

December 1944

BILL'S WIFE REMEMBERS WHEN HE AND SHE AND THE FIRST A.A.S WERE VERY YOUNG

As the wife of an early A.A., some of our experiences and my reactions to my husband's changed life may be interesting to other wives. Bill was an alcoholic, I believe, from the first drink he ever took, just a few months before our marriage. From then on, for seventeen years, I did everything I could think of to keep him away from liquor.

I will tell a little of our life before A.A. to help explain some of my later emotions. Bill and I had no children, so I soon felt that my job in life was to help Bill straighten himself out. As time went on, he earnestly tries to stop drinking. He was always very remorseful and perplexed the morning-after. We would then resolve to lick this liquor situation together, launching off on some new tack.

As his drinking got worse, all decision and responsibility had to be taken by me. It was lucky that we were companionable, for gradually as our social contacts were broken we were thrust back on each other for company. In order to get away from alcohol over the week ends, I used to engineer some sort of outing, as we both loved the outdoors. If our pocketbook was flat, we might take the subway to Dyckman Street ferry and hike along the Palisades to some scenic spot where we would nibble our sandwiches and gaze at the

view. Or we might ferry to Staten Island and walk there; perhaps broiling a steak over a campfire. We have hired a rowboat at Yonkers and, using a bathtowel as a sail, floated up the Hudson, to a spit of land near Nyack, where we camped and tried to sleep. We once went so far to get away from alcohol that we both gave up our jobs and took a whole year off. This we spent motorcycling and camping over half the United States.

These trips, although good for Bill's health, did nothing towards his permanent sobriety. In fact, his alcoholism grew steadily more serious. He lost job after job until I became entirely hopeless about him.

And then suddenly and finally Bill straightened out through the help of an old friend. At once I was convinced of his complete change and was of course extremely happy. Bill began to go to religious meetings and to work feverishly with alcoholics. I would go to meetings too and would try to share his newfound enthusiasms. He always had some drunk in tow and would work all night or get up in the middle of the night to go to the suburbs if one called him. We had drunks all over the house; sometimes as many as five lived there at one time.

One drunk committed suicide in the house after having sold about 700 dollars

worth of our clothes and luggage. Another slid down the coal chute from the street to the cellar when we refused him the front door. Two others took to fighting, and one chased the other all around the house with a carving knife. The intended victim was saved by a third drunk, who delivered the knife-minded one a knockout blow. An alcoholic who was living in the basement was invited up for a pancake breakfast. After eating his share, he suddenly put on his hat and started out of the door remarking that he was going to Childs for PLENTY of pancakes.

Bill had found a job about this time; and it used to take him away from home a great deal and I was left with one or more alcoholics to look after. Once after one of these boys lay in the vestibule all night and screamed invectives at me because I would not let him in. He was so loud the passers-by all stopped, looked and listened. Another time it was 4 a.m. before I succeeded in towing a drunk home. He was anxious to be at his job the next morning and we had gone out around midnight to look for a doctor, having been unable to get one to come to the house at that hour. I helped his shaky steps up and down stoops, lit his cigarettes for him and finally, when we could not rouse a doctor, held a drink to his lips in a bar. When I asked him how

he felt he said, "Well, a bird can't fly on one wing." After a few more drinks I managed to get him home, but he did not get to his job the next morning. I was once suddenly taken sick, and when my sister arrived to nurse me she found five men milling around in the living room, one of them muttering, "One woman can look after five drunks but five drunks cannot look after one woman."

Now to describe my reactions to it all. When Bill first sobered up I was terribly happy but soon, without my realizing it, I began to resent the fact that Bill and I never spent any time together any more. I stayed at home while he went off somewhere scouting up new drunks or working with old ones. My life's job of sobering up Bill was suddenly taken away from me. I had not yet found anything to fill the void. And then there was the feeling of being on the outside of a very tight little clique of alcoholics into which no mere wife could possibly enter. I did not understand what was going on with myself until one Sunday, Bill asked me to go with him to a meeting. To my own surprise as well as his I burst forth with, "Damm all your meetings," and threw my shoe at him as hard as I could. This bad display of temper woke me up. I realized that I had been wallowing in self pity; that Bill's change was simply miraculous; that his feverish activity with alcoholics was absolutely necessary to his sobriety; and that if I did not want to be left way behind I had better jump on the bandwagon, too!

Bill's wife, *Lois Wilson*