

The Wilson - Burwell Letters

This is a collection of written interactions between Jimmy Burwell and Bill Wilson that span from 1940 through to 1965. Jimmy's story ("A Vicious Cycle") can be found in the Fourth Edition of the Big Book on page 219. Jimmy started AA group #4 in Philadelphia and their first meeting was on February 28, 1940.

March 1, 1940

Dear Jimmy:

I hear Fitz came to join you at the first meeting of A.A. in Philadelphia – how was the meeting?

It seems impossible to dig up any bona fide requests for assistance in the territory around Philadelphia. Here is one though that might (undoubtedly will) cause some inconvenience, but sounds like it might turn out to be something.

Mrs. Arthur W. Corning, Apt. G-41, Blind Brook Lodge, N.Y. wrote to us concerning her brother - Joseph Hoopes - who is now in the state hospital at Delaware. She sent him the book and wanted to know if any of our members could contact him while he was there. Can you do anything on this? Will you let me know either way? Thanks.

Sincerely,
Bill

March 4, 1940

Dear Jim:

Will you let me know with all speed at post office box #658, Church Street Annex, New York City just what time, and just where, and how to get to your Philadelphia meeting Thursday P.M.

It seems a great movement towards Philadelphia is welling up here amongst the brethren. At least one automobile load will put in an appearance, and perhaps two.

It never rains - it pours! Twenty five dollars, coin of the realm has just come into my hands and I am endorsing it over to you as per enclosed.

Once more Jim, a lot of thanks for the automobile. We appreciate what you did so much.

Now a final burst of generosity comes from Ruth Hock who is sending you one returned book and one new one, partly in consideration for the big business done at Wanamakers, partly for the use of the Philadelphia brethren, but mostly, I suspect, because she likes you so well.

Yours,
Bill

December 9, 1940

Dear Jimmy,

Sorry you couldn't get up. I was away and so missed Bill Wells.

Jack Alexander expects to be in Philadelphia all day next Sunday. He would like to see Drs. Hammer and Saul and also the man in charge of alcoholics at the Philadelphia General Hospital. Will let you know just when he will arrive and may come down myself, proceeding with him. Sunday night to Akron where he will also take in the Cleveland group, going from there to Chicago and finally writing his article at St. Louis, which is his home town. This schedule is still tentative so will keep you posted.

Wes Northridge tells me there is another opening in your out-fit and he expects to interview your Mr. Carns (?) about it within a day or two. If you feel you can, I wish you would write this gentleman and put in a good

word for Wesley with your boss. Some months ago I would not have done this for I have learned to be careful about pushing people too hard for jobs under some conditions.

But in this case I feel very different. There has been a really miraculous transformation in Wes. It is one of the most remarkable things I have ever seen and I am positive that it is going to stick. Lois and I rode with him over to the Rockland meeting the other night when we had a good chance to talk for a long time. All of the cockiness and disagreeable egotism is a thing of the past. Moreover, he had laid hold of the spiritual angle in a big way. So I am willing to bet on him without any reservation whatever. As you know he has held some swell jobs and is usually competent to make the kind of industrial survey you are selling.

Please find enclosed a copy of my report to the Trustees. Ruth is away in Cleveland and I can't give you Kathleen Parkhurst's address.

Give all the boys my best together with greetings from the whole New York group who appreciated the telegram from the Philadelphia group. Though we haven't framed the telegram, it hangs on the bulletin board big as life.

Be seeing you soon.

As ever,
Bill

January 11, 1941

Deal Jim:

First of all please thank Art McMasters and all of the Philadelphia group for their telegram of Christmas greeting to Lois and me. An avalanche of cards, letters, etc. came in from all over the country and it gives us both a great thrill to realize how many true friends we have.

Your detailed description of operations at the Research Council was most gratifying. I have followed up the Foster Kennedy situation to the point where Blaisdell, although he won't read the paper himself, states he will request Dr. Smith to prepare and read one at the New York Academy of Medicine. And as you know, Dr. Foster Kennedy will speak on the paper and the entire proceedings will be published in the Academy Quarterly. This will, of course, validate our work all over the world and will, in one grand short cut, make it possible to sell any doctor the program immediately.

Some of the follow-ups you suggested I can make myself when Lois and I come down to Washington, Baltimore and Philadelphia, which will be some time within the next two weeks. The rest of them I think ought to wait on publication of the Post article which is so powerful (we have just seen the manuscript) that it alone ought to push almost any doctor over because of its clear description and such convincing statistical data. Sommers, the Post editor, wrote us a nice letter saying that he believes the article will prove a great one both for the Post and for us; and after reading the article there can be no doubt of that.

As a model A.A. group I know all you Philadelphians will be set for the new grist of prospects when they appear.

With best to Mary, yourself, and all our friends,

As ever,
Bill

January 23, 1941

Dear Jimmy:

Just sort of a note to send along a copy of the second effort at a bulletin. It doesn't contain very much and I'm full of ideas for it and such, but you can realize how difficult it is to get very much of anything on one page. And it is just out of the question to put out a lengthy bulletin right now. So this will have to do for the present. I've sent a few along to Art McMaster.

Bill won't be down for another week or two though he definitely has the trip in mind. Finley Shepard is working on the Foundation money angle right now and Bill wants to be handy. Besides which Lois has the gripe and won't be set to go anywhere for another week. She is feeling much better now and is on the upgrade but needs rest and quiet.

As you have perhaps already heard, the article will have the first three pages of that issue of the Post. We don't know yet whether the cover will carry an announcement of it or not, but it may. There has been some confusion about pictures, but they now have an assortment and what they will use only the Lord knows. They have club pictures, hospital pictures, office pictures, large group pictures and what have you. The big group picture taken in Cleveland was a flop. After they went to all the trouble to get four or five hundred people together, and hired a commercial photographer, he let them down for the picture, for some unknown reason, just didn't come out. They had to get another group together, about a hundred and take that.

Did the Post get in touch with any of you down there for some splash picture of some kind. They wanted something hair raising like a man being carried into a hospital on a stretcher or something. Will you let me know if they did? I hope not!

No other news - my best to Mary - be seeing you -

Ruth

December 11, 1947

Dear Jimmy:

Well, it's been a long time. But you know me. More than usually delinquent, I realize I never answered your request for a financial lift. Nor have I thanked you for that history of A.A. The first came when I was feeling pretty low myself and had already committed the dough the Foundation set aside for us to improvements on the house. So, actually I wasn't in a position to help. Later on George Hood, I believe, brought me the history.

That history I did read with tremendous interest, as have several others who have since been to the house. I think several of the oldtimers ought to wright [sic] up their impressions just as you have done. If we had a dozen such accounts, I think it would be possible to piece together, after referring to the office files, an extremely accurate account of just what happened and who did what. Personally I don't care a rap who did what. But I suppose there will be a lot of debate about it later on. So the material should be assembled from different points of view and the best possible record made. I don't think it would be possible for me ever to write a detailed history of A.A. I could only tell the story in a very general way. But if this thing keeps growing and making a stir, I suppose some historian will want to know the real facts by and by. If we don't assemble them now, the record never will be anywhere near straight. And lots of interesting detail and incidents will be forever lost. So your effort in this direction is tremendously appreciated, Jim. Don't let my negligence of correspondence make you think it isn't.

Lois and I expect to get out on the road a great deal after the first of the year. It looks like we might hit the Coast beginning at Vancouver and, say about the middle of March. Thereafter we should work southward, arriving two or three weeks later at San Diego. This however, is tentative -- only a guess. The idea of the trip would be to help explain and consolidate the Traditional material I have been publishing in the Grapevine. The planks of our recovery platform seem pretty solid. The sidewalls of the structure are now going up. They are the Traditions.

And too, we shall have to do something further about the New York Headquarters. A self-perpetuating Board of Trustees, unown [sic] to most A.A. members, could never stand up over the long future. So we shall have to have some kind of annual conference in which out-of-towners delegated for the purpose would sit down and talk things over with the Trustees, the office, and the Grapevine, and make a joint annual report to the Groups. But how in the hell to choose this conference without politics and uproar has always been a puzzle.

After a lot of thought, I am beginning to think we have an answer -- at least a partial one. The conference can't be too big, it can't be too small. It can't ever be a political or governing body. Just a bunch of sane AA's who will sit down and see whether things are going all right in New York and make a report on it. I think that's all we shall ever need. But how shall we make the assembly of the conference simple, fair, and not political? That's the burning question.

What do you think about this? Why not divide the country, including Canada, into four equal quarants. [sic] Suppose we take latitudes and longitude line already on the map. Say 40 [appears that it said 10 and was corrected by ink to 40] degrees latitude and 95 degrees longitude. The north and south line would pass just west of Chicago, the east and west line just above San Francisco and Washington. Then why not build the conference up a little at a time. The first year a panel of twelve, the next, twelve more, and the third year another batch of twelve. At the end of three years the total of out-of-towners [sic] would be thirty-six. Which, plus the Headquarters people, would make a conference of about fifty. To get the first panel of twelve, we would go to the three largest groups in each area. These twelve would be delegated for a three-year term, and each would have an alternate. The second year we would do exactly the same thing. We would then have six people from each quadrant. But this would still leave a serious inequality. As matters stand to-day [sic] the northeast quadrant would contain fifty per-cent [sic] of all the A.A. members. So I suggest that the third panel of twelve be selected on the size of the town only. No matter in which quadrant the cities happen to be. This would weight matters up a little in favor of the northeast quadrant, where so many AA's are to-day. [sic] If things change later the composition of the conference would shift accordingly. We might even include foreign centers in this list of twelve, or we might create, later years, a special foreign panel.

Having thus designated the conference cities mechanically, why shouldn't we suggest to them that they do the same in picking out a delegate. Otherwise we shall have thirty-six political brawls every year at the designated point. Why couldn't central committees, or in case it is where there is no strong central committee, why couldn't the groups themselves each nominate their choices. And it ought to avoid politics or hand picking from here. Even though some hand picking might be done at the present time, it surely couldn't be done later on when the present old-timers are gone. I'm convinced the whole process will have to be pretty much mechanical. What do you think about all this?

Please write me and tell me about all the news, especially about yourself and that good wife of yours. Lois and I hope you both prosper and we shall look forward so much to seeing you when we come.

As ever,

Bill

3943 Louisiana Street
San Diego 4, Calif.

January, 16th 1948

Dear Lois and Bill

It was swell hearing from [sic] you at last, especially to hear you all are coming out our way this spring. I think you will be very agreeably surprised at the real progress of AA on the Coast. They seem to go to many more meetings than the Eastern groups and all the groups seem to e shaping up beautifully, especially in the last year or so. One of the things I do especially like out here in [sic] that they read the Fifth Chapter of the Book before the meetings. This seems to have more meaning to the new fellows than the reading of the Steps alone.

The business deal I wrote you about did not materialize so no harm was done. I left the Government (War Assets) in August and played around with a couple of things. Now I hope I have a sales job that might work out for the long pull but will not mention it until you come out.

January 8th was my tenth year in AA but 10th year of sobriety will not be completed until June 15th, so hope you will be here for it.

Bill, your plans for an annual national conference with rotating representation from the country at large is the best news I have heard from NY since the Grapevine was started. In my opinion it will be the big step in making AA solid for the future - it will help AA groups to understand each other better and it will do more to sell, consolidate and perpetuate the AA traditions than anything else possible. It will also save many new groups much of trial and error that has been necessary in the past, and I think you will be very agreeably surprised to see how well they will all get along together in conference.

Your idea of dividing the country into quadrants sounds fine. However, I would suggest, first, that you have a preliminary meeting of about twelve or fourteen AA's from the heavy membership area. You can then

present your conference ideas to them and they can polish them up - then they will go back to their own groups and present the ideas as their own. This, I believe, would make for better acceptance of the plans nationally and will make all feel part of the planning. My thought would be to have each of the following areas send a representative to New York for a round table discussion of a national conference and rotating board

New York Atlanata[sic] Seattle
Boston St. Louis San
Francisco
Philadelphia Denver Los
Angeles
Washington,DC [sic] Dallas Cleveland
Chicago Detroit

Would suggest that each are pick their representative from among their five oldest and most active AA's and that their sobriety shoud [sic] at least be five years wherever possible. The area should finance the trip and the men chosen should be in a position to take time off and be willing to circulate among their local groups on their return and put the idea over to them. Of course all this could be suggested and sold to the groups gradually through the Grapevine and special letters to the groups at large. I would do everything to make the groups feel that this was their party and that all the constructive ideas would be considered.

It has always been my idea that the drunk will support anything in which he is given an active part.

So much for that. Rosa and I do love it out here. Everyone has been grand to us and we feel a real part of the community and the local AA. Rosa has been very active and helpful in the Women's Group and I am really trying hard to stay out of the middle of things. I am a great believer in the oldtimers getting on the sidelines and letting the two and three year boys and girls do the dirty work. Us oldsters got to know to [sic] much!

I'm so glad George Hood was able to give you the "History" and that you hope to assemble similar material in order that a factual story may be written up - you are so right that with the passage of time so much is apt to be lost or forgotten.

We have had a great deal of fun with your mother - we were all together for Thanksgiving and Christmas both this year and last. She is one grand fellow and is now a real AA - that's what she says.

Well, all here are looking forward to your visit and are so glad to hear all the good reports on how well you and Lois are.

Best to you both,

Jim

August 23, 1949

Dear Jimmy and Rosa,

Thanks so much for all the up-to-the-minute news. Just got a letter from mother saying she nearly took the plane East. Better luck ext time, though I doubt she will come down in winter weather. Lois and I devoutly hope she will make it just for once before it is too late.

I note with a lot of interest that you saw Dick Stanley. What you say is not surprising for we oldtimers, nearly all of us, are getting frightfully stale. I know that's very true of me. I have lived and worked far too long in the trouble department of AA. Anybody who does enough of that will finally go sour or crack up entirely. It is so everywhere. The oldtimer situation is getting to b a real problem. In a sense it means we all have to start over again and get back to first principles. I am glad to see at the group and intergroup levels that our service affairs are in the hands of two or five year old people. Moreover these folks were not so badly burned as we oldsters. As a class they are not so screwy.

As you have probably gathered form Dick, neither he nor Dr. Bob are for a conference. They seem sincerely persuaded that it would cause more trouble than cure. Naturally this pits [sic] me in a hard spot. It is most difficult to oppose Smithy under any circumstances and especially now on account of his health. Therefore I suppose I expect I shall just have to wait until experience makes it painfully clear to everybody that the

groups must participate or the Foundation, the Office, and the Grapevine will go under. We always earn the hard way anyway. Even if a conference proved a flop, and I could know that before hand, I would still be for trying out the idea. Basically these central assets belong to the AA movement. Nobody has the right to withhold from the group their opportunity to participate in the management of their own affairs. However, time will tell the story.

Meanwhile I'm withdrawing as much as possible from any special activity hoping to be able to put some of the last ten years experience on paper. Whether I shall find the energy and the enthusiasm to see the job through, I frankly don't know, but at least I can try.

Mother always writes so enthusiastically about your helpfulness, I know it means so much to her, so please know of my great thanks.

Bill

December 15, 1950

Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell
3611 Park Blvd.
San Diego, california [sic]

Dear Jim and Rosa:

Thanks for your letter of November 10th. Plenty certainly happened since you penned that one. It is hard to get used to the idea that Dr. Bob is gone. But his job was well finished. No more could have been ask [sic] of him. Yet it will take a log time to get used to his absence.

Much obliged for all you say about A.A. on the coast. I suppose that by now you have seen the Conference Plan. I would very much like your view of it, though I guess you did not see the preliminary draft. There wasn't too much time for consultation because final approval came only at the October Trustees meeting. We have to hold the first session in April or put it off a whole year. The Foundation Annual Reports would be too cold if held at any other date.

With much interest I note what you saw about Hal Silverton. I fully agree, too, that Hal's part in the early days on the Coast has been persistently overlooked. The first time I ever went to L.A., he seemed noticeably not included in the festivities. Maybe I am wrong about that, but such was the appearance. Personally, I have always liked him a lot. These considerations would all make me look favorably on him for the post you suggest.

But, are there not other considerations too? Around Los Angels, there is the largest aggregation in all A.A. Today, not one in a hundred of them know Hal. I don't believe he has been active in that area for years. These facts, would of course, suggest some old-timer in L.A. who has continued to be active and who is still favorably well-known. Besides, I understand Hal's health is very dubious; that he is often on the sick list. These are the facts which give me pause when I consider your suggestion.

At best, the Trusteeship on the Coast is a ticklish business. So many oldtimers are in each other's hair or are so little known that we may have to ask a Group Representatives [sic] assembly to pick one out for us. This hand-picked business gets more full of dynamite each year A.A. grows older.

So think it all over again and let me have your reaction. Meanwhile, Lois joins in Christmas best to you both.

Devotedly,

Bill

August, 31, 1951 [sic]

Dear Jim and Rosa,

Thanks greatly for your good letter, containing fine news of you, also the sad news concerning Earl Ryan, to whom I have just written.

As you say, the Conference did come off very well. The results upon offices finances has already been excellent. We have taken in enoufg [sic] money during the past seven months to finance the Office for six months. Meanwhile, the Grapevine deficit has dropped from one thousand a month to the break-even pint. The books in Works Publishing are also doing much better. So we Won't use up any more reserve for 1951, and if things continue this way, we may add ten thousand dollars to it at the end of the year.

Respecting a name for the Family Groups. Lois and Ann Bingham, a neighbor, have opened a Post Office Box for these groups. Right now, they are corresponding with many of them, the question of the name still being up in the air. To date, their correspondence suggests that the name may turnout to be Alanon Family Group or the Alanon Group. Only a few seem to like the word "Associate". This is because, I suppose, there is still a good deal of hostility toward them in some quarters. So they do not wish to use any word which would indicate n alliance with A.A.

As you may have heard, Alcoholic Anonymous is receiving the so-called Lasker Award for meritorious service in the public health, to be awarded at the San Francisco Opera House October 30th. I shall probably come to San Diego to see Mother prior to that time.

Meanwhile, best luck-and congratulations.

As
ever,

WGW/nw

Jim and Rosa Burwell
4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, California

November 24, 1953
Dear Folks,

You two have certainly received tough assignments lately. And this is to tell you how often Lois and I regret your illness, think of you, and pray for you. We do hope t his letter finds you on the up and up both physically and in spirit. We need hardly question the latter for knowing you as we do, you are bound to have a lot of what it takes.

Please do write and tell us just how things are with you and don't forget to let us know if we can do anything. Also, if you are up to it, what about A.A. and the news out there.

Back here, there isn't a lot to report. Group contributions for the office are coming in pretty well and will, we think, meet the year's budget all right. Slowly and surely, the general idea seems to be sinking in with the groups. In many spots, the realization that A.A. has to function as a whole, as well as in parts, is taking hold nicely. The new book has gone mighty well, also - about 30,000 copies will be sold this year, about 10% of these by Harpers. However, the sales of the big book has slowed down some 30%. whether this means the new book will cut into the old one permanently, we can't say. It may be that the new line of pamphlets will slow the sales of the both books down eventually. Only tie will tell that. It won't matter too much anyway, so long as people get the message.

Speaking about the new book, I suddenly realized I do not think I sent you folks one. I really meant to do this and so you will soon find one in the mail, with all my affection and thanks.

So, good friends, hold fast. May God bless you. Write soon.

Devotedly,

Bill

WGW/nw

Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell
4193 Georgia, Street
San Diego, California

January 27th 1957

Dear Bill,

Many thanks for the copy of the A.A. story - and the grand recognition you gave me. It's much more than I deserve except that I did prove to the original crowd that a "nonconformist" had to change to get well. So maybe that was good.

Bill, this history is the very finest thing you have done, and especially for those who come to A.A. future. It is important that they know how and why we came to be what we are, and why we should continue on our present lines. Too, the way you brought all contributors in is splendid - it must have been hard, painstaking job. I don't see how any of the originals can kick-back or complain. I was particularly pleased at the way you handled poor old Hank - even Caroline Parkhurst was happy about it!

I have absolutely no suggested changes. It does seem to me that I saw a copy of a letter from you and Hank to Sam Shoemaker, resigning from the Oxford group and dated Sept. 1937. In the book you say 1936 - am I wrong? Is there any way to bring in Jackie Williams' Bellevue episode as an early tragedy? The only other addition I might suggest is the Dr. Fishbein deal - where he got five of the first books and then wrote that deathless review for the A.M.A. journal. Am attaching a copy of the review in case yours is not available. And that's absolutely all I can think of. I can certainly see why this book has taken a long time to put together - it's a grand job, Bil.
[sic]

You know that you have my deepest thanks for all you and Lois has done for me - it's great to feel that by trying to live A.A. I have contributed a little to the world and a little to help the future drunk coming to A.A. and your tolerance in those early days made it possible.

Rosa is going to conclude this with a suggestion for the Tradition section of the book.

Hi, you dear people; Is there any place for a brief mention of non-A.A. books, pamphlets, records, etc. offered to members, secretaries, and those listed in the directory, especially the kind directed or of interest to A.A.'s only with discounts for group purchases, etc? There are many complaints and questions about such material. For instance, the local Community 7 Family Welfare sell and recommend "I Was a Very Sick Man" etc; then the new people ask us for them and create the problem of trying to play them down without sounding prejudiced. An official [sic] pronouncement on this would be very useful.

And THANKS very specially for the word "compulsory" in re "There are no dues etc." This one word will make a tremendous difference in the collection approach at group level! It's terrific!

We both send you our very best love and appreciation.

Jim

4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, Calif.

March 20, 1957

Dear folks,

Forgive this rather long delay. I have been awful busy with both the book and the television project. A contract for the latter will probably be signed soon. NBC has purchased the story treatment. So I suppose that we shall begin to try to dialogue it presently.

Meanwhile I have received about a hundred favorable replies on "A.A. Comes of Age." Like your own, they are extremely favorable. I'm really delighted that you folks like the book and can see so few changes.

I'm especially glad to have that early review in the A.M.A. Journal. I have ransacked our files, but couldn't find it. We will try to put this in the Appendix of the book, provided that Dr. Bauer of the A.M.A. will be all right. And I'm sure he will; he is a grand chap.

I have heard from Dorothy and, as you say, she likes the book very much, also. It was good to know that Caroline approved the way Hank was treated.

You are dead right about 1937 being the date we parted from the Oxford Groups. Somebody else picked this up, too.

I'm also putting in a little bit about Jackie Williams, how, in spite of the fact he didn't make it, he did us a lot of good. Also, the discription [sic] of his funeral and the great faith that was felt by everybody there. It was a very affecting incident which ought to be recorded.

Meanwhile, I've got to fly. A million thanks to you both.

Ever,

Bill

WGW/nw
Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell
4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, california [sic]

April 3, 1958

Dear Folks,

Thanks for your last, so full of good news.

Be sure, Jim, to take it very easy for that first year after your coronary. Lois did this and she's now good for anything - she can walk two or three miles without fatigue, up hill and down. Like yourself, she's had no recurrence. But the big trick is to let the job thoroughly heal and get a fresh circulation established during the first year. It's the folks who go tearing round that get in trouble. I guess I've said this three times already, but it can't be emphasized too much.

Thanks again for all you have put into A.A. The race has been well run and I hope that things will ease for you both on all fronts. It was good to hear of the prospect of clearing up the debt on the house.

The TV business has come to life again. NBC backed away because they had a big management row over there. Fred Coe, the noted producer, was interested while with NBC. He has now moved to CBS. He has recently eviced [sic] an interest. This he would have done before, but he supposed that NBC owned the story outline. As a matter of fact, we kept the property ourselves and only offered the use of it. We let Coe know this recently, and he says he wants it for fall production. But seeing is believing!

Everybody sends all the best.

Ever yours,

Bill

WGW/nw
Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell
4193 Georgia Street
San Diego 3, California

July 1, 1958

My dear Jim,

Thanks for your last letter, telling me all the good news of yourself and reminding me of your approaching anniversary* I do wish I could share it with you, but the press of affairs here is so great that I don't believe there is a chance. But please know how deeply appreciative I am for all that you did in the early days and ever since, to make A.A. what it now is ... it is a record in our annals that will never be forgotten.

I note that what you say about the upcoming 1960 Conference and will suggest your name to the committee. They tell me there is still some question whether Long Beach will be big enough to accommodate the crowd. Judging, however, by the action of the Conference, I think we shall make the best of what is there. It is certainly the largest center of population and this would guarantee the gate at once. Probably you have heard by now that Lois's sister Kitty died. She contracted lung cancer a couple of years ago, had an operation, but it finally caught up with her. She made a great job of the whole business -- it was vastly inspiring. I hope I can do half as well when the clock strikes.

Meanwhile, please have all the best and the same to your good lady. Wish I could make this longer, but am piled high.

Devotedly,

Bill

WGW/nw

MR. and Mrs. James Burwell
4193 Georgia Street
San Diego 3, California

*Jim - Bill just gave this record recently, to transcribe, so our anniversary has been past these many days! Sorry to be so late.

Nell Wing.

May 24, 1960

Dear Folks

Memories of your visit here are still green and most enjoyable to think on.

My hopper is pretty full just now. Founders Day is coming up, I'm trying to finish those Twelve Concepts, and Long Beach is just in the offing. I haven't begun to get ready for that, at least so far as what I am to say is concerned. However, I have very little luck in preparing that kind of thing in advance.

I wish we had thought of an old timers meeting earlier. I'm taking this up with the office, but I imagine the schedule is pretty tight, as matters now stand. I don't how we would go about getting such a crowd together - where and how we would find them and so forth. But I'll inquire.

Meanwhile, all the best,

Ever devotedly,,

Bill

MGW/nw

Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell
4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, California

August 8, 1960

Dear Rosa and Jim,

Very sincerely I feel not a little badly that the Convention gave you, and perhaps other very old timers, an unhappy experience because of the lack of recognition.

When you wrote me, not too long before the Convention, about the possibility of an old timers meeting, I did check this up. The schedule was then in pretty air-tight shape, so far as the official sessions went. Perhaps I should have followed this thing through more fully, trying to get some sort of informal meeting together. As you know, Hank got awfully sick just prior to the Convention. This threw added burdens on me. I must confess to neglect and forgetfulness - at least to some extent.

As a matter of fact the Convention ran a little bit behind several thousands, we don't know just how much yet. There was always a question of how many people we could bring long distances pre-paid, and on what ground we could fetch them. In this connection, I did [not] give you and Rosa much thought because you near by. But I did think a good deal about Henrietta Seiberling and Bob Oviatt in Akron, both of whom preceded you, I think A.A. wise. Admittedly, I did not think of Clarence. Probably this is because he has always disapproved of conventions and all of the doings of the New York headquarters - off and on he has had us under bitter attack for years. I didn't mean to let that effect [sic] me, but subconsciously maybe it did.

In any case, you will surely remember that I tried to give all possible credit in "A.A. Comes of Age" to you, Bert, Dorothy, Clarence, and a great many others.

Considering the time at my disposal, I did not see how you people could have been introduced in either of my talks. In the first one I could only show the bare beginnings of A.A. In the second one - which was altogether too long - I had to dwell on the development of the Traditions. I really don't see where you folks would have fitted in - at least to the satisfaction of the audience in that respect. Naturally I had to bring in Ebby because despite his lack of sobriety [sic] he was at the very beginning. Sister Ignatia was certainly due for a bow after all these years. After all, she and Smith ministered to 5,000 drunks - a number far greater than you and I ever thought of touching ourselves.

In this connection I also felt not a little sorry that Henrietta wasn't invited. There was not only the question of cost. Though she has been extremely friendly during the last two or three years, it must be remembered that she has never cared for the convention idea and indeed, was against the whole New York headquarters operation for many years. For several reasons she wasn't invited. Maybe that was a mistake. I know that, for one, I was damn sorry she wasn't there. However, I wasn't the entire boss of this whole undertaking, by any means.

I don't know whether you and Dorothy got to say anything at those Alkathon meetings. Some of them were very outstanding indeed, and apparently rated much higher in many A.A. minds than any of my efforts. If you were not invited this [is] surprising indeed, considering how prominent you, especially, have been out on the Coast, well known to everybody. If this was an omission, it certainly gives me cause for wonder, as doubtless it does you. However, those arrangements were all made by the Coast people. Nevertheless I suppose if I had been thoughtful enough about it - which I wasn't - I might have taken pains.

I guess the upshot of it is that life never gives quite the deal we would like. On one hand, you say that you suffer from lack of recognition, and I can say with certainly equal fervor that I greatly suffer from far too much.

Ever devotedly
yours,

Bill

WGW/nw

Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell
4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, California

August 2, 1961

Dear Folks,

Thanks so much for that last news of you both. It's good to read on and between the lines that you both are well and happy.

We can say the same. Haven't had better health in years.

Am progressively detaching myself from active management of A.A. affairs, just as I probably should have done before this. The November Grapevine will carry a piece to the effect that I can no longer get around speaking, nor participate in active management of the office. Of course I shall be glad to help put on blow-out patches, if anything serious turns up.

But I do hope to keep up some writing. This seems to be about the only channel left. My present series in the Grapevine is a trial run to see if I can do a larger book on "Practicing These Principles in all our Affairs".

About those Twelve Step Houses. Well, honestly, I don't know. Like the clubs, some appear to be good and others bad. Are most of the Twelve Step Houses on the Coast those famous "boarding houses"?

Lois and I are just now taking off for a month - the most of it probably to be spent at the old home town in Vermont, that is if we can hide out up there!

Meanwhile, all goes well at General Headquarters. The contributions and book sales are fine. And the reserve fund continues to grow slowly. So we could stand quite a lot of hard times, if necessary.

Do you like the Grapevine any better nowadays? We have been trying hard to improve it and have depended on improvement for increased sales, which are now up about 2,000 from the low point of a year or so ago.

Meanwhile, Lois joins me in all affection, and I'll ask her to send you an AI-Anon book.

Always
devotedly,

Bill

WGW/nw

Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell
4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, California

November 14, 1961

Dear Jim,

First, all the best to you both. And thanks for your remembrance of mother - she die [sic] May 15th last. When, during the last few months she realized she could not get out of bed alone, she began to quit eating. This was quite deliberate, and it finally did her in. That was the way she wanted it, and she made a swell job of passing away - in fact, was mighty cheerful about it.

You may have noticed my article in the Grapevine, which indicates that I have taken another several steps toward the sidelines. For many years I meant business on this, and at last the time is now here.

I think there are a few situations in which I can still help. Our trusteeship needs several more out of town members, and perhaps a better method of selection. Eventually I expect we shall have to shift the ratio and install an A.A. Chairman of the Board. If we fail to do this, we shall be denying our present-day capabilities. And whether this is a good idea or not, we shall never know unless we try.

As to the Twelve Step Houses - well, there you've got me. I haven't actually seen one of these operations in a very long time. I think the impression at the office is that some seem good, some seem fair, and others practically no good. About the best that can be done is to restrain them from soliciting money at the top public level or busting anonymity for public and the like. From this end we try to hold the line at this top level. Beyond that there isn't a thing that we can really do except to leave these situations to the areas concerned.

It's like the trouble we used to have with the clubhouses in the old days. Some were damn good, some were damn bad. But these things do have a way [of] working around, after enough experience. What the outcome of the Twelfth Step Houses will finally be, I'm less qualified to predict than anybody I know. I'm getting like Rip Van Winkle, just waking up in the Adirondacks!

Meanwhile, the old desk gets piled pretty high, in spite of my supposed retirement. I could make a full-time job of answering mail; another full-time job looking after all my old friends in trouble; a full-time job of traveling and speaking; a full-time job of messing around the office.

But I don't think these are the most effective things that I could do from herein. I shall continue to do a little of all of them, but the assignment has gotten so big that it couldn't be handled anyway. So I'm beginning to get out from under a great many of these things which may often be desirable to do, but which are becoming impossible.

Once again the old desk is piled up - so I have to fly. I know you'll understand.

In affection,

Bill

WGW/nw

August 29, 1962

Dear Folks,

Your letter reached us while on vacation in East Dorset, Vermont, the old home town. Sometimes I wish I could resettle up here.

Thanks for all the news and views. As you imply, we are not so young as we used to be. I'm beginning to feel this also, as is Lois. However, we are still doing okay, thank God.

About the late lamented April Conference. There, I think we made some A.A. history, but I question just the right kind. I do think that my recommendations for strengthening the General Service Board would have bucked up our situation a good deal against a future time of real trouble. Routinely, things would go along nicely with present setup. But if the heat really came on in a big way, I would rather see a stronger situation to handle it, so I'm sure we ought to experiment in this direction -- something that the Conference and trustees seemed very adverse to doing.

It wasn't [so] much that I was surprised or disappointed by the Conference decision -- the thing I deplored was the haste and even recklessness in which it was taken. At the very least I think I might have been aloud [sic] to get my recommendations printed as an Appendix to the Third Legacy Manual, along with the Concepts. But evidently the Conference and the Trustees thought the material to be of so little merit that it should not be put on permanent record in this fashion. In a way, this attitude amounted to censorship, something I can't exactly relish. I hope future Conferences will allow me the courtesy of being printed permanently. After all, the recommendations might prove to be some use later on.

But one good thing did come of it. Future responsibility was so completely and eagerly taken away from me that my trip to the sidelines has been greatly facilitated. It's now strictly up to the Trustees and to the Conference and on their own say-so. In a sense, this is a great relief, because, as you know, I have been backing away for along [sic] time. So the job is now complete.

All the best now, and God bless you both. In this Lois joins,

Affectionately,

Bill

WGW/nw

Mr. and Mrs. James Burwell

4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, California

May 15th, 1965

4193 Georgia Street
San Diego, California

Dear Bill,

Just received a letter from Hazel Rice, saying G.S.O. could not invite me to Toronto, for it would break a precedent. First, I did not ask anyone in G.S.O. for an invitation. I did mention to Hazel down in Washington, D.C., that I was retired and could not afford the trip and that I was going to talk it over with you at Bedford Hills, which I did, explaining my circumstances.

But, since this has now come up in G.S.O., I do feel quite hurt and slighted and unappreciated. I do feel a special exception can be made as with Ebby at two conventions. This is really a hard letter to write.

Am listing a few unusual contributions I have made over these 27 years as follows:
Am oldest active AA member at group level. Did contribute materially in all three of our A.A. books, with phrases "God as you understand Him" and "Only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking," plus my own story. In 1939-40 period did sell more books to stores, doctors, etc. than anyone. Did help in 1940, finance (200.00 stock) to keep Vesey Street going. Carried the message to and help organize original groups in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Wilmington, and Harrisburg; plus half a dozen neighborhood and hospital groups in Philadelphia and San Diego. The Philly group was the first to contribute to New York. Initiated the plan for Judge Bok to get us inside The Saturday Evening Post. And Bill, I am the only one of the original members that has never bucked publicly on any of your projects. Especially in 1948-49, I stumped the state for your conference. I do hope this does not sound braggadocious, [sic] but these are facts as I see them.

In all these years, this is the very first favor I have ever asked you or the N.Y. office. Am now 68 and feel positive I will not make the next convention. Also, this is the first convention I have ever been asked to speak or participate, so do hope you will find ways and means to get me there.

After all, A.A. has only given me life and peace of mind. Maybe I should not expect more, but have only done it this once in 27 years.

Our love to both you and Lois as ever appreciated,

Jim