

# Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office VOL 29, NO 3 March 2005

## STEPPING STONES

It's hard to say how Alcoholics Anonymous would have ended up if Bill and Lois Wilson had stayed homeless in 1941. Bill Wilson's only work then was with alcoholics, and his 1939 book about the AA fellowship had not gotten the acclaim that the group's early members expected. Lois was finding scattered jobs as a decorator, but her real work was keeping the couple off the street. The Wilsons slept at 51 places in two years.

Then 1941 brought what Bill Wilson called a godsend — a chocolate brown cottage in Bedford Hills with French doors that Lois adored and a fieldstone fireplace that reminded Bill of the East Dorset, Vt., home where he was born. The house belonged to actress Helen Griffith, whose husband drank himself to death and whose alcoholic friend had been "revived" by an AA group in New Jersey. She knew the Wilsons were destitute and offered them what Bill Wilson later called "unbelievably easy terms." The impact that the Wilsons had during the next four decades in the home they named Stepping Stones is still being lived out today. Yet the contributions they made to the understanding of alcoholism, the requirement for spiritual steps in recovery and the need for families of alcoholics to have their own support are so substantial that the National Park Service is preparing to crown the contemporary couple's home as historic.

"The Wilsons' influence on 20th-century society is immeasurable," reads the nominating statement, prepared by Margaret Gaertner, a preservation specialist with the Dobbs Ferry architectural firm Stephen Tilly. "AA enabled, and continues to enable, millions of people around the world to achieve and sustain permanent sobriety."

Although it may seem contradictory to call a 20th-century home historic in a region where historic properties often have 200-year pasts, the nominating form says the Wilson's are legends who make it easy to forget that as recently as 1940, alcoholism was considered one of society's great unsolved public health enigmas.

Bill Wilson proclaimed that alcoholism was a disease three decades before the American Medical Association did in 1956. The 12-step solution that Wilson and AA co-founder Dr. Bob Smith created to treat the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of alcoholism has become the standard for U.S. hospitals and clinics. Remarkably, AA was proved not in hospitals but in church basements, where recovering alcoholics shared their experiences, strength and hope to help others find the inspiration and power to stop drinking.

"Wilson realized that only another alcoholic could truly understand the tangled emotions evoked by his debilitating ordeal," reads the nominating form. The Wilson's cozy Dutch Colonial, with its barn-like gambrel roof and cement-block studio where Bill Wilson wrote, could be added to the state's Register of Historic Places in the spring. Stepping Stones could then join the National Register of Historic Places by summer. Managed by a foundation that Lois Wilson formed in 1979,

*Continued on Page 5*

# Calendar Events

## Upcoming Events

**33<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL, CALIFORNIA YOUNG PEOPLES CONVENTION**  
RESIDENCE INN OXNARD  
Oxnard, California  
March 11, 12 & 13, 2005  
Info: Candy (805) 816-5628

**40<sup>th</sup> AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CONVENTION**  
Perth, Western Australia  
March 24-28, 2005

**20<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL, VENTURA COUNTY ROUNDUP**  
Oxnard, California  
April 15, 16 & 17, 2005  
<http://www.vcroundup.com>

**A.A. DESERT POW WOW**  
Esmeralda Resort  
Indian Wells, California  
Info: SherAli @ 760-321-6568

**21<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL, SOUTH BAY ROUNDUP**  
Torrance, California  
May 27 - 30, 2005  
TORRANCE MARRIOTT  
<http://www.southbayroundup.org>

**2005 INTERNATIONAL A.A. CONVENTION**  
June 30 - July 3, 2005  
Toronto, Ont  
Registration forms are now available  
<http://www.aa.org>

Registration forms for the events above  
can be obtained at the Intergroup Meeting  
or at Central Office

## SERVICE COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

- March 21, 2005 **SFVH&I**  
**THIRDMONDAY**  
8pm Business Meeting  
Get Acquainted Workshop, 7pm,  
5657 Lindley Ave.  
\*\*\*\*\*
- April 4, 2005 **G.S. Districts #11, 16**  
**FIRSTMONDAY**  
6pm, 11455 Chandler Blvd, N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- April 4, 2005 **G.S. Districts #17**  
**FIRSTMONDAY**  
6pm, orientation, 6:30pm meeting  
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood  
\*\*\*\*\*
- April 5, 2005 **G.S. Districts #2**  
**FIRSTTUESDAY**  
6:30pm, 4011 Dunsmore  
La Crescenta  
\*\*\*\*\*
- April 6, 2005 **G.S. District #1**  
**FIRSTWEDNESDAY**  
6:30pm, 7552 Remmet  
Canoga Park  
\*\*\*\*\*
- April 6, 2005 **SFV Board of Directors**  
6pm, Central Office  
\*\*\*\*\*
- April 9, 2005 **G.S. District #7**  
**SECONDSATURDAY**  
Agua Dulce Woman's Club  
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd  
Sharon G. (661) 951-0372  
\*\*\*\*\*
- April 11, 2005 **SFV Intergroup**  
**SECONDMONDAY**  
6:30 pm Orientation  
7pm Business Meeting  
St. Innocents Church  
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

## Valley Events

As of publishing time,  
no Valley events had been submitted.

TO FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON  
YOU CAN:

COME TO CENTRAL OFFICE

CALL US AT 818-988-3001

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT

<http://www.sfvaa.org>

## Special Events

### CENTRAL OFFICE

The almost Memorial Day,  
almost Free

### Picnic

is scheduled for  
Sunday, May 22, 2005  
at Woodley Park.  
More details next Month.

# Service Opportunities & News

## Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

### PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

### HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the 3rd Monday of the month 8:00 PM @ St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Info: Sarah G. (818) 894-9921.

### SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons & fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30pm, Meeting at 7:30pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

### SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2005 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 PM at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

## Central Office News

### San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday. Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

### Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: [sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net)

### **San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting February 14, 2005**

Richard W. Chairperson — Meeting opened at 7:00 pm  
Treasurer's Report: See Insert  
*Service Committee information — see page 2 and 3 of the Recovery Times for more information*  
Old Business: None

New Business: Rick A. elected Picnic Chair

Birthdays Lisa - 2 yrs, Johnny - 4 yrs, Irma - 4 yrs,  
Rick - 4 yrs.

*Motion to adjourn 7:25 PM*

*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for Feb. is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup Meeting. These minutes are pending approval on March 14, 2005*

*Next Meeting - March 14, 2005*

*Prepared and submitted by: Dawn H. Recording Secretary*

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY!**

### **February 2005**

**Zahir** 1 year

**Keven D.** 9 years

**Rick A.** 9 years

**Hal S.** 33 years

#### Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

## **Spellbound by AA: An Interview with Nell Wing (Bill W.'s Secretary) June, 1994**

I wanted the Archives started, as did Bill. My father, who valued history, had a huge library at home, and after college I took a course in library science and liked it. I always thought that it was very important to preserve AA history, preserve how it started and how it grew – to remember the mistakes in order to avoid future ones. It certainly was important to Bill, but it was hard to get others to understand the need for setting up an Archives. In Europe, in the fifties, archives were thought to be very important, but were not generally considered so here in the United States. We're a "now" people; we don't always think about the future in terms of preserving the past.

In 1954, a fellow named Ed B. was hired to help Bill with his writing projects. Ed was a wonderful guy - a writer, a criminologist, and just newly sober - but he didn't think it was important to preserve all the material we had collected and researched. Our desks were opposite each other and I'd watch him going through pamphlets and letters, throwing many of them in the wastebasket. I'd say, "Hey, Ed, we can't throw all this away." I knew from experience that each of Bill's letters contained at least five different ideas! Ed had had a laryngectomy - so he'd write out a note, "No, that's not important anymore." I didn't argue, but after he left work at four o'clock, I'd take everything out of the wastebasket and put it all safely away in storage boxes until I could sort it out.

I'm especially grateful that Bill so strongly believed in preserving AA's experience. He knew the importance of getting things done, and had a special gift for timing. I often think, suppose he hadn't possessed certain leadership abilities -where would AA be now? Maybe some little sect, who knows? I think it was destined. I think the Higher Power set this up, I really do. The fantastic success of AA is like a big puzzle and there are pieces that you know fit in but you just don't know where until you look back into the past.

How has being so close to the Fellowship affected you? Well, I always like to say I'm on the outside looking in. (She began working in the office of the Alcoholic Foundation – now the General Service Office – in 1947 and in 1950 became Bill W's secretary. Nell worked for AA for thirty-six years.) About a week after I first came to the office, I attended an open AA meeting at a meeting hall on 41st Street. I remember a gentleman sharing his story and I found myself weeping - while everyone else was laughing! Right from the start, I was spellbound by AA. One person helping another who had a similar problem - that was as stunning an idea to me at that time as it is now.

Over the years, I've gained some spiritual gifts myself. Most non-alcoholics who are familiar with AA feel the same sense of growth.

Hanging around with a bunch of drunks for this long - it can only go up from here! I'll tell you something, I don't know people who have lived and learned and reacted to life like AA members. I've been taught - and I'm grateful. Every morning when I wake up, I express gratitude for what's happened to me.

*Taken from a portion of an interview with Nell Wing - Bill W's Secretary.*

## STEPPING STONES (continued from front page)

eight years after Bill's death at 71, Stepping Stones is a sacred site for Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon, the 12-step program co-founded by Lois Wilson for the spouses and children of alcoholics. Yet, Stepping Stones is not mobbed with pilgrims. A mere 1,000 visitors stop by each year — and up to half of those come for the annual picnic in June.

"We could increase our visitors by 100 percent, and we could handle it," said Eileen Giuliani, Stepping Stones' executive director. Of course, she means that theoretically. For one thing, Stepping Stones is surrounded by single-family homes and wants to keep the peace. The other matter is that not all recovering alcoholics and Al-Anons know that Stepping Stones is the Wilson home, much less that it is in Bedford Hills. The historical designation is sure to raise awareness among AA's 2.2 million members in 100,000 groups worldwide, and among the 29,000 Al-Anon groups with some 387,000 members in 115 countries, according to the organizations' estimates.

Giuliani said federal recognition will advance Stepping Stones' mission to protect the Wilson museum and archives, and promote the tenets of the AA experience. Neighbors — for once in Westchester — seem ready to yield to the prospect of more cars in the neighborhood.

"It's fine with me, and I've been here seven years," said Kim Cassone, a mother of two who lives near Stepping Stones on Oak Street. "They were out there to help people who had problems, and that is a good thing."

Once at Stepping Stones, visitors often feel an unmistakable presence: The air seems sweet, as though bread has been baking, but no one has lived here since Lois died at age 97 in 1988. The house is as Lois Wilson left it — wall lengths of books stacked five shelves high, scores of grandmotherly collections, a gallery's worth of photos and framed proclamations by dignitaries ranging from Pope Paul VI to President Eisenhower.

Susan Cheever, a Manhattan resident, will publish a biography, "My Name is Bill: Bill Wilson — His Life and the Creation of Alcoholics Anonymous," this month. Cheever, who grew up in Ossining, is the daughter of Pulitzer Prize-winning short-story writer John Cheever, whose own battle with alcohol she documented in her 1984 memoir, "Home Before Dark."

"It is a very powerful place," Cheever said of Stepping Stones. "The ghosts are still there."

It is a rite for visitors to sit at the 1920s porcelain-topped kitchen table where Bill Wilson had a spiritual breakthrough with his childhood friend Ebby Thatcher, one month before Bill got sober in December 1934. Ignoble as the little white table seems, it is venerated at Stepping Stones, sometimes drawing tears from those in recovery.

"I was overwhelmed," said Mark W., 51, of Topeka, Kan., a businessman who has been sober 10 years and is obliged under AA's 12 Traditions to be anonymous when speaking to the media. He has made three pilgrimages to Stepping Stones in the past three years. It was his second visit with his wife when he dropped his composure and cried. "I already knew how much I lost drinking," he said. "But sitting there made me realize how much I gained by staying sober."

Other relics nearly as special to visitors are the desk in Bill's backyard studio and the desk in the home's upstairs library, where in 1951 Lois Wilson organized the first Al-Anon groups. It was on Bill Wilson's desk, which he brought to Stepping Stones from New Jersey, that he wrote the important opening 11 chapters to "Alcoholics Anonymous" — the 575-page AA textbook that has sold 20 million copies.

"I don't want to call Stepping Stones a shrine, but it is pretty close," said Mark W. "If it hadn't been for those people, I wouldn't be sane."

*THE JOURNAL NEWS of Westchester County NY*

## ***Letting Go of Workaholism***

When I was a kid, I loved spending the day at my dad's drug store. My sister and I would go to work with him and play in the dingy basement with our two next door neighbors, whose mother worked at the store. My favorite game was Magazine, with me as the Editor. How I knew at age 8 what an editor was, I have no idea. I'd assign the other kids stories and then we'd use the left over stock of magazines and newspapers and cut and paste together our own publication. I don't think it's a huge coincidence that I ended up studying journalism in college. Or that I spent most of the last eight years working in advertising, as a writer, editor and creative director.

I loved advertising. Or I loved the adrenaline rush I'd get from the job on a daily basis. The fast pace. The insane deadlines. The ego trips that allowed me to feel like some kind of hero when I stayed up for 48 hours straight to finish a project. That was the crazy side of the job that fed right into the addict in me.

Drinking and drugging is pretty normal in the advertising world, so I was often able to convince myself and others that I was using alcohol and drugs to help 'fuel my creativity' or to 'handle the stress of my job.' But at some point the drugs and the alcohol took over and I became extremely incompetent. I started behaving unprofessionally at work and often couldn't even show up. Looking back, I don't know how I kept my job.

When I got sober (again) about 20 months ago, I came back to work with gusto. Suddenly I was clear headed again and able to focus on doing good work. I was transferred into a different department upon my return to the office and I attacked the new position with the same obsessive nature that I used to apply to getting loaded. I worked long hours, often being the first one in and the last one out of the office. In a few short months, I made the successful transition from active alcoholic to full-fledged workaholic.

I was semi-aware of the fact that my addiction had leapt to my job, but didn't know how to stop it. I decided to get outside help from a therapist and she helped me set some boundaries for myself. We set a time for me to leave the office each day, regardless of how much work was left undone. I began attending a noon AA meeting downtown a couple times a week to help keep me grounded. I started leaving for lunch each day, even if only for a 20 minute change of scenery. I discussed my workload with my boss regularly and asked for help when I was feeling overwhelmed instead of staying up all night to get things done.

At a little over one year of sobriety, I decided to quit my job and learn how to just be. I wasn't enjoying the new position or the adrenaline-fueled atmosphere anymore. After a lot of soul-searching and talks with my sponsor and therapist, I made the decision to leave. I was petrified of giving up the security of a regular paycheck. I had worked at the same ad agency for six years - during the entire time I'd been coming in and out of AA – and the job was the only consistent thing in my life.

*Continued on next page*

## Workaholism cont'd

The day I quit, the stars came into alignment and the world opened up to take care of me. I went to resign, but the HR woman told me the agency would be willing to release me through a layoff so I'd get severance and could collect unemployment. This is exactly what I needed to ensure I could take enough time off to figure out what to do next.

The first two months of not working were really difficult for me. I struggled with not having a schedule or structure to my day. It really sank in how much I tied my self esteem to what I do for a living when I suddenly wasn't doing anything but living. I started to feel depressed and anxious and thankfully reached to my AA tools for help. I began to go to more meetings and spend more time with friends both in and out of AA. I also picked up a commitment at The Point, which has been a good way both to do service and to indulge in the editorial process again, but in a more sane way. The last month has been better, though some days I feel almost too busy again.

I don't know where my career is going, which freaks me out in many ways because I'm not the type of person who does things without a plan. I'm just putting one foot in front of the other each day. I know there's a path unfolding in front of me, but I'm not able to see where it's going because for once, I'm not laying the bricks myself. My higher power is.

Today I'm holding on with faith that each step will reveal itself when it's time for me to take it. It's hard for me not to switch into that familiar make-something-happen mode because I'm scared of the open spaces in my life right now. But I'm trying to sit quietly and be mindful of the decisions I make each day. I'm trying to stay grounded in the AA practice of doing the next right thing. I trust it will inevitably take me somewhere even better than I can possibly imagine.

Cami W.,

**Newletter Subscription:** *If you wish to receive your copy of the Recovery Times at your home, please complete this form and return with a check (\$7 donation to cover delivery cost) to:*

*San Fernando Valley Central Office  
7417-E Van Nuys Boulevard  
Van Nuys, CA 91405*

### Current Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ St \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

New

Renewal

Additional Contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Moving ???:** *We need your former address as well as your new address to correct our records. Fill out both forms and mail to the address above.*

### Former Address

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ St \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_