



Stepping Stones News

A publication of the Stepping Stones Foundation

Summer 1995

STEPPING STONES -- IN AND OUT



Stepping Stones was the home of Bill and Lois W. and is a place of significant history in the Fellowships of AA and Al-Anon. Bill lived at Stepping Stones, located in Bedford Hills, New York, some 45 miles north of New York City, from May

of 1941 until his death in January, 1971 and Lois continued her life there until her own death in October, 1988.

Much of Bill's important writing was done at Stepping Stones, most of it in the small studio cabin called "Wit's End," poised on a knoll within site of the main house. The studio contains the large desk replete with Bill's cigarette burns on its edges that Bill bought from early AA Hank P., the New Jersey oil company executive who was a driving force behind getting the Big Book written and published. Hank and Bill were to have a falling out and Hank left the fellowship, but his contributions were invaluable.

Although it was in New Jersey when Bill used it to write the Big Book, the desk was at its present site in the Stepping Stones studio where Bill wrote *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* book, AKA, "the 12 and 12." Many of Bill's other important works were penned in the studio where he was often helped by the excellent secretarial skills of Nell Wing, undoubtedly the AA fellowship's most beloved non-alcoholic friend. In fact, a room in the main house is nicknamed after Nell, the blue guest room which is called, the Nell Wing room because she was the visitor who used it

more than anyone else.

"Nell's Room" is one of four off the large central living room replete with the commanding stone fireplace that Bill loved to use whenever the

(cont. on pg. 4)

A Trip to Stepping Stones

On July 31, 1993, the Jones Beach Sunday Morning Sunrise Group sponsored a bus trip to Stepping Stones, the former home of Bill and Lois W., in Bedford Hills, New York.

I've been sober for nineteen years and yet I had declined previous invitations to this "hallowed" spot because it scares me a bit to realize that humans love to make saints of the heroes in their lives. I feel there are no great people, there are only great challenges that ordinary people are forced by circumstances to meet.

The trip was a revelation, however. I not only got to see Bill and Lois as having been very human but I'm now more accepting of my own humanity. The caretaker of the property offered us many anecdotes regarding Bill W.'s family and mentioned some of their all-too-human foibles. Bill really came to life for me as I sat in his chair at "Wit's End," the one-room writing studio that stands several hundred feet from the main house. He did most of his writing



at Wit's End and his desk has been decorated with numerous cigarette burns.

Later we sat on the lawn and engaged in an open discussion. Bill and Lois were with us as surely as was our breathing. I felt that when Bill and Dr. Bob founded the Fellowship, we were there with them also, because spirit is one. I realized there is no death. What we humans refer to as death is merely a transition, a change in molecular structure. Bill has dropped the body, he is at peace, he has gone home. Yet he lives. He is the tree above our heads. He is the wind and the rain and the morning air. He is always with us.

E. H., Brentwood, N.Y.



THE ANNUAL PICNIC -- ANOTHER WONDERFUL DAY

It's called "The Al-Anon" picnic, "the Lois W. picnic", and sometimes "the Stepping Stones picnic", but an event by any other name couldn't be more fun which is why, after some 43 years, our annual picnic continues to be such a wonderful event.

The picnic began in the early 1950s as a casual get-together for Lois and a few of her Al-Anon friends and their families, so AAs were always included. Bill (pictured above) loved to address the group. The meeting always included speakers and a collection was always taken as it still is today to defray some of the costs.

This year the picnic took place on Saturday, June 3rd, and the weather predictions could not have been worse as the date approached. Forecasters were calling for "severe thunderstorms, heavy showers and hail". Several would-be picnickers called to see if we would cancel or reschedule. "No" on both counts; the picnic would commence as planned, albeit with crossed fingers.

Picnic morning was a bit soggy, but the sky brightened as the day went on. By the time the guests started to arrive around noon, the sun was shining and the temperature was balmy. At 2PM, the traditional meeting started with our Executive Director, Eileen Giuliani, greeting the group. She mentioned the weather forecast and the telephone calls but reminded the group that "it has never rained on Lois' picnic and never will." (At least that's what we've been told, and every year it's

been true. A saying heard here time and again is, "It never rains on Lois' picnic -she'd never allow it!").

Paul Lang, our archivist, gave the group a brief history of Stepping Stones telling the remarkable story of how Bill and Lois acquired it, as well as giving a verbal tour of the house itself. Usually when visitors arrive at Stepping Stones, we take them on a tour, but with over 200 people, as we had this year, it's impossible to do so. The house is open for touring before and after the speakers share.

This year our Al-Ateen speaker was Colleen L., who is also the Al-Ateen coordinator for the state of New Jersey. She was followed by Sean D. of the Nyack, New York, Freedom of Choice AA group and then by his wife, Pat D., of the Nyack Al-Anon group. All three speakers were moving and inspirational, and their contribution in making the day the success that it was is much appreciated.

Although most of the picnic guests come from the NY-NJ-CT area, there were several from Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Maine and California! Mark your calendars for next year's picnic scheduled for Saturday, June 1st. Bring a chair or blanket, your lunch and we'll provide the soft drinks and terrific speakers and fellowship.

(cont. from pg. 1)

weather was cool enough to permit it. Also in the living room is Lois's piano and Bill's cello and violin. Both he and Lois enjoyed playing music together and there are several lovely photos around the house of them doing so. They especially enjoyed musical gatherings with friends when guests were encouraged to play as well.

The other rooms off the living room include a guest room dubbed "Helen's Room" after Bill's half-sister, Helen Strong, who spent much time with the couple. "The spook room", a kind of catch-all room, was nicknamed by Lois because of Bill's activities there during a time that he was interested in spiritualism. And then there's the kitchen which, like in most homes, has a special feeling about it. The Stepping Stones kitchen is doubly special because in it is the table at which Bill, in 1934, sat down to drink gin while his unbelievably sober friend, Ebby T., told him about the Oxford Group and how its spiritual principles had helped him to do the impossible - stop drinking.

The second-floor of the house, a 1920 Dutch colonial, is a remarkable place. There is a long library containing the hundreds of books from the frivolous to the profound and scores of photographs and memorabilia from Bill and Lois' personal life. Beyond the library is the airy, sun-filled bedroom with the large bed in which Lois was born.

A tour of Stepping Stones always takes longer than first-time visitors think it will. There is much to see, and those visitors who forget or didn't bother to bring a camera are usually disappointed because there is so much to photograph and record.

When Bill and Lois moved into Stepping Stones in 1941, the house included 1.7 acres. Over the years, Lois purchased additional property which enlarged the place to 8.5 acres. Much of the property is beautifully landscaped with trees, shrubs and flowers still vibrant from when Lois first planted them. The garden is now replenished and maintained annually. The other sections are mostly lovely woods and lawn which is a great boon to the groups which come for picnics every year.

The overwhelming feeling at Stepping Stones is one of serenity and familiarity. Bill and Lois left Stepping Stones to all of us in the AA and Al-Anon Fellowships, and we fulfill their dearest wish when we visit. You are all encouraged to do so.

About the Newsletter

The Foundation publishes the Newsletter to share events at Stepping Stones, interviews with people who remember Lois and Bill, stories from the archives collection and so on. If you have a memory you would like others to read, please contact us. If you know someone else who would like to receive the Newsletter, just send us the information at:

The Stepping Stones Foundation
P. O. Box 452
Bedford Hills, N.Y. 10507

By the way, the logo chosen for our newsletter is a drawing done by Lois Wilson. Lois loved to sketch, even illustrating her diaries. The picture shown is of Lois and Bill contemplating their new home originally called Bil-Lo's Break and later Stepping Stones. This image was used by Lois for her bookplates and note cards for many years.

About the Foundation....

The Stepping Stones Foundation was created by Lois W. in 1979 some nine years before her death. It is run by a board of trustees which meets regularly to carry out the Foundation's mission which is to preserve Stepping Stones and its historic archives and to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of the disease of alcoholism and its effect on the family and society.

The trustees, staff and volunteers are comprised of AAs, Al-Anons and individuals not belonging to either fellowship, but who want to be involved with Stepping Stones because of the work it does

To Visit the House ...

Please call us at (914) 232-4822
...we are open by appointment and will be happy to make one for you.