

Friends of Bill

Written by L.A. Plume
Tuesday, 26 March 2013 13:00



Dear L. A. Plume,

I was browsing in a bookstore with a friend who was soon to be employed there. She introduced herself to the cashier and he said, seemingly apropos of nothing, "I'm a friend of Bill." She responded by saying, "Oh, so am I."

When we left the store I told her I thought she'd never met that man, asked "who is Bill?," and wondered how they both knew him. She explained to me the Bill W. was the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous and that "knowing Bill" is a sort of code for being in the AA program. If you're not a "friend" of Bill's, how do you know when someone is, and therefore not to offer them a drink or suggest getting together for cocktails?

Linda in GA

Dear Linda,

If people don't drink, for whatever reason, it's up to them to decline the offer without any explanation. Some people who are, or have been, in AA do not care to be in a situation where alcohol is being served, and some don't mind. It is not unusual for one half of a couple to drink while the other does not. Just pay attention, never force the issue, and remember that "Anonymous" is half of "AA."

L. A. Plume

Dear Ms. Plume,

An old college friend came to visit. I hadn't seen her in years and on the way home from the airport I planned to stop and pick up some wine, which we used to drink together in abundance in our college days. As we approached the local liquor store, I said to her, "We'll just stop at Bill's for some wine." She replied, "I'm a friend of Bill's." I said, "Really? I thought you'd never been to Beaufort before!" She said, "No, I haven't, but I'm a friend of Bill's." I found this thoroughly confusing, so I asked her how she could possibly know Bill if she hadn't been here, and she explained that "knowing Bill" means that you have an issue with alcohol and don't drink. Bill was the founder of AA and "being a friend of Bill" is a way of saying you don't drink.

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Why would they name a liquor store "Bill's"?
Just Curious

Dear Just Curious,
I'm not sure how your question applies to etiquette, but it is an entertaining question. Why don't you stop in and ask them? I doubt it will be the first time.
L. A. Plume

Dear L. A. Plume,
I just returned from a vacation with a dear friend whose life has recently taken some unfortunate turns. Every morning she would start out with a Bloody Mary instead of breakfast – after all, according to her, tomato juice and celery are vegetables. Lunch consisted of pina coladas. ("Pineapples and coconuts are fruit and therefore healthy.") Same thing for grapes - fruit again. Wine with some cheese and crackers seems to fulfill her nutritional requirements in all the food groups. Then maybe a tot of brandy before bed to ward off evil spirits. As much as I love her friendship, there wasn't much left of her by the end of the day. I'm not only worried about her but also about the responsibility/liability if something happens to her while she is with me. What should/can I do?
Worried

Dear Worried,
Liability should be the last thing on your mind. People will only do what they're willing to do when they're ready to do it; but you might think about suggesting an introduction to Bill.
L. A. Plume

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