

## Joy Davidman and C. S. Lewis Initial Meeting: Timeline, January 1950--January 1953

Researched and Compiled by Andrew Lazo

- AGCI Folder 2-15 (& *Out of My Bone*) Letter from HJD to Chad Walsh, June 21, 1949: By the way, your remark that Lewis answered even asinine letters gave us courage to write to him--se we sent the unfortunate man five single-spaced pages of personal history and what not. **First contact HJD-CSL = pre-June 21, 1949**
- AGCI Folder 2-15 (& *Out of My Bone*) Letter from HJD to Chad Walsh, Jan. 27, 1950: Just got a letter from Lewis in the mail. . .
- AGCI Folder 2-15 (& *Out of My Bone*) Letter from HJD to Kenneth Porter, August 16, 1951: Since I am one of C. S. Lewis' converts I tend to follow him fairly closely, and nobody has yet been able to define him! I'm not quite as traditional as my teacher though on several points, particularly things like birth control, on which I've been having a running argument with him on and off for a couple of years.
- Folder 6 Aug 1952: Joy seems very affectionate towards Bill—tone, pet names (Poogles [which seems to be a family name applied to all the Greshams], Poogabill, “you ole sweetabill, I’m going to be such a nice poogle when I come back”), suggestions that he move to England, an assertion of their “telepathic bond”—not at all like a woman who went to England to seduce C. S. Lewis.
- August: Joy sails to England, arriving 13 August (unpublished letter to WLG of 6 Aug. 1952)
- Joy stays in London with pen-friend Phyllis Haring (*Williams?*) (Hooper & Green 336)
- 29 August 1952, typed air-letter to Bill: “Mrs. Charles Williams lives five blocks from here, so I walked up last week; she was out, but I’ve met the son, Michael[. . .]I’ve since had a note from his mother and am going to tea there tomorrow.” She ends the typed not with a cheery, handwritten “hope you’re all as well as I am!”
- 1 September 1952 typed air-letter to Bill: “Tea yesterday with the Williams family, who are perfectly lovely, and we got to be good friends. . .we talked about a million other things, including Chad Walsh and Lewis. [The Williams lived at 23 Antrim Mansions, Hampstead, London, N. W. 3] “I’ll be here for a couple weeks yet[. . .] but will go off on a trip or two before I leave for Oxford. Mrs. Williams suggested (out of a quite clear sky) that I wear something pretty when I go to see Jack; says the dons may lead a cloistered like, but they take notice—and feel flattered! Ulp? She’s very fond of him and says he’s very easy to talk to.”
- Joy quickly meets and quickly “got to be good friends” with Florence “Michal” Williams, widow of Charles Williams, 29 August-1 September (unpublished letters to WLG of 29 Aug. & 1 Sept). “Mrs. Williams suggested (out of a quite clear sky) that I wear something pretty when I go to see Jack; says the dons may lead a cloistered life, but they take notice—and feel flattered! Ulp? She’s very fond of him and says he’s very easy to talk to” (1 Sept).
- Sometime between 1-11 Sept., Michal Williams apparently writes Lewis mentioning meeting and liking Joy (?).

- 12 Sept. Lewis writes Michal Williams, inviting her for a drink. Lewis calls “Joy Davidman. . .an old & valued pen-friend of mine” and says, “I’m so glad you like her.” Lewis also asks Michal “prod her to say *when* she is coming to us (Hooper Collected Letters III 222).
- 12-15 Sept. Michal Williams apparently writes Lewis suggesting a meeting at the Mitre at 12:00 noon on Wed. Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>
- 14 Sept. Joy goes to Oxford to visit Veronica Ruffer. Is she making it a reconnaissance trip for her meeting with CSL in two weeks?
- 15 Sept. Lewis writes to Michal Williams to confirm meeting: “Mitre Hotel. 12. noon. Wed. Sept 24th.”
- 17 Sept. CSL presents HJD with a copy of *Mere Christianity*, signs fly leaf.
- 24 Sept. Lewis and Joy meet for lunch as planned at the Eastgate—but initially at the Mitre with Michal and Warnie, not Phyl. Michal Williams, in a 14 November 1952 letter to Chad Walsh, recalls meeting with Joy, Warnie, and Jack for a drink at the Mitre. This MUST have been on this date.
- Conjecture: 24-26 Sept.: L invites Joy back to stay with him at the Kilns. Thursday they rise early and do some walking (cf. “Ballade of Blistered Feet”). They drink too much and talk philosophy. They go to the Eagle and Child. Joy does a Dianetics demo. They read and talk about writing poetry. Joy gets to know Warren enough to call him “Warnie.”
- 26 Sept. Lewis invites Joy and (Michael? Phyl?) to lunch in his rooms at Magdalen. Warnie bows out and George Sayer is asked to fill in. [A]fter his other guests had gone,” Lewis asked GS to stay behind to mention that he’d invited Joy to stay at the Kilns, and to ask about how they should act. Is this a cover question? Had she already been staying? Does George misremember? Lewis writes to Roger Green about Joy Davidman, “who has been staying with us.” Letter postmarked 26 Sept., 4:45 PM. Says, “we also have had visitors.” I think this means that Joy had gone; L writes a number of letters that day.
- 4 Oct. Joy in a letter to Bill recalls getting “sozzled” with Jack one evening (in the pub with the queen with a frill, from the “Ballade”?). She also refers to pork pies and cider “one day” with Jack at the Bird and Baby, and trying to write the “Bread and Butter Sestina”.
- 6 Oct. Writes Bill: “Wish you both all the luck in the world.”
- 13 Oct. Letter to Bill: “Did I mention I’d returned Jack to a pleasure moment in childhood, just for a demonstration (of Dianetics? Did this memory spark *Surprised by Joy?*). Mentions Michal Williams “having a drink with Jack and me in Oxford.”
- 15 Oct Letter to Bill: “My sestina seems to have knocked Jack for a loop.”

During their initial meeting, they met MW for a drink, got sozzled one evening in a pub, did a Dianetics demo, ate pork pie and drank cider at the B&B. All of this happened before mid-October, and the “B&B Sestina” makes this clear it was around “that September day.”

- Letter from Chad Walsh to Michal Williams, 21 April 1953: I received a number of glowing letters from Joy about the wonderful time she had in England, and how much she appreciated your friendship and Jack’s. I don’t suppose it’s revealing any secret to say that her marriage seems at the point of breaking up. A divorce seems to be in the offing. I feel very distressed about the whole thing. Her husband, Bill, is a very talented writer,

and a loveable person--“the life of the party.” But I suspect that underneath he is a good deal of a boy, and self-centered the way an adolescent is. Joy is the one who has really kept him going these long years.

- Letter from Michal Williams to Chad Walsh, 14.XI.52: I saw C. S. Lewis a few weeks ago + he was fit + fine + the inhabitants of the Mitre lounge forgot their drinks + nakedly + unashamedly listened to the great man cascading brilliance. He brought his brother + Joy Gresham along. I like Joy so much. She is most unusual. I think she may be going through some sort of crisis + I think her visit to England has done her good. She comes here quite a lot and we talk of mice + men + cabbages and Kings. She has a great affection for you + Eva + says how lovely your children [sic]. + somehow I think she is a forlorn child + very brave + rather hurt by life.
- Letter from Michal Williams to Chad Walsh, 25.V.53 (and a handwritten note: ans'd 21 Aug 53): Poor Joy! She is like Princess [Dindrane](#) “[Her nature is sweet to all](#)” + I would have thought that Bill would have had “I love her till I die” attitude. I think Evan (whom Joy deeply loves) will be her strength + stay just now. We will pray that her writing will bring her fame + financial solace.
- Letter from Michal Williams to Chad Walsh, 18.IX.53: Poor Joy! Poor Bill! I had hoped that Bill would purpose firm amendment + that all would come right. It is dreadful that a brilliant man should go all Humpty Dumpty. I wonder if Joy’s own literary ability will suffice to bring financial adequacy. I have never read any of her work.
- Letter from Michal Williams to Chad Walsh, 29.I.54: I have only seen J. Gresham for a brief few moments since she arrived in England. I sent her your message + I think all is well with her. + she has contacted the nice Jacksons + she has lots of contacts both in Oxford + London. I wouldn’t let her be lonely.
- Letter from Jeannette Davidman to Michal Williams, November 29, 1954: JD calls MW “dear friend.” We were very sorry that so many things happened in London while we were making arrangements to travel southward, that it was impossible for us to find time to see you again. The happy memory of your gracious hospitality will always be with us. When we return to London in the spring we shall certainly get in touch with you. I do hope that you are well and that your dear son feels better.