

# MARKINGS

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## A Memory of Lois

By Mel B., Toledo OH

Back in 1980, I was working part-time for A.A. World Services on the book that was published four years later as *Pass It On*. As a contributing writer to this book, I spent several days in Bedford Hills, N.Y. interviewing Lois W. at Stepping Stones, the home she and Bill had owned since 1941. (Lois, the widow of A.A. co-founder Bill W., was also a founder of Al-Anon.)

The first time I arrived there, a woman named Edna was staying with Lois as a guest. Edna was a timid woman in her late fifties or early sixties, and it was very obvious that she was suffering from a terminal condition of some kind. At first I thought she might be an abused wife seeking refuge in Lois' home. Another thought was that she might have been related to an early A.A. friend of Bill's.

But I learned that Edna was actually a housekeeper who had worked for Lois some years earlier. More recently, while working as a live-in housekeeper for another family, she had become ill and had a long stay in the hospital. Destitute and alone, she had been discharged from the hospital with no place to live, although a hospice of some sort would have an opening for her in a few weeks. She could no longer stay in the hospital during that interim period, and the family that had employed her would not let her come back.

In desperation, she had remembered to call Lois and explain her plight. Lois immediately invited her to come to Stepping Stones to stay with her until the hospice opening was available.

Edna proved to be a good companion for the next few days and she even took an interest in my interviews with Lois and our other conversations. Despite her physical suffering, she even tried to help around the house. And though she had not been involved



Lois W. with friend at the St. Louis Convention, 1955.

in any way with alcoholism, she showed a deep interest in our discussion of A.A. history. On Monday morning, a man arrived to take Edna to the hospice. We helped Edna carry her meager belongings to the car, said our goodbyes, and then watched sadly as they drove away. We knew that Edna would have only a short time at the hospice. A few months later Lois told me she had died.

Back in Toledo, I found myself breaking down every time I tried to

relate this story at an A.A. or Al-Anon meeting. I'm sure that Lois's unhesitating response to Edna's plea for help touched something deep in my heart. Perhaps it reminded me of Lois's generosity towards the early A.A.'s Bill brought home for help. It may have reminded me of the time alcohol left me helpless and alone, until I found A.A.'s helping hand. It also convinced me that Lois, a key person in A.A.'s early development, had the qualities of a saint.

### Observations of an Early Starter

## 60th Anniversary International Convention of A.A. San Diego '95

By Erik K., Mobile, AL  
Wednesday, June 28

I arrived in San Diego one day early so that I could avoid the crowds, long lines at the registries, and better contain my eager anticipation. I am in year 43rd of sober living (D.L.D. 12-

27-52) and have attended many conventions, conferences and events of A.A. throughout the years. They were always enjoyable and spiritually fulfilling for me. This time, however, I came away with a feeling akin to when I had the honor and pleasure of meeting with

and speaking to our co-founder Bill W., who, with Dr. Bob, I like to refer to as "Grand Sponsors" to all of us in the "Society of Alcoholics Anonymous." This event in my first year of sobriety left a profound and lasting memory. It was the annual meeting of the King's School group in Akron, Ohio. An anniversary, and Bill was the speaker. The meeting was not recorded, to my knowledge, and he spoke of things that I have not been able to find mention of since then.

I registered, picked up my name badge and signed in at the 40+ years sober desk to participate in the "Oldtimers Sharing" at the "Big Meeting" on Saturday night.

#### Thursday, June 29

Day one brought a flow of people from all parts of the world and was to number over 56,000. Long lines began to form at the activity desks. A.A. was taking over the city of San Diego. Hospitality, fellowship and good will were permeating everywhere. I met many old acquaintances and made new friends.

I roamed around, hoping someone from the land of my ancestors would notice my name badge. I am of Finnish extraction and my name would be obvious to another Finn (Finnlander). I was unsuccessful but undaunted for I knew I would meet some members from Finland at their meeting on Saturday afternoon. Day one ended with a huge "Block Party" of dances at the hotels and main convention center. The media reported on TV that we were consuming coffee at 200+ gallons a minute.

#### Friday, June 30

Day two brought me to the "Pioneers in A.A." portion of the Friday morning programs. The room filled quickly to "Standing Room Only." Our good friend Frank M., Archivist at G.S.O., was present to conduct the program and introduce the speakers who are true

pioneers of A.A.: Bob and Sue (Smitty and Susie), the children of Dr. Bob and Ann Smith, who shared their experiences at the very beginning of what was to become a new way of life for all of us. Their lives were often disrupted. Everyone attending came to realize how these two "Pioneers" in their young lives gave of themselves. They saw their home become the first "Halfway House." They saw their mother work tirelessly with their father, "Dr. Bob" and "Uncle Bill" when it was realized that they were "On to something." Nell Wing was Bill's Secretary from 1947 until his passing in 1971. Nell gave us personal accounting of the effort needed to keep things moving in the right direction. She displayed the unique qualities which, along with her predecessor Ruth Hock, were needed for the fledgling society to survive.

Laurie, daughter of Ruth Hock, who was the first secretary before A.A. had its name (it was called "Honor Dealer"), displayed the wit and humor of her mother and added her own charm to the delight of everyone. Laurie related stories that she heard from her mother about the trials and tribulations of the early "first years." As a young girl she would ask her mother, "Did it really happen that way." Many of the stories were somewhat outlandish and humorous.

Dr. Earl from California along with George S. from Canada related historic moments and events which grew from small gatherings to what we witness today and ever growing larger. The program ended with a standing applause, then over 2000 happy people came towards the stage for autographs. Chairman Frank had announced that another program was to follow and the audience could meet the speakers in the lobby area and obtain autographs. I was in the midst of it all at the stage and saw Frank. He was trapped behind the stage, agonizing his plight and dismay. Eventually the program to follow got underway.

I arrived at the Finnish language meeting on Saturday afternoon. At the door were two greeters, an older man and a very large younger man. I introduced myself in Finnish with apologies, as my command of the language had diminished for I had not conversed in Finnish but very little in the past 35+ years. I was told no apology was needed and I was making myself under-

stood quite well. He (the older man) then asked me how long I had been in sobriety. I jokingly said "You are an old so and so like me. How old is the big guy? The younger man said in a soft voice, "I am 43." I exclaimed, "This is my magic number." He then seized my hand and I saw him close his eyes tightly (to hold back tears). He then asked had I ever met and spoke with Bill W. I said, "Yes, I met Uncle Willie and had the honor to converse with him." "Did he offer his hand," he said. "Yes," I replied and added: "I would like to pass on to you the handshake that Uncle Willie gave to me with his favorite quote—'Pass It On,' so you may give it to others which we do to keep its meaning live and well." I related this with much difficulty in finding the proper words. He seized my hand again and pressed it against his great chest. I felt this Gentle Giant tremble with emotion as he thanked me profusely. My memory flashed back when I received a similar grace. I then went in to attend the meeting and found new friends. I had to leave early to prepare for what was to be another unforgettable experience.

Transportation of such a large number of people to the events at Jack Murphy Stadium was a Herculean task. Hundreds of buses were provided, some I was told were brought from as far as Las Vegas. The drivers, not being familiar with the area, sometimes became lost. Also hundreds of very special people were on hand to support the events, guiding the people and helping us when we became lost. They had on yellow sun visors and vests with a huge badge button with "Host" printed on them. They were always attentive to our needs.

The parade of flags on Friday night was a beautiful and inspirational event. Flags were presented by many new member nations, demonstrating that A.A. has reached around the world. A sobriety "count-up" was held. With such a large crowd present it seemed to be coming somewhat noisy and chaotic. As the count passed 20 and 30 years the crowd got "with it." The numbers were called with music in the background and a group of young members, several dozen, had formed a serpentine dance column which was "snaking" through the seating via the walkways. A festive air resulted. By the time 40 years was reached and only the 40+ group was still standing, the

**Put those early timers  
to work! Pass It On!  
Compile your  
group's history!**

crowd was responding with a moving tribute. This was to be my new "home group" for the "Big Meeting" on Saturday night.

All those who had signed in for the old timers sharing were instructed to arrive early at gate "A." On my way to the turnstiles through the streaming crowds I saw several police officers astride their motorcycles with their normally stoic and disciplined expressions now displaying boyish grins. The women would stop to have their pictures taken with the officers, hugging them and sitting on the motorcycles. I asked the young officer in charge, "How are you standing this." He told me, with a look of astonishment, that he had just called his supervisor to report on "All is Well" and told him they had nothing to do. Everyone was behaving themselves, and there were no drunks or fights to respond to. His boss told him to keep one man on the radio and enjoy the show. I was ushered to the field at the front of the stage where seating was reserved for us and roped off for our safety. Many of the group were quite elderly and some in wheel chairs with a ramp provided to the stage. It soon became evident why we were asked to come early. People from the main seating were permitted in the roped-off area to visit with us and obtain autographs. They kept us busy signing souvenir books, programs and even name badges. A young lady asked permission to sit beside me just to be there and watch me signing autographs and talking to my visitors. The young woman's presence and the ongoing gave me great pleasure and again brought back memories when I too was deeply affected when I met with those who had preceded me and had some years of successful sober living.

Young A.A. members by the hundreds came to visit and the "Serpentine dance group" came by to keep a festive air. The "Yellow Hats" hovered nearby and offered to get us coffee. A beautiful lady in white gown came down from the stage and strolled among us to announce that the meeting was to start and if we needed to go to the bathroom to go now because any one of us might be called to share and would be on stage for a time.

The meeting was opened by "George," the general manager from G.S.O. New York and he introduced his assistant, the lady in the white gown, whose name was "Isadora." A

large top hat was brought out and 15 names were drawn and called for the members of our group who were to share. My heart swelled with love and pride as I watched my fellow members being assisted up the ramp to their seats on stage. They displayed the dignity befitting their station in life. I was deeply moved and felt honored at being part of such an assembly. George gave a forward and tribute to those on stage and introduced Isadora again. She stood beside a huge oriental gong and held in her hand a rod with large red ball on it. She announced that each person sharing would be allowed 5 minutes at which time the speaker would be finished or the gong would sound. Isadora demonstrated and the sound was deafening. She did have to use it a number of times to everyone's amusement.

Our group (the 40+) numbered 129 and collectively are the "custodians" of 5624 years of sober living. In attendance for the meeting were over 63,000 members, A.A. and Al-Anon, representing many countries. The speakers shared for the 5 minutes each, beginning with a lady named Ruth followed by 14 more men and women representing us. We heard memorable and historical experiences, strength and hope via words of wisdom and, of course, the needed wit, humor and charm. Those attending responded with a spirited and enthusiastic applause. After the sharing was completed George announced that this was the first time an "Old Timers Sharing Big Meeting" has been held at the International Convention, "and how did you like it?" The response was tumultuous. This means that the 65th anniversary convention in the year 2000, "We will do it again."

### Postscript

In the distant future there will be an end to the suffering and anguish brought on by the ravages of alcoholism. It might be said that, by God's grace, the end shall be that we shall live to enjoy the fruits of our labors. The man shall have a wife and she a husband. Their children shall have a mother and father. Their mother shall have the com-fort of their arm in her age, and hopeless physical wrecks and mental cripples who were once strong men and women shall no longer be a by-product of alcohol.

## Clubhouse to Intergroup

A member shares: "The clubhouse continued to be the nerve center of the new thriving A.A. activity in greater New York. It belonged to everybody and it had a deep sentimental attachment for those who first found their sobriety within its panelled walls. To those who first walked down that long narrow hallway in 24th Street, there will never be anything to replace the mantelpiece where we hooked an arm to keep from shaking as we delivered our first A.A. 'speech.' No food service will ever equal that little cubby hole where old Tom used to brew the meanest coffee ever to bite you back, poured from a battered and smoke smudged pot into big, chipped cups.

A.A. was growing into many self sustaining groups. It suddenly dawned on many of the boys and girls who lived, in furnished rooms mostly, in the center of Manhattan and whose connection with A.A. was tied up exclusively with 24th Street, that they were a group also. So, in the Spring of 1944, they officially brought the Manhattan Group into being.

As logical as this move was, it was also the beginning of trouble and confusion. Gradually, the 24th Street club became identified as a Manhattan Group operation. They occupied it didn't they? The Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday meetings held there were identified as 'Manhattan' meetings. So why should A.A.'s out here in Jersey (or Long Island, or Westchester, or Connecticut) help to support their clubhouse?

What a rat race! Because the mother of all New York groups wanted to be a group itself, the club that had brought so many of A.A.s together was loosing badly needed support! It was our first taste of group jealousies!

Actually 24th Street location had long since become too small for the traffic of 1944. So when Dr. Norman Vincent Peale offered A.A.s an aban-

***Won't you share your group's history with us? Each group history we receive is added to that group's file.***



24th Street Clubhouse.

doned Church on 41st Street, they grabbed it. The grand opening took place a couple of nights before Christmas of 1944.

It was a big barn of a place, easily large enough to accommodate the entire Metropolitan District, as a Central Office, a clearing house for inquiries, etc. but obviously a new kind of 'management' was needed. For this was to be a 'big time' operation.

At a heated election a new body of officers took over. They in turn set up a different form of corporation. This time the requirements for membership was not length of sobriety but money. A pledge system was instituted. Anyone who signed a promise to pay as little as \$1.00 or no more than \$5.00 a month (this last was suggested to put the quietus on ('Big Shots')) was a member of the corporation. Budgets were fixed on the basis of the pledged income.

Fine. Except that after the first few months the revenue dropped, and continued to drop until it got down around a mere 30% of the anticipated intake. Excuses for the non-payment of pledges were varied. Some just forgot, others, alcoholically, had simply overestimated their power to pay. Others didn't like the way things were being run. But perhaps, the biggest obstacle was the recurrence of the Manhattan group bugaboo.

The 'Manhattanities', by now the largest group in the area by far, had moved in to the club they continued to conduct their three weekly meetings in the new quarters, paying a nominal rent for the meeting room. The 'Dry Manhattans' as they called themselves, also had agreed to take over the night desk after the corporation's paid secretary's day was over. The outlying groups still considered that this, like 24th Street was a Manhattan proposition.

There were headaches too. Poker, for one. To some, gambling was far worse than drinking have ever been and shouldn't be allowed in an A.A. clubhouse. The scoffers' argument lost some of its sting when people who couldn't afford to lose were getting hurt and, in some cases, getting drunk because of it. Then it was discovered that several 'sharpies' probably not alcoholics at all, had got wind of the game and had simply wandered in off the streets to take the boys daily

for anywhere from \$50.00 to \$100.00.

Then they started a restaurant in the clubhouse. It was perhaps the most popular eating place ever to exist. Patronized heavily for coffee and snacks, they also seemed to be doing a pretty good business for full meals. Especially on meeting nights. It also became a handy way to start newcomers on the way back to job security. The kitchen help, counter men and bus boys were invariably rather shaky A.A. beginners. And let it be said that many a good solid A.A. today got his start back to prosperity in that restaurant. But when the auditors came in, after nine months, they were \$6,000 in the hole! A la carte went out of business - but quick! And the hat had to be passed to pay off our creditors!

Still, it was the Manhattan Group 'label' that kept the club from being an area wide service. So the board of directors decided to make the separation irrevocable! The clubhouse, henceforth, was to be actively operated by all groups' the meetings conducted within its walls were not to be only representative of the whole district but actually conducted, on a rotation basis, by outside groups.

The Manhattan group, seeing itself being dispossessed, set up a loud howl. There were also accusations that the Manhattanians were reluctant to give up getting first crack at the 12th Step Work which flowered through the club. Whatever the causes, the result was a wrangle that might have been a scandal if it hadn't been so typically alcoholic. While the fracas lasted, A.A. friends who had been practically blood brothers were hurling insults at each other and threatening much worse. Emotions were at the breaking point. We had what Bill W. sometimes called an 'incorporated dry bender' and it was a little dandy!

The directors had drawn up a new constitution which gave representation to all groups. It has since proved to be a pretty sound document but when it was

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notes, correspondence,**

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presented at a business meeting of members of the 'corporation' (heavily loaded with Manhattanians) one of the most violent scenes in New York history took place. Insults made the air an electric blue - 'thief', 'crook' were among the more printable!

This was the culmination of months of hurt feelings. Slips were, alas, frequent. Old friendships seemed blasted beyond repair. The new constitution was passed by a narrow margin and the old directors resigned in a body for a new set of officers to put the new plan into effect.

Violence and near-riot! But out of it came what we have today. The cracked friendships have mended nicely. And many of the wide-eyed antagonists of that brawl, closer friends than ever now, smile today when they recall it. And many of those who opposed the new order have since served faithfully and will in governing the intergroup association born out of bitter railing and condemnation.

## Sharing from Areas

By *Dave S., Alaska*

Next year's celebration: "50 years of A.A. in Alaska," will take place in September 1997. We will help to focus the membership on the importance of our foundation, where we came from.

Jo B. who lives in Bethel and Anchorage gave Archives a folder with several flyers, group reports and other misc. items dating back into the 1980's, lots of good insights. I'm sending this down to Anchorage to be put in area archives. . . Jo is another one of those active members who knows that the answers to our future lie in the foundation of our past. . . Thank you very much Jo!

### Arkansa Area Archives:

Bob W., Archivist reported: 1) Repair of Sterling C.'s Big Book complete; next area assembly three founders' Big Book may be on display under lock and key. 2) An extra room at Wolfe Street Center may soon be available to the archives providing much needed new space. 3) All old Grapevines, pamphlets, etc. are in a state of repair or need conservation work. 4) Help still

needed for conservation work; can have training workshop. 5) Supplies needed—tissue to repair old books, double sided tape, blotting paper, document repair tape and bond tissue. 6) Travel display at Ft. Smith; will display at Springtime In Ozarks; display was not invited at Pine Bluff.

Fay W., Associates Archivist reported: 1) Sterling C. had taped his memories and has given archives his father's Big Book. He also provided family photos to copy. 2) Judy Green's memories were taped. 3) Daughter of early A.A. member, Joe M. has found movie film and photos make by her father - promised archives copies; and daughter of Marvin W., an early A.A. member, will tape her memories and look through inventory/finders aide endeavor. 5) Last quarter, researchers from CTC and Convention Committee and others utilized the archives. 6) Should we pay more rent for possible new space at Wolfe Street? 7) Do we want other another open house next fall? 8) Still need old-timer interviews.

Committee Reports 1) Computer consultant, Chris L., reported: Automation going faster and smoother than anticipated, but much to be added to database. 2) Researcher, Jackie M., reported continued discovery of new data on early Arkansas. A.A. 3) Tape librarian no report. 4) Goal setting chair-person, Clay C., reported although there had been no meeting as a committee, they had talked of goals and studied archives committee minutes from day one. He stated primary purpose of archive: keep records straight; allow truth to prevail over myth; be source for A.A. fellowship; maintain history; preserve traditions. Clay mentioned use of CD-ROMs for the future preservation of archival data.

## Forums Are Valuable

*R. D., West Jordan, UT*

In 1994, I attended a Regional Forum in Boise, ID. Two workshops were presented on how important keeping an archives was for your area. Another workshop focused on doing a group history and starting a mini archives for your home group. I knew then what my next group project would be.

Working along sided the Utah Area Archivist from time to time, and assist-

ing the District 10 archives rep. in Salt Lake City, gave me the chance to learn what an archives was all about. Finally, I took on the District 10 archives job with lots of enthusiasm. After the forum in Boise, the idea of doing a mini archives for my home group was an exciting one. Although the project was delayed for a while, in October of 1995, a group history and mini archives were completed for "The Greater Kearns Group," Kearns, Utah. Hopefully, we'll keep adding to the group history.

I write this article in hopes of encouraging others in service to not only try and attend a Regional Forum, (the next forum will be Salt Lake City, UT. in 1996) but to record the history of their groups. When I started the history there were only two long timers left. Time was of the essence. I am so glad it wasn't too late to gather such valuable group information.

## Greater Kearns

*(group history)*

The "Kearns Group" (as it was called initially) was founded in 1958. An A.A. member and his wife (who helped start the first Kearns Al-Anon meeting.) welcomed about six other early members into their home for the A.A. meeting and refreshments afterward.

Several years later, the group moved to a church building and has had three other meeting places (two different churches and a bank building) since. On several occasions the group met at local parks.

Until 1982, after moving to a church, the Kearns Group was a podium speaker meeting. Later it became a topic/discussion meeting. Along with reading the twelve steps and twelve traditions, a page from an inspirational book was read.

In the summer of 1990, the group elected to replace that book with newly published "Daily Reflections" book. The group has always been a closed meeting with the exception of the last Monday of the month. At that time, we had an open meeting with Al-Anon participation and celebrated lengths of sobriety.

Over the years, the early members spread it around that the Kearns Group

was the greatest group in the Salt Lake Valley; consequently, the "Greater Kearns Group" name was adopted.

The group has had it's share of changes and additions. Our present

meeting place became a nonsmoking facility in 1992, but that didn't seem to make a difference in our attendance. Also in 1992, the group was fortunate enough to have an interpreter for the hearing impaired for a short time.

Today, the Greater Kearns group has approximately sixty home group members, with only two of our long timers left. Our formats have changed but the A.A. message stayed strong.

## Joe H., Oldtimer Shares

A few of us from Orlando were so impressed with the Palm Bay Long-timers meeting that we decided to try doing the same in our area.

Not having done a function of this type before, we wondered if even 100 would show. Before 8:00pm, all 385 chairs at the tables were occupied. We brought out 200 more chairs and placed them in an open area we now call the "in-filed." The 585 were exuberant over the occasion.

Bryan, sober six weeks, told me he felt goose bumps during the count-down. This, of course, is the feeling we tried to foster. He was amazed there was so much sobriety in that room-3,019 years accumulated by the 396 who signed the book.

Kevin B., North Florida Area Archivist, and I are having a lot of fun in sharing A.A. history. His work has him traveling through the state a lot. Now when he calls, I ask "Where are

you?" Places like Holopaw, Narcoossee and Yeehaw Junction are a few of the colorful locations he identifies. I was able to describe that last one, it having been my beer stop before reaching West Palm Beach for the night after visiting my headquarters in Georgia. I am considering starting "The Round Table of A.A. History" in my neighborhood. The only requirement to join The Round Table is a desire to share/learn/have interest or want involvement in A.A. history.

## Attitude

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company. . . a church. . . a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. . . we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable.

The only thing we can do is play on the one thing we have, and that is our attitude. . .

I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

And so it is with you. . . we are in charge of our Attitudes."

*Charles Swindoll*

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