

Books explore addiction, spirituality

My Name Is Bill, by Susan Cheever, is subtitled "Bill Wilson — His Life and the Creation of Alcoholics Anonymous." Wilson, the co-founder of AA, was born in 1895 in East Dorset, Vt. Raised in a dry household, Wilson did not have a drink until he was 22 years old. For the next 17 years, he would drink away one job after another. In 1934, hospitalized, broke, hopeless, he had a dramatic spiritual experience and never took another drink.

Wilson met Dr. Robert Smith in Akron, Ohio, in 1935. In that meeting "Dr. Bob" experienced the healing power of one alcoholic talking to another alcoholic. After one final relapse, the doctor had his last drink on June 10, 1935. That date marks the official founding of AA. In 1939, with the editorial help of the first sober members of AA, Wilson wrote the textbook of the new group, *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Cheever is careful not to put this most quixotic of heroes on a pedestal. She gives ugly — if fascinating — details of Wilson's womanizing, experiments with LSD, spiritualism and attempts to make money from AA.

In the delirium of his final days dying of emphysema in 1971, Wilson

Book Reviews

***My Name Is Bill* by Susan Cheever. Simon and Schuster (New York, 2004). 262 pp., \$24.**

***The Dark Night of the Souls* by Gerald G. May. Harper (San Francisco, 2004). 216 pp., \$23.95.**

Reviewed by
Graham G. Yearley/CNS

cried out for whiskey (which he was not given). That request, after 36 years of sobriety, was testimony to the enduring grip of alcohol. Wilson was instrumental in freeing millions from that grip's torment.

The Dark Night of the Soul is the newest book by Gerald G. May, who is best known as the author of the contemporary classic, *Addiction and Grace*. As a psychiatrist and a trainer of spiritual directors, May has given years of study to the physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of troubled and healthy souls.

In *The Dark Night*, May explores what the spiritual writings of two 16th-century Spanish mystics can say to a 21st-century audience. The

writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross about their own experience of prayer and contemplation offered more understanding of the inner life than had been known before.

Like most people, I have used the term "the dark night" to mean an experience of anguish and pain. But the dark night can also be experienced as joyful, May explains. The misunderstanding is, in part, linguistic because "dark" has multiple meanings in Spanish. In the dark night of St. John, our spiritual vision is obscured, just as our physical vision is clouded by darkness, so that large objects are faintly perceived and small ones are hidden. The dark night is not a single event, but more of a process of shedding worldly attachments and inner resistance to God in order to arrive at a place of calm and constant awareness of divine love.

One of May's primary points is that we cannot arrive at the more profound levels of contemplation by our own efforts alone. God alone can lead us through the dark night.

Yearley writes on theater, literature and spirituality from Baltimore, where he studied theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University.

Best Sellers

Here is the July Catholic Best-sellers List from the Catholic Book Publishers Association.

HARDCOVER

1. *The Rhythm of Life.* Matthew Kelly
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*
3. *Rediscovering Catholicism.* Matthew Kelly
4. *The Book of Courage.*

PAPERBACK

1. *A Guide to the Passion.* Pinto, D'Ambrosio, Shea, Thigpen, Allen
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church.*
3. *De-coding DaVinci.* Amy Welborn
4. *Amazing Grace for Those Who Suffer*

CHILDREN AND YOUTHS

1. *Tear Soup.* Schwiebert & DeKlyen
2. *Making Things Right.* Jeanine Tirnko Lechner
3. *Called to His Supper.* Jeanine Tirnko Lechner
4. *Pope Pius XII Bilingual Coloring Book.*

Wegmans

That's The Ticket!

SEABREEZE AMUSEMENT PARK

Ride the All New WHIRLWIND
New Spinning Rollercoaster with a whole new twist -
Forward, backwards, sideways, down!

Save \$2.00
ON ADULT ADMISSIONS (48" AND UP)

Seabreeze
AMUSEMENT PARK

OTHER HOT SUMMER FUN:
SIX FLAGS DARIEN LAKE • ROSELAND WATERPARK
• STERLING RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL
• RED WINGS BASEBALL
And Much More!!



RIDE THE BREEZE

Spirit of Ontario Fast Ferry



Purchase your **PASSPORT TO SAVINGS**
at Wegmans and receive a savings booklet
offering products and services for both
Toronto and the Rochester Area

