



IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

December 2005
Issue No. 60

SEARCHING FOR SERENITY

The youngest of three children, I grew up in a middle-class home in the suburbs of Portland. My parents were very active in the community, and our family looked ideal from the outside. Unfortunately, the reality was far from ideal. The truth was that my home was in constant chaos. It lacked the safety of personal boundaries, which resulted in physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. This environment contributed greatly to my low self-esteem. I was very lonely, even in a group of friends, and I felt different from others. Although I was depressed as a kid, I concealed it well. I was very active in sports, was one of the brightest kids in school, and had plenty of friends.

Looking back, I can see now that one of the factors significantly affecting my home environment was alcohol. In fact, my family had a long history of alcoholism. My grandfather died of complications from alcoholism at the young age of 34.

I don't remember when I had my first drink of alcohol, but I remember that even though the taste was terrible, the effect on my spirits was worth it. I instantly felt alive, and all of my insecurity left me. I was outgoing, funny, and adventurous. Suddenly, I found the wonder drug – the answer to all my problems. Alcohol seemed to temporarily lift my depression.

Alcohol started to become a regular part of my life when I worked away from home during the summer of my sophomore year in high school. When I returned to school for my junior year, my

entire focus in life changed. Even though I usually drank only on weekends, I had found something that I enjoyed and that made me feel good about myself, and I had something to look forward to.

In college, my partying went up another level. I made the basketball team and joined a fraternity that was perfect for me because it focused on sports, drinking, and girls – the three most important things in my life. Academics, on the other hand, were last on my list of priorities. I missed many classes, and my life became a series of parties, including one where I drank so much that I almost died of alcohol poisoning. By the end of the first semester, my grade point average had dropped below the minimum necessary to continue participating in college athletics – a crushing blow to me – yet even that did not slow down my drinking. By the end of the year, my grades had fallen so far below the school's standards that I was asked to leave.

Back at my parents' house that summer, they told me that I had to start paying rent and that they would no longer help pay for school. For the first time, I realized that I needed to make some significant changes. I went to a local community college, where I did well and eventually transferred back to my state university.

Over the next seven years, I exercised my freedom to drink and play sports while still enjoying many academic successes. I graduated in four years with a double major and honors. I was accepted to law school, graduated in the top half of my class, and passed the Oregon State Bar exam on my first try.

OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

503-226-1057
1-800-321-OAAP
www.oaap.org

Lawyers Helping Lawyers

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After law school, I got a great job at an accounting firm, married, and bought a townhouse in a nice area of Portland. For the next few years, everything went well. I did well at work, played basketball, and drank and partied with a group of young professionals.

Eventually, though, the external achievements and activities were not enough to counter my internal depression. My work attitude was getting worse, my wife and I were having problems, and I was drinking every night. I decided I needed to make a change. I applied and was accepted to an LLM program in taxation in another state. I moved there and lived in a one-room apartment by myself, leaving my wife, friends, and family in Portland. Once there, I again had more time to drink and play sports. I was running away from my life, trying to start over. It was not working. I was running out of answers.

Finally, after some urging from my wife and family, I agreed to meet with a therapist to help me sort out my life. Talking to the therapist just made me want to drink more. The more we talked about my problems and brought up the past, the more I wanted to drown those feelings in alcohol. I also found gambling. Although it kept my mind off my life while I was at the casino, I always felt worse the next morning. I was truly reaching the end of my rope and even considered suicide.

I agreed to try antidepressants and to stop drinking while I was taking them; however, after just a few days without drinking, I realized that I couldn't not drink. At that point, I truly felt hopeless and powerless over my life. I thought I was out of possible solutions.

One day, back at my home in Portland, I noticed an issue of *In Sight* in my mail pile. As I read the *In Sight*, I came across an article about attorneys with drinking problems. For the first time, I wondered if what I often thought of as a solution to my problems might actually be the problem. So I asked my wife if she would call the OAAP and ask them for more information about how they could help. She called and set up an appointment for me.

Through the OAAP, I learned that there was a solution to my misery, and it started with me stop-

ping drinking and starting 12-step meetings.

I agreed to go to a 12-step meeting at the OAAP, even though the idea made me very nervous. I expected to see people who were living on the streets, drinking out of a brown paper sack, with little education and no money. What I found was quite the opposite. I saw ordinary people who were well dressed and had smiles on their faces. It was a meeting of those in the legal profession who had problems with alcohol and drugs. There were attorneys, legal secretaries, judges, and others with law-related jobs.

The biggest effect on me was when the attendees shared their stories. Everyone said something that reminded me of my life. I couldn't believe it. For the first time in my life, I didn't feel alone. I found a group of people who had the same struggles that I had, but they had found a remedy that brought them peace and contentment. They made it clear that I, too, could find happiness.

Over the next year, I found a sponsor in the program and did everything he suggested. I worked all 12 steps, did service work, and surrendered my life to a higher power. I started to become the person I had always wanted to be. For the first time in my life, I experienced some serenity and joy. It was not all easy, though. I had to deal with the consequences from years of drinking, and I had to make amends. I had to look at my problems honestly and not use my old methods of escaping.

Today, I am in my 10th year of sobriety. I've been successful at finding new ways to cope with life. I have been able to find out who I am and what I want out of life. I remarried and have a good job that allows me to spend time with my family. I am involved in Alcoholics Anonymous, and I sponsor others who need help. I can look at myself in the mirror and like who is looking back at me.

If you are concerned about your drinking or that of a friend or loved one, call the OAAP and get the help you need.

Finding My Way Home