

## Lois W.

March 4, 1891 - October 5, 1988



Lois seemed to have been born with the ability to lead. Her family background, innate talents and abilities, capacity and interest in learning, and her devotion to Bill all seemed to prepare her for the role she assumed later in life.

Lois was born into a loving family, the eldest of six children.

Her father was a surgeon in Brooklyn; her mother, a homemaker. She said her parents truly loved one another and taught their children to show affection, how to make peace with one another, and how to admit mistakes without feeling ashamed. She felt particularly close to her mother and wanted to follow her example. "Absolutely without self-consciousness and totally selfless, Mother loved people and people loved her," Lois wrote in her autobiography, *Lois Remembers*.

Growing up, Lois's family spent almost half the year in Manchester, Vermont with children's nurses, private tutors, and household servants. During the summers, they stayed at a bungalow near Emerald Lake they called "the Camp" and the family would go bike riding, boating, antique collecting, and picnicking.

Lois was formally educated at private schools in Brooklyn and graduated from Packer Collegiate Institute in 1912. After graduation, Lois studied drawing at a New York art school and later became a receptionist at a Brooklyn YWCA. She was promoted to personal assistant and then girls-work secretary before moving to Short Hills, New Jersey, to teach at a progressive private school.

It was Lois's brother Rogers who introduced Lois and Bill. At first she thought of Bill as nothing more than one of her brothers because he was four years her junior. The following summer, they were thrown together as part of a group of young people picnicking, hiking, and driving around the countryside. Lois admitted this time she found Bill "the most interesting, the most knowledgeable, the finest man

I knew." He spent long afternoons telling her about his visions and dreams. Eventually, they fell in love and became secretly engaged.

They planned to marry after Bill graduated from the military college he was attending, but his studies were interrupted by the approach of World War I. Even in the midst of wartime uncertainties, Lois remembered their courtship as a time of great promise for them both.

Although Bill's drinking began before they were married, it was not apparent to Lois that he had a problem with alcohol. To her, his drinking was the result of too much socializing and she felt sure she could return him to his former abstinence after their wedding. They married in 1918 before Bill was sent to Europe.

When Bill returned, Lois took time off from her work to go on a well-documented year-long motorcycle trip with him. Later she completed a course at the New York School of Interior Decorating and held several more volunteer positions, including work with the Adult Education Committee at the YWCA.

Although Bill was a talented stock analyst, his drinking made it difficult to hold down a job. Lois's salary became necessary to maintain the household. Problems at home were mounting and Lois poured out her anguish in a journal: "God help me to help him, my husband, my boy, who is more than life to me. God give me wisdom and strength and patience, for I love him, I love him, I love him." Thus began many years of alternately mothering Bill and developing interests of her own.

Bill's battle with alcoholism led to several hospitalizations before he found sobriety in A.A. Lois was by his side through it all. When they moved into their first home of their own, Stepping Stones in Bedford Hills, New York, in 1941, Lois' thoughts were of decorating her home and working in her garden. But that was not to be. Ten years later the Al-Anon fellowship began in the upstairs room of Stepping Stones.

Lois's life with Bill is well-documented in *Lois Remembers*. This book is not only the love story of a devotion to Bill that remained steadfast throughout their life together and continued after Bill's death in 1971, it also describes a life-long love story with the

Al-Anon fellowship which Lois served until the end of her days. Lois often said,

*"It takes only one person to start something, but many others to carry it out."*

Throughout their lives, Anne and Lois remained close personal friends. They saw each other for the last time in 1983. In their eighties and nineties, respectively, they reminisced about the early years. While many of the details escaped them both, the friendship that underlay their extraordinary work was as real as ever. These two women, who always thought of themselves as ordinary people, worked together in quiet, practical ways to accomplish their extraordinary contribution to tens of thousands of families and friends of alcoholics. Al-Anon was built on their common sense, capacity for caring, and willingness to help others. Their work has since been shared by many who continue to volunteer their hearts and hands in the service of Al-Anon.

For more about our cofounders and Al-Anon's history read:

Al-Anon Books

*Lois Remembers* (B-7)

*How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics* (B-22)

*The Al-Anon Family Groups—Classic Edition* (B-5)

*Many Voices, One Journey* (B-31)

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AL-ANON FAMILY GROUPS®  
hope for families & friends of alcoholics

# Al-Anon's



Anne B.



Lois W.

*The extraordinary work of two ordinary women*

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*The story of our cofounders is the story of the principles of Al-Anon in action. Before Al-Anon ever started, there were isolated families of alcoholics who formed separate groups, searching for a way to recover from the disease of alcoholism. Just as those early members who sought recovery learned first-hand the lesson that our program is a "we" program, it took these two women to unite our early Family Groups and isolated individuals into a cohesive and unified fellowship.*

*Lois and Anne also illustrated that members with extremely different talents and exceptionally dissimilar backgrounds can recover from the disease of alcoholism; that each of us can make meaningful, enduring and powerful contributions to families and friends of alcoholics ...whether the alcoholic is still drinking or not.*

*The portraits of Lois and Anne as seen on the front cover hang in the lobby of Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters in Virginia Beach, Virginia*

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## Al-Anon's Cofounders

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Anne B. and Lois W. met in 1941 as they drove their husbands, Devoe B. and Bill W., to A.A. meetings in New York City and Greenwich, Connecticut, the only meetings in the vicinity of their homes at that time. Although there were several "A.A. Auxiliaries" in the area that Anne and Lois frequently attended together, it was while waiting for their husbands that they began to discuss how they could apply the principles of A.A. to their own lives. It soon became apparent that personal growth through spiritual principles was the answer to much of their confusion created by alcoholism. As their friendship deepened, Anne and Lois frequently depended on each other. This turning of one individual to another in friendship, love, and mutual support was the starting point from which the worldwide organization of Al-Anon began.

The fellowship had its formal beginnings at Lois' desk in the upstairs room of Stepping Stones. Using A.A.'s list to contact family members who wrote to the A.A. Foundation, Anne and Lois had much to

share. Though their own efforts to help their husbands attain sobriety had failed, their spouses had found success with the aid of others.

*When Anne or Lois became discouraged because their efforts went unnoticed, they looked to each other for affirmation and support.*

They also drew strength from the letters they received in which family members wrote of despair followed by hope and recovery.

In 1951 Anne and Lois began working to unite the Family Groups into the Al-Anon fellowship. Anne performed the business functions and Lois was the organizer. "Lois had the ideas and I wrote them down," Anne said. Lois signed letters as "Acting Chairman," Anne signed them "Secretary." When Lois wrote our first pamphlet, *Purposes and Suggestions*, Anne typed and edited the manuscript. She wrote down expenses for stationery, mimeographing, and postage in what became known as "the little black book" and also created a card file for individuals and groups that can still be seen in the World Service Office Archives in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Soon they had outgrown the resources of the upstairs room at Stepping Stones. Lois called together an Advisory Committee made up of Chairpersons and Secretaries of local Al-Anon groups. Together they decided to accept A.A.'s offer of space at the 24th Street Clubhouse in New York City. Anne might well have continued as the "business partner" except that the volume of work increased so dramatically that more help was needed and the first paid employee, Henrietta S., was hired.

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### Anne B.

November 9, 1899 - February 24, 1984

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Anne was born in Brooklyn and was, by her own admission, a sickly, shy, and fearful girl. Her father, a cabinet maker who later became a chauffeur, often traveled with his employer's family throughout Europe and other exotic places, leaving his family at home. Anne claimed she did not get along with

her mother, who worked as a seamstress.

In one of a series of childhood illnesses, Anne contracted St. Vitus' Dance, a nervous disorder; she was eight years old. As a result, the family moved to Chappaqua, New York, the "country" as it was known then, where she was educated in a one-room schoolhouse. Her only sister died of heart disease four years later when Anne was 12 years old.

Anne met Devoe in Sunday School when he offered to drive her home; she was 17 years old and he was 19. At the time, Devoe owned his own garage where he sold and serviced high-priced foreign cars. They married two years later after Anne finished a course at a local business college. Within a year, their daughter Madelyn was born; a second daughter, Charlotte, arrived seven years later.

At the time they married, Devoe had never touched alcohol. Then for some inexplicable reason, he stopped by a local bar one day and failed to return home at his usual time. Devoe's drinking was problematic from the start and like the wives of many alcoholics, Anne moved quickly to secure the business and keep their family intact. In nurturing their business, she developed a business acumen she later used to the advantage of our fledgling fellowship.

Devoe's drinking so distressed Anne that at one time she left the children with friends and family in New York and fled to Florida to obtain a divorce. However, she soon returned to her husband and children. It was following that separation that a family physician suggested to Anne that she talk to Wilbur S., a recovering alcoholic who met with "a bunch of drunks." In desperation, she telephoned him. Wilbur gave her an A.A. pamphlet and Anne left it on the coffee table at home. The next day Devoe came to her tearfully saying that he had to "do something about this drinking." Anne later recalled that she saw this incident as the intervention of a Higher Power. Devoe began attending A.A. meetings, but Anne's difficulties were far from over. Devoe was a periodic drinker despite attending meetings and Anne's response to these bouts of drinking was, by her own admission, to become either fiercely independent or deeply sympathetic.

Anne recounted the story of how with Lois' help

she came to start the first Family Group in the New York metropolitan area. "I attended an A.A. meeting in New York and heard an A.A. girl give her first talk. After the meeting she said to me, 'I wish there were groups for non-alcoholics, because my husband doesn't understand why I have to go to meetings...'" Anne was so moved, she couldn't sleep that night. The first meeting was soon held in Anne's home in Chappaqua and attended by 15 women. Anne had chosen the same night as the A.A. meeting held in the local firehouse. The men decided to end their meeting early and troop over to the Family Group to sit in and listen. True to her character, Anne interrupted their plan by closing the meeting early. Laughingly, she said later that the men thought they were being talked about. That was not so. Everyone at the Family Group meeting was talking about their own experiences in dealing with the disease of alcoholism in a loved one—just like the meetings we have today.

Almost 10 years after Devoe found A.A., he finally achieved sobriety. Ten years later, in 1960, he died, a well-respected man in the community and director of the local bank.

The following year, Anne married Bill W.'s cousin Howard and moved to Connecticut. They were divorced just two years later. Anne moved first to Florida, then Illinois, and later to Indiana. In 1974 Anne moved to Santa Paula, California to be near her daughter Madelyn.

Although by this time Anne was no longer active in Al-Anon service, she continued to work on her own spiritual growth. As she realized that her insecurities were part of her life, long before the onset of Devoe's drinking, Anne frequently referred to the Fourth Step: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." She said she spent two years with pencil and paper taking a personal inventory.

Anne left our fellowship with the message that each of us in our own way can lead purposeful and meaningful lives through working and giving service to the Al-Anon program. She continued to live the program until her death in 1984. Her legacy to Al-Anon is that personal recovery is possible whatever the circumstances. Anne often said,

*"I never felt alcoholism did something 'to me,' it did something 'for me!'"*