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# Warren and Jack - Brothers and Friends

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# **INKLINGS FOREVER, Volume VII**

A Collection of Essays Presented at the Seventh  
FRANCES WHITE COLLOQUIUM on C.S. LEWIS & FRIENDS  
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## **Warren and Jack** *Brothers and Friends*

**Constance Rice**

My paper is about Warren Lewis, C. S. Lewis's older brother, and the impact Warren had on his brother's life and writing and his important contribution to The Inklings. Warren Lewis is often overlooked by scholars or is spoken of only in regards to his struggle with alcoholism. As a brother and friend, he plays an integral part in C. S. Lewis's life.

Rice, Constance "Warren and Jack: Brothers and Friends."

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## Warren and Jack—Brothers and Friends

Constance Rice

Clyde Kilby, founder of the Wade Center at Wheaton College and early Lewis scholar, met Warren Lewis in 1966, forming a friendship that would last until Warren's death in 1973. He would describe Warren Lewis in the introduction to *Brothers and Friends The Diaries of Major Warren Lewis* as a "sensitive, loving man, a gentleman above all, who struggled honestly with the temptations of human life. He was no hero, no saint, and yet he was a good man—devout in his attempts to live a Christian life. Just an ordinary man. And just as extraordinary" (xi).

Warren Hamilton Lewis was born on June 16, 1895, in the outskirts of Belfast. He was to become not just an older brother to C. S. Lewis, but the two would become lifelong companions and friends. Warren is often overlooked for the integral role he played in the life of his famous brother. He was a central figure in the Inklings throughout their entire history and provided much of the social glue that held the members together. He would help his brother host the meetings by preparing tea and possessed a genuine gift of hospitality making everyone feel welcomed and comfortable. It is from his diaries that we get our greatest knowledge of the Inklings' meetings. He served his brother as Jack's personal secretary helping his brother with the great amount of correspondence Jack faced on a weekly basis. They shared a love of nature taking annual walking vacations. They shared a love of reading and writing. As brothers and friends, they shared the highest joys and deepest sorrows of their lives.

In C. S. Lewis's autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, he writes that Warren was one of the several blessings in his life growing up. He wrote, "The other blessing in my life was my brother. Though three years my senior, he never seemed to be an elder brother: we were allies, not to say confederates, from the first" (6). Warren writes of their childhood as filled with rainy Irish days and the resulting "recurring imprisonment" that gave the brothers "occasion and stimulus to develop the habit of creative imagination." They learned to draw and together created an imaginary country of Boxen. Warren acknowledges that these were the early developments of his brother's gifts. When the family moved to Little Lea, they found the huge, wasted spaces under the roof and in the attic provided the brothers with glorious privacy and a place where Boxen and their imaginations

could flourish. It was here, too, they experienced the tragic loss of their mother to cancer, and the resulting emotional loss of their father who was so overcome with his own grief that he was unable to comfort and to help his sons in their grief. Jack writes in his autobiography the impact the death of their mother had:

With my mother's death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life. There was to be much fun, many pleasures, many stabs of Joy; but no more of the old security. It was sea and islands now; the great continent had sunk like Atlantis. (21)

The brothers' bond was only strengthened by their need to cling to one another and to comfort each other.

Warren would leave for school in England first, followed by his brother Jack soon after the death of their mother. Both boys would attend the same series of schools with Warren later taking private lessons with their father's former tutor, W. T. Kirkpatrick, as Jack would do as well. While Jack would choose the life of a scholar, Warren would choose the life of a career army officer.

Warren entered the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in February of 1914 having placed twenty-first out of 201 candidates. In September, he was appointed a commission as a second lieutenant in the RASC, his officer's training accelerated due to the wartime need. In November, Warren was sent to France as a second lieutenant. Throughout his career, promotions came quickly. His posts included service in Sierra Leone, West Africa (1921-22); and Shanghai, China (1927-30 and 1931-32). Jack would enlist and be placed into a cadet battalion in May of 1917 and served in the Somerset Light Infantry in France until he was wounded. Warren's service in the army involved supplies and transport. During both World Wars, Warren's duties were dangerous, situated just behind the front lines, strafed by enemy planes and while being responsible for thousands of soldiers. When he became ill with fever during WWII, he was evacuated from Europe with his unit from Dunkirk in May, 1940.

While in China during his first assignment, Warren Lewis's Christian faith was renewed. About a year later, he wrote on May 13, 1931:

I have started to say my prayers again after having discontinued doing so for more years than I care to remember: this was no sudden impulse but the result of a conviction of the truth of Christianity which has been growing on me for a considerable time . . . The wheel has now made the full revolution—indifference, skepticism, atheism, agnosticism, and

back again to Christianity. (92-93)

As recorded in Jack's autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, Jack had gone through a similar renewal of his Christian faith culminating during a ride in the sidecar of Warren's motorcycle on a trip to Whipsnade Zoo while Warren was on leave. In a letter to his brother on January 19, 1932, after Warren had returned to duty, Jack shared with Warren that he too had started to go to communion.

In July of 1930, Warren while on leave from the army joined with Jack and Mrs. Moore to purchase the Kilns. They had extended to him the invitation to live with them when he retired from the military. After his retirement he moved into the Kilns, weighing the pluses and minuses of his new living situation which included the setting of the home, domestic tensions due to Mrs. Moore, and a pleasant daily routine he hoped for. He wrote in his diary, "I have reviewed the pros and cons, and came to the conclusion that on balance, I prefer the Kilns at its worst to army life at its best: the only doubtful part being 'Have I seen the Kilns at its worst'" (Carpenter 39). Warren would find that life under the reign of Mrs. Moore could be quite miserable in the years to come, but he and his brother would live the rest of their days together in the Kilns. At home they spent a great deal of time together. Jack spent nights in his college rooms, but would come home in the afternoons. He and Warren would take the family dogs for walks or work in the garden before Jack returned to his college rooms. Warnie had a bedroom in the Kilns, but kept most of his books in Jack's rooms at Magdalen where Warnie spent most of his mornings working on the Lewis family papers or helping Jack with his correspondence (Carpenter 53).

Humphrey Carpenter in his book, *The Inklings*, describes Warren's physical appearance as follows:

Warnie and Jack were fairly similar physically, both being heavily built with broad faces, though Warnie was more thickset and was tanned from his years abroad. They dressed similarly in baggy flannel trousers and tweed jackets, and they shared a liking for pipe tobacco and beer and country walks. (38)

Carpenter also describes Warnie's intellectual makeup:

Warnie's formal education had stopped far short of Jack's, but he kept up his reading and was widely knowledgeable of English literature and even more so in French history, particularly of the seventeenth century. In English literature he regarded himself as a mere amateur, but his sheer enthusiasm, uncomplicated by any preconceived notions of what he ought or ought not to like, made him a discerning critic." (38)

This quality was much appreciated by his brother Jack. Warnie,

as he was called by friends and family, was less read than Jack, but Warnie possessed a speculative imagination and common sense which made him an excellent companion for his brother (38, 53).

Upon Warnie's retirement and move to the Kilns, the brothers began a series of walking tours of forty to fifty miles or more which became an annual holiday. Warren writes in his *Memoir of C. S. Lewis*, shortened by the editors to an introduction to *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, about their times together on holidays and walking tours:

The various holidays and tours were a great feature of his [Jack's] and mine; they were inspired by a joy in landscape that developed out of the Boxonian visions of our childhood and was—together with books—the most enduring element of cementing our friendship. Until 1939 our annual walking tour was a regular feature; on these long days, and during the pleasant evening hours when we took our ease in an inn, Jack was always at his most exuberant, his most whimsical, his most perceptive—the over-worked cab horse released from the shafts and kicking his heels (16).

In *Surprised by Joy*, while Jack was studying with the Great Knock, W. T. Kirkpatrick, he describes a perfect day that would include a daily walk after lunch with a friend:

At one precisely lunch should be on the table; and by two at the latest I would be on the road. Not, except at rare intervals, with a friend. Walking and talking are two very great pleasures, but it is a mistake to combine them. Our own noise blots out the sounds and silences of the outdoor world; and talking leads almost inevitably to smoking, and then farewell to nature as far as one of our senses is concerned. The only friend to walk with is one (such as I found, during holidays, in Arthur) [Arthur Greeves, long time friend of Lewis's] who so exactly shares your taste for each mood of the countryside that a glance, a halt, or at most a nudge, is enough to assure us that the pleasure is shared. The return from the walk, and the arrival of tea, should be exactly coincident, and not later than a quarter past four. (142)

Jack did not like to walk alone, and Warnie was a perfect walking companion. George Sayer in his biography of C. S. Lewis, *Jack*, says that the brothers shared the same scenery, although they often had different impressions of it. They both enjoyed stopping at old fashioned inns and pubs that served rustic bread and cheese and beer (420). Their walking tours were planned to come to the end of a day of walking and to stay at a favorite inn. In their conversations, Warren would often take the lead

having a far greater experience in ordinary life. Warren was also probably a shrewder judge of character (420) which is often apparent in his diaries.

In his *Memoir* of his brother, Warren tells of the immense importance of afternoon tea for Jack. When Warren and Jack were on a walking tour together or out on a ride in Warren's motorcycle with Jack in the sidecar, the whole day had to be ordered around the necessity of finding their selves at 4:00 in some place where afternoon tea was served. Warren tells that the only time he ever saw his brother disgruntled over food or drink took place when motoring with a friend and finding no tea in a place they had counted on serving tea. The friend and Warren naturally dived into the nearest pub for a drink, but Jack refused even this consolation.

It is from Warren's diaries that we get the best opportunity to get a picture inside the Inklings. In his diaries he would record who attended, what topics were discussed, and which pieces of literature were read. Warren was a regular attendee and read from his own writings on French history. He played host by preparing tea for those who attended. John Wain, a former student of Jack, describes him as "a man who stays in my memory as the most courteous I have ever met—not with mere politeness, but with genial, self-forgetful considerateness that was as instinctive to him as breathing" (Glyer "Warren Hamilton "Warnie" Lewis 249). In his *Memoir*, he calls the Inklings a "famous and heroic gathering, one that has already passed into literary legend." He continues to describe the group:

Properly speaking it was neither a club nor a literary society, though it partook of the nature of both. There were no rules, officers, agendas, or formal elections—unless one counts it as a rule that we met in Jack's rooms at Magdalen every Thursday evening after dinner. Proceedings neither began nor terminated at any fixed hour, though there was tacit agreement that ten-thirty was as late as one could decently arrive. (13)

Warren also describes a typical meeting:

The ritual of an Inklings was unvarying. When half a dozen or so had arrived, tea would be produced, and then when pipes were well alight Jack would say, "Well, has nobody got anything to read us?" Out would come a manuscript, and we would settle down to sit in judgement upon it—real unbiased judgement, too, since we were no mutual admiration society: praise for good work was unstinted, but censure for bad work—or even not-so-good work—was often brutally frank. To read to the Inklings was a formidable ordeal, and I can still remember the fear with which I offered the first

chapter of my first book—and my delight, too, at its reception. (13-14)

Warren Lewis was an author in his own right, writing and publishing six books that covered various aspects of 17<sup>th</sup> century France. He also arranged and typed the Lewis family papers consisting of numerous diaries, letters, photographs, and miscellaneous documents gathered together by Warren and Jack after their father's death. The entire history consisted of eleven volumes. Warren's diaries were edited by Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead and published after Warren's death in 1973. According to Kilby, Warren writes "With a style light, quick, and perceptive" and "with the sensitive eye of the novelist—and yet his is a record of fact, not fiction. A keen reader of published diaries, Warren valued the insights he gained through such works. Even as a historian he was unafraid—and often preferred—to find the truth of history in these accounts (*Brothers and Friends* x).

Kilby also writes about Warren in his introduction to *Brothers and Friends* that "His is not a simple story—perhaps no one's ever is—but it is a true one. It is a life filled with much happiness, and a life of great sorrows. While the supreme tragedy of his life was certainly the premature loss of Jack, Warren Lewis also struggled mightily with the disease of alcoholism" (x). George Sayer, Walter Hooper, and Douglas Gresham have all written about Warren Lewis's alcoholism. Douglas writes in his book, *Lenten Lands*, that Warren's alcoholism began while he was in the army leaving him with "a dark legacy," a disease which he fought "with astonishing valiance for year after year, achieving some successes and suffering some cataclysmic failures" (43).

Kilby writes that Warren "was to battle this agony for forty years." He goes on to describe Warren's struggles:

A man of integrity, and of strength even in his weakness, he knew that his occasional though intense bouts of depression left him sadly ill-fitted to cope with the attractions of alcohol. Nethertheless, Warren continued to face this reality courageously—and, more often than not, successfully—for the rest of his life. (x).

Warren often wrote of his victories and failures in his diaries. Numerous entries account the number of days he was able to remain a "teetotaler." One example from his diaries dated Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1963 reads:

I entered this year having been a teetotaler for 15 days. From then and 21<sup>st</sup> June, a period of 172 days, my consumption of alcohol was one pint of beer, drunk whilst lunching with George Sayer at the Mitre on 29<sup>th</sup> April. I drank from 22<sup>nd</sup> June until 27<sup>th</sup> August while I

was in Ireland, then was a teetotaler from 28<sup>th</sup> August to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 126 days. So out of 365 days I was T. T. for 298 days. A poor performance compared with 1961. (282-283)

In another entry for Saturday, April 10, 1971, while reflecting on the past Lenten season he writes:

I don't look back over Lent with much satisfaction, though there have been years in which I've passed the season worse. I can take no credit for having drunk no spirits, for it must now be two years or more since I've tasted any; nor can I plume myself on my dieting, for this, such as it was, I did for merely physical reasons. . . as well of course as my normal daily Bible reading; and I attended Evensong on the six Sundays as well as Mattins. Not much of an achievement I fear, but still, better than nothing. (332)

It is obvious that Warren struggled to maintain his sobriety, but he indeed had many days, even years of success.

The most telling of all of Warren's writing which reveals his great love and friendship with his brother is the account he gives in his *Memoir* of the days before his brother's death:

In their way, these last weeks were not unhappy. Joy [Joy Lewis] had left us, and once again—as in the earliest days—we could turn for comfort only to each other. The wheel had come full circle: once again we were together in the little end room at home, shutting out from our talk the ever-present knowledge that the holidays were ending, that a new term fraught with unknown possibilities awaited us both. . .

Our talk tended to be cheerfully reminiscent during these last days: long-forgotten incidents in our shared past would be remembered, and the old Jack would return for a moment, whimsical and witty. We were recapturing the old schoolboy technique of extracting the last drop of juice from our holidays.

Friday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1963, began much as other days: there was breakfast, then letters and the crossword puzzle. After lunch he fell asleep in his chair: I suggested that he would be more comfortable in bed, and he went there. At four I took in his tea and found him drowsy but comfortable. Our few words then were the last: at five-thirty I heard a crash and ran in, to find him lying unconscious at the foot of his bed. He ceased to breathe some three or four minutes later. (45-46).

Warren survived almost ten years longer than his brother and died on April 9, 1973. It is a tribute to the brothers' love

for each other and their enduring friendship, after a lifetime of companionship, that Warren was buried in the same grave as his brother.

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