

## MY STRUGGLE WITH ALCOHOL

I got drunk for the first time when I was 13. After 30 years of drinking – 21 of them while practicing law – I finally quit and started going to Alcoholics Anonymous.

My problems with alcohol became more visible in high school. I was arrested twice for being a minor in possession. I drank with friends most weekends and started using marijuana and other drugs. My high school grades were so-so as I partied and got into trouble. There was never a question that I would go to college and I went to a state university in my hometown.

I continued to drink and use drugs in college. I found out that I enjoyed school, so I worked hard and did well. I was successful at controlling my drinking during much of this time, but I never quit and frequently got drunk. I seemed to be able to drink more than most of my friends and be affected less.

I finished college without a clear goal. I went to work at various jobs for several years and drank heavily and used lots of drugs. I decided the drugs were a problem, so I gave them up. I told myself I was in control. I even quit smoking, but I drank on. I loved to drink and believed I was destined to drink heavily. I admired famous drinkers and thought I could drink *and* be successful.

I had wanted to be a lawyer when I was a kid. I didn't know what else to do so I applied to law school. I was accepted at my old college. I drank through law school, although I was able to cut down when I thought it necessary. I believed I had control of the drinking, although it was apparent that few other students drank as much as I did. I began to worry that heavy drinking might not help my legal career.

I enjoyed law school and graduated near the top

of my class. I got a job clerking for a Federal Magistrate after law school. I drank most nights and did not actively seek work after my clerkship ended. I was unemployed for many months, drinking all the time. I got hired to do appellate work for a state agency, though the last thing I wanted to do was appeals. I moved to another city and began writing appeals. I was good at the job, but I never really liked it. I stayed for 18 years.

I drank nearly every day and got drunk several times a week. I was able to handle my work assignments easily, leaving more time for drinking. After several years, I told myself I was an alcoholic. I read about alcoholism and saw I qualified under any and all definitions of the condition. I frequently went on the "wagon" to prove to myself that I could control my drinking or to get my wife off my back, as she began to see that I had a drinking problem. I was always more miserable when I was not drinking. I always knew that it was just a matter of time before I would start drinking again.

My wife and I had three children. I tried to stop drinking for my kids. I couldn't do it. I saw my best drinking buddy go into AA and change his life. I knew I should be with him, but I couldn't bring myself to admit to anyone that I had a problem and seek help.

The last 10 years of drinking were miserable. I drank mostly by myself. I worked hard to hide my problem, and wrongly thought I was successful. I had grown to hate my job and I spent as little time as possible in the office. Most days I came in late in the morning and left early in the afternoon to drink by myself. I hardly tried to stop anymore. I began to notice the deaths of alcoholics, including one I had worked with for years. As I entered my late forties I began to fear the damage I knew I must be doing to my body and mind. But I couldn't stop. I began thinking of suicide or running away from my job and family.

Obviously my work suffered, and the day came when I was asked to leave or be fired. I resigned and spent five months drinking. I was in the worst depression of my life. I still could not bring myself to ask for help or admit I had a problem.

Finally, my wife could not stand me any longer, and I could not stand myself. I had lost my job and my family was next. I had seen the notices in the Bar Bulletin about the OAAP for years. Somehow I was able to phone the OAAP one night when I was completely smashed. I got a call back in minutes from the OAAP and entered an inpatient treatment program the next day.

In treatment I learned that alcoholism is a chronic, progressive, and fatal disease. More importantly, I learned that the disease can be controlled by using the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. I embraced the program, found a sponsor, and began working the steps.

It has been three and one-half years since my last drink. I regularly attend AA meetings and work the 12 steps. I have met many other alcoholics who are in recovery and made great friends in the program. I have been able to live comfortably and happily without drinking. The compulsion to drink has been removed. My family is reconciled and happy. I am working as a trial lawyer, something I wanted to do for years but was afraid to try because of my drinking.

During the last years of my drinking I got to the point where I could not imagine life with or without alcohol. AA has allowed me to live without alcohol and be happy. My life is much richer today than when I was drinking. I thank God every day for AA.

*Happy to Be Winning the Struggle*