*

no thought of helping anyone else, because he was desperate. But that is the way that God helps us if we let God direct our lives. And so he came out to my house, and he stayed for dinner. And I told him to come to church with me next morning and I would get Bob, which I did.

Bill stayed in Akron. He didn't have any money. There was a neighbor of mine, John Gammeter, who had seen the change in my life brought by the Oxford Group, and I called him and asked him to put Bill up at the country club for two weeks or so, just to keep him in town. After that, Bill went to stay with Bob and Ann for three months, and we started working on Bill Dotson and Ernie Galbraith.

The need was there, and all of the necessary elements were furnished by God. Bill the promoter, and I, not being an alcoholic, for perspective. Every Wednesday night I would speak on some new experience or spiritual idea I had read. That's the way we all grew. Eventually the [Oxford Group] meetings moved to King School. Some man from Hollywood came, an actor, and he said that he had been all over the country and that there was something in the King School group that wasn't in any other group. I think it was our great stress and reliance on guidance and quiet times.

Bill did a grand job. We can all see in his life what the Oxford Group people had told us in their message: that if we turn our lives to God and let him run it, he will take our shortcomings and make them valuable in His way and give us our hearts desire. And when I got the word that Bill had gone on, I sat there, and it was just as if someone had spoken to me again on top of my head. Something

said to me, "Verily, verily, he has received his reward." So I went to the Bible, and there it was, in Matthew VI. Then I looked at Bill's story in Alcoholics Anonymous where Bill had said that all his failures were because he always wanted people to think he was somebody.

In the first edition of the book, he said he always wanted to make his mark among people. And by letting God run his life, God took his ego and gave him his hearts desire in God's way. And when he was gone, he was on the front page of the New York Times, famous all over the world. So it does verify what the Oxford Group people had told him.

...I feel that the whole wonderful experience of Alcoholics Anonymous came in answer to a growing great need in the world, and this was met by the combination of Bill, who was a catalyst and promoter, and Bob, with his great humility (if you spoke to him about his contribution, he'd say, "Oh, I just work here.") and Ann, who supplied a hominess for our men in the beginning.

...In the early days, Bob and Bill said to me. "Henrietta, I don't think we should talk too much about religion or God." I said to them, "Well, we're not out to please the alcoholics. They have been pleasing themselves all these years. We are out to please God. And if you don't talk about what God does, and your faith, and your guidance, then you might as well be the Rotary Club or something like that. Because God is your only source of power." And finally they agreed. And they weren't afraid any more. It is my great hope that they will never be afraid to acknowledge God and what he has done for them...

And then there is one other thought I'd always like to stress, and that is the real fact of God's guidance. People can always count on guidance, although it seems elusive at times.

From the Stepping Stones Foundation Archives

The year 1941 was a pivotal one for Lois and Bill as well as Alcoholics Anonymous. The Wilsons tribulation of being homeless would end with the finding of the house in Bedford Hills, subsequently called "Stepping Stones", and the fledgling fellowship would be catapulted into national recognition with the groundbreaking Jack Alexander article on AA published in The Saturday Evening Post, perhaps America's most popular weekly magazines of the time.

In this letter from Bill to his father and step-mother living in British Columbia, Bill talks about his sobriety and about AA. While both Gilman and Christine apparently knew of Bill's stopping drinking, this letter suggests that he had not told them fully about the work he had been doing, the creation of the fellowship and his crucial role in it.

Jan. 11, 1941

Dear Dad and Christine:

Surely we in this family are terrible correspondents, but of all I'm the worst. I'm sure it's time we did better and drew closer together for my thoughts often go out to you both. Notwithstanding a terrible period of alcoholism, I'm very grateful to be alive and as you know I have been entirely free from it for six years. During this period a means of escape from that terrific dilemma developed and the method has spread now to about 2,000 others. Our organization, Alcoholics Anonymous, a band of ex-drinkers helping each other to sobriety, now numbering 2,000 members and growing with prodigious rapidity. I won't go any further into that story because I am sending you our book and some other material which will explain. I am sure you will be interested to know that I wrote the text of the book and am considered the founder of the movement which it represents.

Of course these events have paid huge dividends of satisfaction and peace of mind to Lois and me, and to those who know us; and I am truly sorry that we

...“real success is never determined by what we have. Rather it is determined by what we are - what we have in inner resources of happiness and peace of mind.”

Bill's Father, Gilman Wilson, British Columbia, Canada



have not shared the good news with you to the extent we should have done.

As a result of this effort we are terribly broke though I doubt if that lasts much longer for many prominent people, including Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., are taking an interest in the situation. Though we have had a great deal of publicity, the Saturday Evening Post will carry an article early in February which is sure to give us a fine public standing. This can only mean *continued on page 4*

Picnic 2003

For as long as most of us could remember, it never rained on Lois' picnic. But as into each life rain must fall, so must it fall on a beloved event. June 7th, the first Saturday of June and, therefore, picnic day, it rained and, at times, poured. But we had the picnic anyway, and people showed up!

In fact, 163 people signed the registers. But since the registration table had to be hastily moved from its customary spot on the lawn to the garage, it is doubtful that everyone signed in. People came in raingear, with umbrellas and a few (undoubtedly Al-Anon members, one AA observed) with a portable tent under which a lighthearted group assembled. Some resourceful people made tents with umbrellas.

People kept asking "what happens" and the truthful answer was "we don't know". We played it by ear. Bernadette B., Lois' long-time friend, recalled a year that it did rain and that Lois held the meeting in the house. Those of you who have been at our picnics (last year there were over 500) will recall how visitors spread out on the lawns, and the speakers address the crowd at a mike from the stone barbecue across from the main house. So, into the house most of us went. Folding chairs were brought in and placed in as many rooms as possible, and people sat on the staircases or stood. Others chose to stay outside and listen as the talks were broadcast as they always are over the loudspeakers.

The speakers were wonderful. Barbe B. from Connecticut spoke about finding hope and happiness in Alateen; Nafisa D., an Al-Anon from New Jersey who had led a sheltered life in India, told of mar-



rying an alcoholic because he seemed so much more fun than the men her parents had chosen for her, and Hugh M. of Brooklyn, the AA, whose story was an eloquent testimony of the power of alcoholic denial and alcoholism recovery through the fellowship.

As in every year, the volunteers, without whose help the event couldn't take place, were terrific. Our special thanks to them and to the people who came — they made the picnic possible, and made it possible for us to say again that day, "This picnic began in 1951 by Lois and Bill and has gone on every year since." Because of them, we will be able to say that next year, on June 5, 2004, and we invite you all to be with us, rain or shine.

(To order tapes & CD's of the talks, visit www.glennkaudio-tapes.com or call 1-800-257-TAPE.)

Johnny Allem Interview *cont. from page 2*

recruit, train and support lay ministry volunteers within each church to conduct awareness, support and referral activities. It began in Austin, Texas in 1995, and now has more than 100 congregational teams in six major American cities.

Related to that is our Clergy Training Project conducted in partnership with the National Association for Children of Alcoholics. Studies show that churches are one of the best places to identify and assist in early intervention, but less than 12 per cent of seminary graduates have any formal training in chemical dependency issues. We produced a curriculum for pastoral counseling training in the 185 accredited seminaries in the country. Another education initiative is a pilot project to create recovery high schools in inner cities where young people with chemical dependency who have completed intensive treatment can learn in safe and supportive environments. Two urban recovery schools are scheduled to open in 2004 in Minneapolis and Washington, D.C.

SSF: We're particularly proud of the National Forum that you host in Washington, DC twice a year. Can you talk about that?

JA: That was an outgrowth of the groundbreaking three-day seminar Stepping Stones hosted in 1993. That event started bringing together leaders in the addiction field.

SSF: It was our Advocacy Seminar.

JA: Yes, and it was a great success and the beginning of my association with Stepping Stones. It demonstrated the need for all of us to gather and work together. That initial meeting evolved into the National Forum, a twice-a-year conference of national organizations with a stake in chemical dependency. These include organizations with a direct stake, such as the treatment industry, and those with an ancillary stake, like the American Bar Association. We also conduct theme and issue symposiums to collect and register new thinking on a variety of policy issues effecting chemical dependency.

Johnson Institute, however, is more than a series of activities. We are a voice for several principles germane to conquering chemical dependency in our life-

time including the impact that chemical dependency has on the entire family. Healing can and must include the entire family. Lois Wilson and the Al-Anon founders certainly knew that.

SSF: What's the best way for people to find out more about JIF and its interests?

JA: Log onto our website at www.johnsoninstitute.org and I suggest everyone to check out the FaVoR website at www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org as well. In the words of Vernon Johnson, "Chemical dependency is a treatable illness that we all can do something about."

JIF: has offices at its headquarters in Minneapolis, MN and in Washington, DC, where Johnny is located.

From the Archives *cont. from page 3*

that we shall presently find a means of supporting ourselves adequately. About that we are not worried.

Now a word of cheer for both you and Dad. Lois and I know all too well what it is to struggle and not succeed. Or rather, not seem to succeed. But long since we have found out how profoundly true it is that real success is never determined by what we have. Rather it is determined by what we are - what we have in inner resources of happiness and peace of mind. And, if I may venture the expression, a trust in the Great Father of Lights who presides over us all.

Now Lois and I want to help - when and how often it will be I don't know, but enclosed find a small token of my gratitude to you Dad. Meanwhile, Cheerio.

Visiting Us We welcome visitors throughout the year. Please call to arrange a tour 914-232-4822 or email us at Stepsfoundation@aol.com

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