

Attorney Recovery Stories



Foreword

This publication contains stories written by lawyers who are in recovery from alcoholism and substance abuse or dependence or depression; it was compiled with the anticipation that others may benefit from reading them. We hope you are among those who do.

Special thanks to the individuals who shared their stories and to the staff and volunteers of the lawyer assistance effort in New York State.





Table of Contents

Wanna Party?	1
Depression or Drinking	3
I Hated the World	4
A Friend in Need	5
The Family's First Professional	6
I Didn't Know That I Didn't Know	7
Desperate Problems	9
It Couldn't Happen to Me	10
A Problem Drinker	11
I Followed in Their Footsteps	12
Magic	13
A Road to Wisdom	15
I Thought I Was the Same	16
Anxiety and Fear	17
Will Power is Not Enough	19
Couldn't Be Me	20
Smug and Complacent	21
Did I or Didn't I?	22
A Blessed Life	23
An ACOA and an Alcoholic	24
Personal Observations	26
I Promise	29
Depression; One Attorney's Story	32
Practicing Alongside Depression	34
Depression Ethics	36
Lawyer Distress Revisited	40
My Name is Judy	42
Resources/Contacts*	46

**See the Resource listing at the end for Lawyer Assistance Programs and Lawyer Helping Lawyer Committee contacts around New York State*



WANNA PARTY?

Growing up in the 60s, I started “partying” like a lot of other people did — underage drinking with friends in the park near my house. Laughing and carrying on — running from the cops — it was my favorite kind of fun. And since I didn’t get into too much trouble, it all seemed pretty harmless. What I didn’t realize at the time was that drinking did something for me that it didn’t seem to do for most other people. When I drank alcohol, I somehow felt larger — more powerful — and all the negatives in the world around me seemed smaller and less threatening. All the fear, the prevailing feeling of inadequacy and the sense of not belonging diminished and often disappeared while drinking. I loved everything about drinking — the taste, the smell, the way the bottles looked, but mostly the effect it had on me — the way it made me feel.

When I was about 16, I smoked my first joint. That night, I met my second true love. I loved smoking dope — from the first time to the last — even though I hated what it eventually did to me. And even though I came to use cocaine five days out of seven; even though I liked pain relievers and tranquilizers (often all at the same time) — above all I loved drinking and smoking marijuana and did both virtually every day for the last 15 years of my active using.

As the years went by, drinking and getting high gradually became more and more important in my life. In college and law school, I managed to get excellent grades and did most of what was expected of me. I often said to myself that I worked hard and played hard. And even though I worked as hard as most people, I “played” a lot harder. I started noticing that my drinking and using were different from my friends — I drank and got high more frequently, often alone. I didn’t think it was a problem because I somehow managed to function. It’s only now that I’m living a clean and sober life that I understand that “living” life was possible for me — that I didn’t have to settle for just “functioning”.

Alcohol and drugs were my reward when things went well and my solace when they didn’t. Whether celebrating or drowning my sorrows — they were my constant companions and eventually became my top priority. I was more dedicated, more devoted and made more sacrifices for alcohol and drugs than for anything else in my life.

As things got worse, I became less and less able to hide the effects of my drinking and using from those around me. My wife and my partners knew “something” was wrong, but didn’t know what to do. All lawyers have too much to do and too little time to do it, but everyone I knew managed better than I did. My practice was full of excuses and blaming and having others bail me out. The deadlines were unreasonable; the clients were impossible. I worked so hard why didn’t they all cut me some slack?

I finally got to the point where I lived in constant state of terror. I knew I wanted to stop drinking and using but couldn’t stop no matter how hard I tried. Continuing to drink and use was untenable and living without alcohol and drugs also seemed untenable.

Then, I did something I had a great deal of trouble doing all my life I asked for help. In tears, I told one of my partners that I thought I was an alcoholic and a drug addict and that I needed help.

I choked those words out the first time I said them. How could it be? I was a cum laude graduate of a good law school, a partner in a major law firm and an alcoholic and drug addict? Shouldn’t I have known better?

I felt rotten, weak-willed, immoral and no good. I was a procrastinating, people-pleasing perfectionist, an ego manic with an inferiority complex. I felt that I was a loner and a loser and that I just didn’t belong in life. And I clearly had a mental obsession and a physical compulsion to drink alcohol and use drugs. Shouldn’t I have known better?

I found out that knowledge has nothing to do with it. I have a disease, a primary, chronic, progressive, incurable and fatal disease called alcoholism. The alcohol and drugs are just symptoms. My strength and willpower have nothing to do with it. I am powerless over alcohol and drugs.

I also found that, although incurable, this disease I have is very treatable. I’m not alone, far from it and if you have the same disease I do you’re not alone either. If you (or an attorney you’re close to) have living problems and alcohol and/or drugs are an important part of your life, please call the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. We can help. ■



DEPRESSION OR DRINKING

Whether depression fosters drinking or drinking fosters depression is the subject of recent research at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Based on a group of 936 people studied, the general conclusion seems to be that women who are depressed for two to three years are more apt to drink to excess and men who drink to excess for two to three years are apt to become depressed. Drinking (or drugging) to excess is depressing enough; recognizing yourself as an alcoholic or an addict sounds even more depressing. So I thought.

Thinking didn't make the depression or the drinking change. At seventeen I was depressed. Years of drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco and marijuana — all to excess — didn't change that. I was simply older, depressed and alcoholic. Such substances didn't make me any less anxious, any less afraid, or any more brave or creative. And stopping didn't either. Quitting drinking and smoking, however, did cheer me up in that I had fewer things to worry about and it was cheering not to be actively killing myself on a daily basis. No term paper, exam, client or case — nobody and nothing — is worth doing that to yourself.

I was lucky. A few years ago, I showed up at the Bar Association one day visibly depressed. I was crying. The sympathetic receptionist ushered me to an empty conference room and gave me the number of the Bar Association's counselor. Even though I had gone to a counselor for years, I met with the Bar Association's counselor, was given financial assistance, and after a few months, realized that I had an alcohol problem and that I couldn't continue to drink. The Bar Association referred me to a member of Lawyers Helping Lawyers who told me about regular meetings and helped me with my billings. I started going to an attorney/law student Alcoholics Anonymous group on a weekly basis.

Lawyers Helping Lawyers and those who attend the attorney AA meetings are supportive of each other and other attorneys in need of help. Should you need it, help is available to you. If you think we might be able to help, chances are good that we can. ■



I HATED THE WORLD

Just a few years ago, unless I was drinking, I hated myself and everything around me. Today, I don't drink, and like who I am and what is around me. Here's my story.

Although I grew up with enough food, clothes, shelter, friends and family support, I always felt alone and different. That was until I discovered alcohol. After taking my first drink, I was like everyone else, able to do whatever I wanted. By the time I reached my twenties, alcohol had become my constant companion. Before, during and after most of my activities, I drank. It was not an option. It enabled me to escape from fear and worry.

By my thirties, although constantly drinking, I was doing pretty well. I made it through high school, college, law school and passed the bar. In a short time, I got a job, met my wife and had a couple of kids. It seemed all was going my way. But, through it all, I drank to feel comfortable. Increasing episodes of yelling, arguing, fighting, and ultimate self-loathing ensued. Abusive behavior became the norm for me. While blaming the world for all my problems, I could not stand me. Anyone in my path suffered.

In my early forties, no one intentionally remained in my path too long. I was usually drunk. At work or at home, no one could predict when I'd either say or do something unacceptable. I had lost all my friends and was close to losing my family and job. That was then.

My life has changed dramatically. What happened? While eating dinner alone and having a few too many, I started talking to a guy sitting next to me. What I said, or how I spoke, is a mystery to me. I remember what the guy said to me. He asked, "Do you want to stop drinking?" He added, "I've seen you before. I'm a lawyer too. I used to drink". After that, I only know when I came to the next day, two phone numbers were in my pocket. One was for Lawyers Helping Lawyers, the other for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Many times people told me that I drank too much and that I'd better stop before losing everything. But I never listened. Yet, rather than make a demand, when another lawyer asked me a question and told me about himself, giving me phone numbers to obtain information, well, that finally moved me. I was able to admit that I had a drinking problem. It was the root of all my other problems.

I called Lawyers Helping Lawyers. Anonymously, they helped me learn what steps to take so I could live comfortably without alcohol.

Now, in my late forties, I have a comfortable personal and professional life. My life today is filled with fun, laughter, and success. When I have a problem, I don't have to drink over it. ■



A FRIEND IN NEED

A few days ago, I was approached by a good friend of mine. He told me that his drinking was getting “a bit out of hand” and that the time had come to see what could be done about it.

He informed me that he had tried on his own many times, and in many different ways to address this problem but his efforts were to no avail. The funny thing about it is, he said he wanted to “check it out” but didn't want to commit to attendance or sobriety at the moment.

Boy, could I relate to that. I had tried to gain control of my substance abuse problem for years. The aftermath of each vain attempt made my life even more chaotic than it had been before.

Speaking with my friend was like looking in a mirror that reflected the me of years ago.

When he asked me how I had quit booze and drugs, my reply was simple: Alcoholics Anonymous. He seemed ambivalent. He expressed concerns about his professional reputation and his standing in the community. I told him that he would no longer have a professional reputation or standing in the community if he allowed his disease to go unchecked, and that the ‘Anonymous’ component of AA addresses concerns such as this.

He finally seemed relieved when I told him about the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. I explained to my friend that many attorneys suffer from the disease of alcoholism and would welcome the opportunity to help him. He seemed surprised to learn that we have a weekly meeting, but he also seemed anxious to attend.

Last night, my friend met me at a meeting. It was his first meeting, and he seemed as nervous as I was at my first one. The people there tried to put him at ease and were friendly. I remember wishing they hadn't been so friendly when I began, so I wouldn't be noticed!

It appeared that their attempt to welcome him worked. I could sense a feeling of relief in my friend as he looked around the room and noticed many attorneys in attendance.

After the meeting I introduced him to my AA sponsor (a sponsor is a mentor of sorts). He instantly recognized my sponsor as a prominent attorney in our area. This also seemed to have a positive effect on my friend.

I hope my friend comes back. Some come back right away; others return after a period of time. Those are the lucky ones. Others lose their jobs, families, and/or their professional licenses. Some go to jail. Some are institutionalized. Many end up dead.

The Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee really cares. They offer confidential assistance to attorneys, their families, and others. There is no charge for this help...we pay a high enough price to qualify, if you know what I mean.

The people involved give of themselves freely in a fashion I had been unaccustomed to. They have literally saved my life. ■



THE FAMILY'S FIRST PROFESSIONAL

I was the first one of twenty-five cousins in my family to graduate from college and still the only one to graduate from a professional school. I experimented with alcohol on a few rare occasions in high school and never experimented with drugs.

I started drinking my freshman year in college, even though I was seventeen, at campus functions. The school apparently thought anyone with a valid school ID was legally old enough to drink even though the card clearly showed the owner was too young. I drank only on weekends and never became “blitzed”.

I continued the same pattern in law school. I was a weekend drinker who rarely drank to excess. The same pattern continued for several years. After being admitted to practice, you cannot imagine how dumbfounded I was to learn that, after drinking alcohol for many years, I was an alcoholic.

My family had a history of clinical depression. I knew instinctively that I, too, had suffered bouts of depression. My early drinking patterns and my family history allowed me to fashion an almost impenetrable barrier to my accepting that I was an alcoholic and for my seeking any help for my problem.

Once I was ready to admit I had a problem, Lawyers Helping Lawyers was there to help. I was guided to the professional help I

needed. Most importantly, LHL introduced me to a “safety net” of people like me with whom I meet on a regular basis. We deal with our alcohol problem together.

I may have given the impression that I never abused drugs. I did, but only properly-prescribed anti-depressant medication. I drank while I took them. Now that I am alcohol free I can deal with that problem also.

The confidential assistance of Lawyers Helping Lawyers is available to you, too. Please call. You will be put you in touch with a colleague who has been where you are. Lawyer Assistance Program services are totally confidential.■



I DIDN'T KNOW THAT I DIDN'T KNOW

I didn't know that I didn't know that I didn't know, and so it was easy for me to blame my wife, my family, my co-workers and my clients for my ineffectiveness, my mistakes and my unhappiness. If they would only listen to me and let me take care of everything, then the pain would go away. I was the most loving, caring, conscientious person that I knew. I might add that I was the most knowledgeable person on every topic that was being discussed, regardless of whether or not I knew anything about it. I was constantly persecuted by the very people that I was going to rescue. I summed up my existence by saying that I was Guilty of Right Thinking. If that phrase strikes a chord in your inner being, there is help for you as there was for me.

For most of my life I snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. I was an expert at the famous coin flip game: heads, I lose, tails you win. It seemed that every selfless gesture and good deed ended with my feeling isolated and alone. Fortunately, I did have a friend that I thought understood me, supported me and enabled me to face the very people I was trying to help when they mercilessly pointed out my shortcomings, failures and mistakes. The friend was alcohol and after many years, when I needed more help, its companion, drugs.

The everyday problems of life overwhelmed me. I couldn't face them, because I didn't know how to face them. But I didn't know that I didn't know how to face them. I devised a system that guaranteed I would lose. At least that way I wouldn't be harming anyone? My two best friends, alcohol and drugs, absorbed the pain that this created in

me. They commiserated with me and encouraged me to live this way. And so I lived, passively resisting the advice of the people who loved and cared for me, secure in the knowledge that they would all be safe, because in the end I would lose. It didn't matter to me because in the end I would lose. It didn't matter to me because I always had my friend in the bottle or the ounce or gram, until I didn't.

I had to take two trips to the dry well of despair, the first when I ran away from a career that had promise and the second when I gave up on my marriage. I was physically, materially, morally and spiritually bankrupt. There was nothing left to fail at, my friends, alcohol and drugs couldn't find anything or anyone to blame for my terror, frustration, loneliness and despair.

At that time I was given one glimpse of reality. I saw that nobody benefited from my losing, that I was hurting everyone that I thought I was helping, that I had been trying to manipulate and control the people I wanted most to be free, that I was hopelessly and desperately alone and that it was my choice. I was forty years old and I had no idea how to feel and how to solve problems so that everyone could benefit. Perhaps, most embarrassingly, I was trained as a lawyer and teacher, allegedly solving problems and teaching life skills to associates and students who placed a great deal of reliance on me ... and I couldn't do it for myself.

In that glimpse, I saw that the solution, alcohol and drugs, was the problem, and if I was ever going to touch others, help others and feel the love that I had always pushed away, I had to stop drinking and drugging. But I couldn't do it. Not matter how hard I tried, I would always return to alcohol and drugs. They never made things better, even though I kept telling myself this time they would.

I found help. The volunteers of my bar association's Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee reached out their hand to me and with their help and direction I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous. A hopeless, useless person has become hopeful and useful. Without LHL and AA I am certain that I would not have been able to turn my life around.

For today, I know what I didn't know. I know that it is okay if I don't know, if I do make mistakes and if there are times when I am unhappy. Today I know that there is a place where I can go to find the life skills I didn't know about and I go there. Now one day at a time, I do not use alcohol or drugs to run away from life.

The miracle has happened. Some days I win. ■



DESPERATE PROBLEMS

I didn't know what to do. I felt that my problems were too immense and too difficult to handle. I felt desperate, afraid, lonely and sad. I wasn't the type of person who would share problems with another person.

I began drinking as a teenager — just beer at first. I slowly developed a taste for the “harder” stuff. My drinking never got me into big trouble. Never had a DWI or major accident; never lost a job or a marriage over it. My problems seemed to be centered around relationships. This included family and former friends. There was a total breakdown in communication with my son, and I had very few friends left.

Shortly before I became sober, I remember the day I said, “I am not going to eat anymore!” I was losing weight and becoming more and more anxious, sullen and withdrawn. It seemed that eating just upset my stomach and began to interfere with my drinking. Soon after, I realized I was in a bad situation — couldn't stop drinking, and I finally realized I should. I became a closet drinker at this point. I would wait for the family to go to bed for the evening and then I would begin my drinking. I could drink a tremendous volume in a very short time. I would invariably go to sleep drunk and wake up hung over.

As the problems in my life became unbearable to me, one day I made an announcement (a vow) to my whole family that I was going to stop drinking. Having admitted for the first time that I was powerless over alcohol, many odd things began to happen. My family was now encouraging me to go to Alcoholics Anonymous, or “AA”. My family surprised me: some of them are recovering alcoholics too and they knew what I was going through.

A volunteer from the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee contacted me and asked me to lunch. He later brought me to my first AA meeting.

Since attending AA regularly, all sorts of wonderful things have happened to me. My friends and family relationships have improved. My health has improved. I am learning to accept on life on life's terms. I am growing emotionally, spiritually and in every other way. I haven't had a drink in over a year and a half and things are getting better day by day. I owe my recovery, which is an ongoing affair, to AA. I found people in AA who could show me by their words and

actions and stories - how to live a new and wonderful way. If you feel desperate like I did, give yourself a break. There are people ready, willing and able to help you on your way to recovery. ■



IT COULDN'T HAPPEN TO ME

Eighteen months ago I had my last drink, I pray. Prior to that time, I would have rather jumped off a bridge than have to admit to myself, let alone to the readers of this article, that I was an alcoholic. The stigma that I perceived to be attached to this disease was sufficient to sink me deeper into denial. Additionally, I could not have a drinking problem — I was not the type of person I imagined an alcoholic to be: a daily drinker, a street derelict, a washed out, weak-willed sot.

In my recovery, I have learned that it does not matter what I did for a living, how smart I thought I was, how often I drank or how much. The bottom line was what the drink did to me.

I had always associated drinking with fun. It allowed me to relax, celebrate, escape temporarily from stress and to create a high spot in an otherwise dull day. Because I drank periodically, I thought I was a social drinker. However, almost every time I took a drink, I wanted more. One drink was not enough. So, often when I did take a drink, I would get inebriated to some degree. Once I picked up the first drink, I could not guarantee the outcome. “Stopping for one” was a figment of my best intentions.

During the last four years of my drinking, I used alcohol more frequently to cope with the ups and downs of life. My hangovers became worse. Fear, guilt and remorse, which used to visit me on “the day after,” became more frequent companions. Motivation and productivity at work lessened. More and more I isolated myself from people. My wall was up. I did not know that I was suffering from the disease of alcoholism. As it often times is I was the last to know.

It was difficult for me to take what appeared at the time to be a humiliating step: to admit that I was powerless over alcohol. However, by taking that first step, by honestly facing myself, I began a new life, a much better life. I surrendered to win. Freedom, peace of mind, and a newfound happiness are just a few of the promises of sobriety which are coming into being in my life, one day at a time.

For those of you who think you have a problem with drinking and/or drugs, there is a solution, if you want it. For completely confidential help, call the Lawyers Assistance Program or the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. There are many of us who were where you are now, who stand ready to help. ■



A PROBLEM DRINKER

When I came to the end of my drinking days I figured that I was a problem drinker, not an alcoholic. I could not possibly be an alcoholic. For one thing, I was too intelligent and too talented. I functioned as a lawyer and, for the most part, functioned fairly well. So I had a bit of a problem with booze...that was not the end of the world. Many successful trial lawyers drank too much, from time to time.

This is what my problem drinking was like. Fear was with me at all times, except when I was drinking. I feared such things as the phones, the mail, my boss, my shaking hands, and my uncertain memory. I had nothing to hope for. My future was firmly behind me. My wife was thinking of leaving me.

The periods between drinking were simply time that had to be endured. I had no feeling of self-worth. Guilt and remorse were a daily part of my life. The list of people I had disappointed grew as the list of people who were part of my life shrank. Believe me - there was absolutely no joy in Mudville. This is what having a drinking problem was like for me in those days.

Obviously, I had a serious problem with self-honesty. About the last thing I wanted to do was to look at what I had become. I am an omnivorous reader, yet I would avoid any books, articles or information, from any source, about alcoholism. I did not want facts to complicate my thinking. Actually, I realized I was doing this. But I ran from the thought by telling myself lies, such as that I had no interest in something so irrelevant.

When I finally reached bottom and got honest I recognized myself for the alcoholic I was. I then came face to face with the dilemma that has killed many a problem drinker. I knew I could not continue drinking and live, yet I did not know how I could live without continuing to drink.

The answer to this dilemma was this: I was a sick man and was not able to handle my drinking problem alone.

Twenty-one years ago Alcoholics Anonymous came into my life and gave it back to me.

If any of this rings a bell with you, please know that you are not alone. For completely confidential help, call the Lawyer Assistance Program or the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee at your bar association. We stand ready to help. ■



I FOLLOWED IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS

For some time now I have been reading the Lawyers Helping Lawyers column in my bar association's newsletter and seeing how so many of us who have entered recovery did so after realizing that they had reached a turning point precipitated by impending disaster in their personal or professional lives.

When I asked for help and entered recovery I had no recognition that the disease of alcoholism adversely affected my professional life. I regularly worked long hours, acquitted myself more than reasonably well in the completion of my professional responsibilities, earned a fair living from my practice, and was able to care for my family.

The idea that I was managing well in those areas, while partially true, was an illusion that allowed me to deny that there was something seriously wrong. I didn't know enough about it to call it alcoholism. It was not until some time after I entered recovery that I could begin to assess the cost that I was paying and, unfortunately, the cost I was imposing on the people involved in my professional and personal life, for letting the disease of alcoholism continue unchecked.

It wasn't a question of dishonesty; I simply didn't understand the dynamic. I knew that I had passed the stage where I could stop drinking through my own efforts. I had not realized that I could not continue to drink. The physical effects were apparent. I was seeing a specialist for kidney trouble, an internist for help with assorted gastric problems, and a psychiatrist for chronic depression. I still thought that medicine and treatment for these problems would solve them somehow, in a way that was not related to stopping drinking. In the

course of seeking treatment for my medical problems, I began to abuse the prescription drugs given to me to “ease the pressure.” At that time I believed that the pressure and stress induced by my practice caused all the medical difficulties and that drinking was the source of relief.

At the same time, however, I was becoming increasingly isolated from the people I really cared about: my family, my friends, my partners, and my clients. They were all, at some level, reacting to my attitude, finding ways to get on with the business of their lives and letting me go my own way. I had been wishing that people would just leave me alone...and I was beginning to get my wish.

My life, at that time, was a textbook case of progressive, untreated alcoholism. Nothing about it was a mystery to anyone who was familiar with the disease. Unfortunately, I was not one of those people. Even though my physicians, each from the standpoint of his particular discipline, talked about stopping drinking, I didn't recognize the existence of a separate, progressive, debilitating, and eventually terminal disease called alcoholism.

The circumstances of my recovery are not as important as the fact that it took place. It began through meeting members of the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee and continued through my participation in Alcoholics Anonymous. The entire process was confidential, with full care and consideration for my need to keep it private. Today I choose to speak about it so that others may see that they, too, can enjoy recovery and regain a life worth living.

If you can see that drugs or alcohol are having an effect on your life and you would like help on a completely confidential basis, please call the Lawyer Assistance Program or the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. ■



I do not want to preach, so I will be brief.

From the time I picked up my very first drink and felt the magical “Ahhh” feeling, I drank for that physical effect. I was 15 years old.

My first drunk resulted in a bout of alcohol poisoning and a blackout. They found me in the bathroom at Kissing Bridge. I thought

it made a funny anecdote.

My drinking continued through high school. I'm not sure, but I don't think any of the other students without drinking problems were sneaking their parents' booze into school in jelly jars. I thought I was funny when I was drunk. I certainly thought I was better-looking when I was drunk.

College brought new opportunities to learn. I learned that without Mom and Dad around, I could drink first thing in the morning. In fact, I could catch a buzz and then go to class, or simply catch the buzz and skip the class.

Law school brought a new kind of pressure to bear on my already exciting existence. Somehow I went to class, took exams, and graduated. Within two years of graduation, I had "bottomed out." I did not get arrested, I did not get a divorce, I did not lose a house.

But I lost the ability to make sense of anything. My perception was severely distorted.

I have come to understand that this is a symptom of my alcoholism.

Much more than my drinking, what was causing me grave difficulty was my inability to see myself clearly in relation to the world. Rules did not apply to me. They were boring and had little to do with the exciting life I had planned.

When things went wrong, instead of taking responsibility for my part, I found ways to become a victim. Life happened to me, not for me. I had a penchant for drama: the more, the better.

And finally, I had a profound inability to make the connection between the actions I took and the resulting quality of my life.

My understanding and awareness of my disease of alcoholism did not become fully realized until I put the drink down.

I did that on August 4, 1991.

There's a saying in Alcoholics Anonymous: "If you want what we have, then you have to do what we do."

If you think you might have a drinking or other substance problem, please call the Lawyer Assistance Program or the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. ■



A ROAD TO WISDOM

I was a fool before I became wise.

There is little about my life that is truly profound in a philosophical sense, but I have made the transition from a confused, alcohol-dependent, dreary (and sometimes altogether dark) marginal existence to a state of stability and calm in which I never knew I could dwell.

Naturally, I never thought it would turn out this way. During my childhood and adolescence I frequently had the sense of being misplaced, finding that only rarely did others see my perspective on life. My middle-class upbringing was stable enough to normalize my actions but my emotional and thought life was always unsettled and often chaotic.

When I first encountered alcohol at the age of 14 or so, however, reality was turned inside-out. I had the illusion that the world conformed to me. Thereafter, I sought after this magic elixir with increased zeal and frequency. Alcohol smoothed off every rough edge of the peg.

There were consequences throughout my teen and early adult years: I had difficulty in the latter years of high school; I was unable to form genuine friendships; I was hostile and belligerent towards authority, and I had a few (although thankfully, minor and non-disabling) scrapes with the law.

I did some minor experimentation with other drugs, but booze was my first love, a love that did nothing but vexate my spirit. Eventually, perhaps due to necessity, my ambition and ego, I put aside alcohol for a period while in college, except for the post-exam binge. By the time I graduated, the idea of my being an alcoholic or having any kind of drinking problem was far from my mind.

Alcoholics, after all, don't achieve the way I had, do they? I graduated second in my class, scored well on the LSAT's, and was admitted to several top law schools. Only after I learned more about alcoholism and addiction did I realize that alcoholics and addicts are indeed, on the large part, very driven, energetic, and self-willed people who are capable of accomplishing great deeds.

Law school was a challenging experience, but I did it well enough; top third of my class, law journal editor, recommendations from professors. I enjoyed the academic pursuit. I controlled my

drinking for the first two years, but I steadily increased my consumption during the final year. I was drinking daily and the fun began to fade. I would drink for relief, for any reason or for no reason. I became less sure of the future.

I decided to sit for the bar only through the prodding of family members. Having passed the bar I started work with a firm where I was able to muster the enthusiasm to actually do well, but within a year or so I became less interested in law and more attached to drinking.

I drank every day after work, sometimes into the early-morning hours. My binges took me to places I would have never otherwise visited. My level of functioning slid downward. My personal and professional life began to suffer, and I became depressed to the point where I had to take a leave of absence. I thought I needed a psychiatrist for the treatment of some complex syndrome. Little did I realize that I was consuming copious quantities of a depressant on a daily basis.

Finally, I could not stand it any longer. I called the Lawyers Helping Lawyers hotline and was put in touch with two local attorneys who met with me. I didn't get it the first time around, and it took several months of struggle and denial before I finally conceded to my innermost being that I could not stop drinking on my own. The lawyers, judges, and other professionals who worked with me and helped me were patient, non-judgmental and caring. I was not alone anymore.

Today, I enjoy a most fruitful existence and I am grateful for everything from even the simplest things and especially for the privilege of practicing law. I can do all this and face daily challenges, without picking up a drink, through God who strengthens us and gives us grace. ■



I THOUGHT I WAS THE SAME

From my earliest recollections I do not believe that I felt the same as other kids. I just did not fit in.

All that changed instantly when I began using alcohol and other drugs.

Those feelings of being “less than” or “not part of” immediately disappeared and for the first time that I can recall, I felt good.

I have heard it said that alcoholics and drug addicts are mis-

wired in the factory. I can certainly identify with feeling that way. I now realize that I was using the alcohol and other drugs to run away from problems.

I continued running, finding myself in and out of trouble until one morning in January, 1988. In the midst of my morning ritual, which involved the consumption of alcohol and other drugs to thrust myself into a state of consciousness in which I could feel comfortable on the planet, I had a moment of clarity. I suddenly realized that my continued alcohol and drug abuse would lead to my demise. Somehow, I knew inside that I didn't have much longer to live.

I soon found myself involved in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. In AA, I felt at home for the first time in my life. I began to become acquainted with a Higher Power which I now realize was always present in my life.

Several years later I became involved with my Bar Association's Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. The Committee members are acutely aware of the life and death nature of alcoholism and drug addiction. These individuals became my heroes and I am genuinely proud to be one of them. Many of us devote a great deal of our time and resources to helping attorneys, judges, law students and their families recover from seemingly hopeless states of mind and body. In addition to our LHL Committee meetings, we meet for lunch once a week, have a weekly 12-Step meeting and are always in touch with one another. One of the founders of the Committee is my AA sponsor (mentor). His help to me and countless others is immeasurable.

The Committee members accept me as I am, without expectations. I have found a real home, unconditional love and acceptance. I have found the fellowship that I craved and an opportunity to be of service to others. I have stopped running and I am at peace. ■



ANXIETY AND FEAR

I had my first drink when I was fourteen. It was sweet wine and it tasted good. More importantly it made me feel good. That first drink was precipitated by anxiety and fear.

My last drink was forty years later! It was also precipitated by fear and anxiety but now it was terror, dread and paralysis. I could not go outside, except to work, which I did.

I was a functioning alcoholic. At the end of my drinking, no one

cared about me save my seventy-nine year old widowed mother. I was broke, having recently gone bankrupt. I had four years of payments on my car, I had an apartment with cast-off furniture and I could not get credit.

I could not stop drinking. I became physically ill, very ill. I became a cardiac patient. I had open-heart surgery and lower-back surgery. I became an active diabetic. I developed a duodenal ulcer and an irritable bowel. The list went on. My cardiologist attributes most of my ill health to the use and abuse of alcohol over that long period of time.

I bankrupt the family business in addition to my personal bankruptcy. I married and divorced three times, had five children and two step-children. None of my family, including my sister, wanted anything to do with me. I still had a girlfriend and two male friends but I was bankrupt, not only financially, but morally, emotionally and spiritually.

All that was really important to me was my alcohol and my prescription tranquilizers, my sleeping pills and pain pills. It took three ounces of bourbon and three Seconals to put me out at night and I would have to repeat the process in order to get through the night.

If you told me that there was life after booze I would have labeled you crazy. I had tried various cures and I had sworn off many times, only to resume drinking with a vengeance.

I have been a patient on locked floors in two different hospitals. I have tried suicide twice. The list of horrors could go on-but the simple truth was -I couldn't stop drinking — I had to drink.

Maybe you're not this bad ... yet ... but if alcohol is messing you up, professionally, personally, or socially, you may have a problem with alcohol.

Alcoholism is a treatable disease! Trust me. There is life after booze.

I came out on the other side, and I believe you can, too. Please call the Lawyer Assistance Program or the committee of Lawyers Helping Lawyers of your Bar Association. We are sworn to confidentiality-your anonymity will be scrupulously protected.

Remember-you don't have to live that way any more — there is a better way! I have found it and so can you! ■



WILL POWER IS NOT ENOUGH

Self-sufficiency, a spirit of independence and carefully nurtured feelings of intellectualized stubbornness are some of the hallmarks of our profession; character traits which can be devastating for those of us who, like myself, suffer from the disease of alcoholism.

Ten years ago, if anyone had suggested that there was any kind of problem that I could not overcome with will power, study, perseverance and control (let alone my drinking, “social” of course), I would have responded in a none-too-subtle manner that that person had been using his or her head for a hockey puck.

Engaged in a profession stressing the art of persuasion, I succeeded in convincing myself (if no one else) that I could control my drinking any time I chose to. This attitude was maintained against all efforts by friends, family and colleagues to break through the Maginot Line of my denial until my world was collapsing around me. Fired from my position in an area firm, I became embroiled in myriad professional, financial and domestic crises; lost the last vestiges of control and became powerless over almost any aspect of my life. Filled with fear, it became an ordeal even to read my mail or answer the telephone.

The only person fooled by my feeble attempts to fabricate a facade of normalcy was me.

It was not until I had reached the nadir of my life, lost in a morass of helplessness, self-pity and loathing, that I was able to overcome my own sense of pride and bull-headed stubbornness, to admit defeat, ask for help and become teachable.

A miracle happened. People helped me when I asked for it.

Since that time and with help that is so freely offered, my life has improved in every aspect beyond any expectation I might have had. Of paramount importance is my recognition of my illness and the return of self-respect which came with facing it and treating it in an honest manner. In relying solely on my own will power to combat alcohol, I had refused to recognize that the progression of my disease had removed any self control I thought I had.

My message for anyone reading this article can be reduced to this: if you are powerless over alcohol and your drinking is causing problems in your life, you do not need to suffer any more. We are all humans. Our profession does not endow us with unique powers to deal with this devastating disease. If we are willing to accept the help

that we can offer to each other, we can learn to live again, instead of remaining in fear of what each day may bring, drowning ourselves in alcohol to anesthetize the pain of an unhappy existence.

If you have a desire and need to stop drinking, the Lawyer Assistance Program or the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee of your Bar Association can help you. Your anonymity will be scrupulously protected, and there is nothing to lose except fear, pain and misery. ■



COULDN'T BE ME

Addict.

Alcoholic.

Words that could apply to me?

Hardly! Never!

After all, I had gone through a career process that required the discipline of substantial post-graduate education at the law school level. I had passed the rigorous bar examination and had carved out a practice in the profession of law. I had won the respect of my family, my friends, and my fellow practitioners. How could I be out of control of my life?

Couldn't happen.

Well, of course it can. The disease of alcoholism is no respecter of personal accomplishment. On the contrary, the disease hides behind the denial that addiction could possibly be present in someone who has done much and gone far. Like me.

The illusion, the facade, that my life was still under control, that it was manageable with just a little more effort and a little more application and attention from me persisted long after the choice of whether and when I would have to drink had evaporated.

I had a rationale, an excuse for why my drinking had a negligible effect on the people in my life. If there was a problem, it was my problem and I could fix it anytime I chose.

Fortunately, alcoholism is a progressive disease and the interior damage to my body and my mind broke the illusion and the denial before my life was ruined. I was forced to seek help before I destroyed my family life and my practice.

That is not true for so many people. For all too many, the law practice, the family, and the friends are gone before the denial is shattered.

If you are at a place in your life where you think you may have a problem with alcohol or drugs; if you think that your ability to practice law or to function is dependent on the relief you get from just kicking back, don't ignore it. Take a good look at where you are and where it might be taking you.

Not everyone who indulges has the disease, or is beyond self-control.

But if you think it may be possible that it is getting out of hand, there is a place to turn for help before you pay too great a price. ■



SMUG AND COMPLACENT

When I finished law school, I keenly anticipated the chance to be able to lead a normal life, free from the unrelenting penury of the student. I expected to and did find a job, which allowed me the luxury of decent clothes, a car, a chance to socialize regularly with friends without a nagging budget.

I could go to good restaurants and was able to afford something better than the cheapest on the menu. I could afford to have cocktails before and wine during dinner. I could and certainly did stock a liquor cabinet at home. It also seemed eminently sensible to have drinks at home before dinner. After all, I was an adult now, a lawyer working hard and making a living. If for no other reason, I deserved these small pleasures for the delayed gratification and hard work.

Living this way felt comfortably mature and I pursued life with gusto. Although I might have been a bit smug and complacent then, I surely could not have thought I was living a prelude to disaster. Nevertheless, in not too many years, a disaster it was.

I usually did not intend to get drunk, although I recall seeing nothing wrong in so intending when I did. My usual intention was to have a few drinks. I came to see, though, that if I had any drinks I would often, though unpredictably, get drunk. Unintended drunkenness brought with it embarrassment and substantial inconvenience. I found I could not get to work on time, and many times not at all.

I was convinced that inconvenience was a small price to pay for

the good life of comfortable maturity. The price, however, became exorbitant, and my life became miserable. In the last years of my drinking virtually every time I drank I got drunk, and I had to drink every day. My drunkenness may not always have been apparent to others. However, it was grimly apparent to me when the next morning inevitably brought a hangover and excruciating remorse.

Ten years after I left law school I had become hopelessly addicted to alcohol and in grave danger of ruining my career and much else that was important to me. By then, I had tried to control my drinking by changing what and where I drank. I even tried to stop drinking, but conspicuously and repeatedly failed.

I was ashamed and afraid to ask for help. Ironically, month after month I would read the stories of recovering lawyers that would appear in my bar association's newsletter. I surely could identify with these accounts but, inexplicably, I could not make the call.

Do yourself a big favor. If you think alcohol or drugs are a problem in your life, call the Lawyer Assistance Program or the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. The help is confidential and effective. Why wait as I did and compound the misery? Call right now. ■



DID I OR DIDN'T I?

One of my dreams as a teenager was to become a lawyer.

I came from a middle income family. They paid my college tuition and I worked part-time for expense money. In my senior year at college I had a fiancée and decided to get married and get a job instead of going to law school. But after being married for a few months I knew I had to be a lawyer. My wife agreed and we worked together to accomplish that goal.

Although I had three children and worked full-time, I graduated. Soon thereafter, I passed the bar and began practicing. Success came quickly as a result of some fortuitous events and within three years I was a senior partner in a very successful firm.

Sounds like a time to celebrate, and celebrate I did! Every day I drank alcohol and was proud to be known as a hard drinker. This went on for a few years until the alcohol changed my life.

I got divorced, terminated my partnership and sold out my inter-

est in a building. I became a sole practitioner so I would have no interference in my life. I accepted this as normal behavior.

I eventually went into terrible depression, compounded with the alcohol. I sought treatment, where I eventually realized I had been living an abnormal life.

But before I got to treatment I must tell you that the efforts of other attorneys to help me were the keys that opened my eyes to the fact that I was an alcoholic and needed help. I rejected the first few attempts of attorney friends because I was in denial that I could be an alcoholic. But admitting that I was an alcoholic was the first giant step to recovery and a normal life.

We must understand that alcoholism is a disease and not an indication of weak character traits. Strong will power is not the answer.

I would promise myself before I went out to only have a certain number of drinks and then stop, but I didn't.

I would promise myself that I would not get drunk and embarrass myself or others with the things I would say or do, but I did.

I would switch from gin or scotch to beer so I wouldn't get drunk, but I did.

What I finally realized was, if I have to give thought to what I drank or how much I drank so I didn't get drunk, that's a strong indication that I might have a drinking problem. At the very least I had to make a call to Lawyers Helping Lawyers to discuss the situation... And I did. ■



A BLESSED LIFE

Early on in life, I was blessed.

Having been raised in a good and loving family, I thought nothing could ever go wrong in my life. I loved school, and although I don't really know why, I always wanted to be an attorney. Upon my graduation from law school, my good fortunes continued, and I was hired by one of the area's best firms. I soon married and began a family.

All continued to go well, until my divorce. That was the turning point in my life. It was the beginning of my world turning upside down.

In despair, and feeling shame, I turned to a lifestyle that turned

my life into a living hell. I began to use and abuse substances that I had previously attacked as a plague against our communities.

Once involved, there seemed to be no way to get my life back in order. I constantly felt that I was alone in this battle, with no one to turn to for help. I later learned that I was wrong.

My life was in complete turmoil, and I desperately wanted help. I thought that life would never be the same. I was wrong.

I thought I could never let go of the lifestyle that had taken over my very existence. Again I was wrong.

I soon learned that there were others out there, who had gone through what I was going through.

The day I admitted to myself that I was powerless over my addiction, and that my life had become unmanageable, was the first step toward recovery.

Today I am a proud example that it can and does work. You, too, can have what we have found with a life that is clean and sober. We are here to help others find what we have found. We know what you are going through. We've been there.

We're a phone call away, ready to show you that life can be good again, by taking it one day at a time. ■



AN ACOA AND AN ALCOHOLIC

I am an “Adult Child of an Alcoholic.”

By putting that designation in quotes I am using it as both a description of myself and as a reference to the support group whose meetings I've attended. Being an adult child of an alcoholic I've learned that I have faced certain difficulties that are not normal in society, even if they are normal to me.

While a column of my bar association's newsletter usually is written to address the subject of alcoholism or to reach the alcoholic directly, I will attempt to shed some light on what it is like to be the child of an alcoholic.

My alcoholic parent was not the one who went out to bars to drink or to take part in the cocktail party circuit. On the contrary, my parent stayed in each night after working every day and got quietly drunk at home. My parent was always gentle, loving, dedicated,

hard working, and self-less, maybe even too responsible in that no time was spent on self.

As a child, I don't recall being aware of the drinking to excess until I was in my early to mid-teens. I'm not sure when it really started. I began to feel embarrassed, comparing my parent with my friend's parents. My parent was drunk every night — was his? At the same time, I felt so much guilt because I loved my parents beyond compare and I knew that my parent was always there even though it was obvious how difficult that was. My heart broke to see my parent suffering. What was the cause of this need to drink? Was it our family? Were we putting on too much pressure?

I was torn by many emotions. I felt guilty about feeling shame. I felt protective of my alcoholic parent and wanted to make whatever it was that caused the drinking to go away. I felt resentment for my other parent assuming fault. I felt a tremendous amount of responsibility to make my alcoholic parent OK. I didn't care if I was OK; I just wanted my parent to be OK. The truth is, none of us were OK. Things were terribly wrong.

One day, after several years of dysfunction, I decided that I would attend a "ACOA" meeting. That's me — an Adult Child of an Alcoholic. At the door were piles of brochures and pamphlets that listed other meetings, directions to turn for help, symptoms of the adult child of an alcoholic, and more. I actually laughed when I read the traits of the "ACOA" — because I had most of them.

That was a landmark day for me because I learned so much about who I am and why my character is the way it is. I know that I am a composite of my experience and my genes, but it was interesting to learn about some characteristics that I gained by experience. I won't take this space to list what those character traits are, but the gist is that "normal" traits — loyalty, for example — can be taken to the extreme by the "ACOA." When out of balance, those traits can be quite problematic. Adult children of alcoholics tend to get themselves into trouble — or keep themselves in the same vicious cycle — where adults with normal childhoods would not.

Interestingly, I saw several of those friends from childhood at the meeting. You know — the ones whose parents I compared with mine.

My point is that it is not only the alcoholic who suffers from alcoholism. Families suffer horribly — marriages are lost, children are abused or scarred, and problems tend to carry into the next generation. The child may not be an alcoholic, but in adulthood may marry

one, if for no other reason than because it is familiar. The cycle continues because the starting place for our thought process and our emotional impetus is not “normal.” We don’t have the same reactions or solutions that others do — because we start out at the wrong place.

I am lucky because my alcoholic parent had people who cared enough to confront and push for treatment. My parent now attends Alcoholics Anonymous and has been sober for several years. I am fiercely proud of my parents — both of them — because they survived what I hope was the worst and came out to the other side. AA has given not only my alcoholic parent life, but has also given us back our family. We are blessed to have each other, and we wouldn’t if it weren’t for AA.

My loyalty and love of my alcoholic parent was not abused or misplaced, but not all are as lucky as I am. There are too many of us who have been destroyed, further victims of the disease of alcoholism. And we don’t even drink. ■



PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

My name is . . . and I am an alcoholic.

I was in recovery before I went to law school, but I’d like to share some observations. I guess you could say I came from the stereotypical alcoholic family, both my parents were alcoholics and, through what I now know is learned behavior, I emulated their response to difficulties. My solution to any kind of problem or difficulty was to get hammered.

In 1980 I discovered this drug called cocaine that allowed me to stay up all night long and continue to get hammered. You might say I exercised my option to run from responsibility on a daily basis. But then came a time where a sense of hopelessness and despair and the pain that came with that was just so much that I entered a phase, what I now know to be called suicide ideation, and it wasn’t until that point in time that I realized, I finally realized I had a problem. Because my entire life I literally put down people who had attempted suicide – or who had actually gone through with it — as being weak, who couldn’t handle responsibility, meanwhile I was having those same types of thoughts.

In 1989, due to a strong suggestion of my probation officer, I went into rehab for the first time, because the alternative was going back to jail. A year later, fortunately for me, I was able to go back to that same rehab, this time on my own, not mandatory, and that was 13 years ago this month. I haven't had a drink or a drug since. Fortunately for me I think, God gave me some brains — God and my parents — and I was lucky enough to say I would go back to school. I went to college, graduated in '95, and then in '96 I entered law school. At that point I had approximately 6 years of recovery.

I have to say that up to the point I got into recovery, every job I've ever had invariably I gravitated towards the drinkers. Without even thinking about this, you just know who goes out after work, Miller time, et cetera, et cetera. Every job. It was no different in law school. Within the first month or two, there was a group that had gotten together and every Thursday night they went to a local bar on a weekly basis. At first I went with them, and then after a month or so I said to myself what are you doing this for? You just drink Coke all night, and you are up all night because of the caffeine going to the bathroom, so I just said the hell with it, I stopped going, I just didn't belong there.

I had a unique position to observe what was going on around me, because I had been in rehab twice, I had been educated about the disease of alcoholism and about the attitudes, about denial, about progression, all of which I had, and I had some time to reflect on my own life and my own progression in alcohol, my own denial. My own denial brought me to what I call canning for nickels. You see these people with big large plastic bags full of empty soda cans, that's called canning for nickels. Or strolling around my neighborhood looking for decent cigarette butts to smoke because I didn't have the money to buy them — this is where my denial brought me, and finally suicide ideation.

I know about denial, I know about progression, and I know about attitude, and I would sit with this group that had gravitated towards each other and I would listen to them and I would hear myself in certain people. One of my colleagues in school, his response to a difficult situation was to go out and get hammered. A female colleague, to say she was in a bad mood on a daily basis is putting it mildly, and if you looked at her wrong she would rip your face off verbally. I went over to visit with another student who was thought to have a cocaine problem, and I left him notes, and one day he came to me just to tell

me “look, I don't have a problem.” I don't know whatever happened to him, but as far as I know, he never returned the next semester, and I still don't know what happened to him. These are just observations I was able to make from a personal point of view.

I went to law school during the evening division when most of the students were, like me, a little older, and patterns have been set, progression are in the works, whether slowly or faster, or depending on the individual. But I could recognize my struggles in others.

Then I was given the opportunity to meet the New York State Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program Director, Ray Lopez, and to have Ray come to the law school to do his presentations. We made presentations during the professional responsibility classes. And it worked, we had a captive audience. I was able to sit through these presentations and make another observation. Some of the students continued doing homework or reading or whatever. I said well, all right, that's all right, because maybe this really has no impact on them, because they just don't have a problem with alcohol or drugs. Other students always sitting in the back of the room, you could hear them making little jokes and giggling, and I am telling myself ‘that's you before you got in recovery.’ Sitting in the back, making the jokes, anything but hearing the truth or making you think that maybe you have a problem.

One of the questions on the AA meeting list is “have you ever had a loss of memory when apparently functioning because of my drinking or drug use?” Now, I can't tell you how many times I have been at a meeting and I have heard the speaker or somebody in the audience share they had no idea what a blackout was until they came into AA, or they read the list. They had no idea, and I am thinking I am going to school with people who are 35, 40, 45, who might be sitting there up to this point in orientation, having no idea that they are having blackouts. Or even the day division, the younger kids, the 25 and 26 year olds, I have heard people at meetings say they started having blackouts right away when they first started getting involved in alcohol or drugs. These kids can be sitting there having no idea they are having blackouts, but if somebody reads this question to them, and asks them to think about it, I plant a seed or somebody plants a seed in one of these individuals to get help, that's all I could really try to do, is plant a seed. Think about it. ■



I PROMISE

My name is . . . and I am an alcoholic.

I can't believe the way life has worked out. I absolutely can't believe I am an attorney, a successful one, made it through law school, passed the Bar, and that I am an alcoholic — and it's on my resume. I absolutely know that I have a lot of blessings in my life and I have been touched by a power that exists in all of us, and I use it daily and I try to be a blessing to my elderly clients, and I love what I do, and I can't believe that I have been blessed to actually be in recovery from such a horrible disease.

Alcoholism as is a deadly disease, it's progressive, and a lot of people don't make it. The way I was headed by the time I hit law school — I was very seriously ill. I didn't drink until I went to college. My entire career at college was messed up socially because I couldn't remember what I had done the night before, and I just thought, “I don't know, I didn't understand how I became such a social nightmare to myself.” And it all had to do with alcohol and drinking.

I am an alcoholic and I process alcohol differently. I tell the story that once I got into recovery I was at Founders Day where alcoholics gather every year in Akron, Ohio, and I was talking with a member of my County's Lawyers Assistance Program. He asked whether I remembered him coming to speak at my law school, and I said no. He told me that I came up to them after their presentation to thank you them for coming to speak to the students, because I used to have a problem with alcohol. And he told me that my breath just blew them off the stage. I was in a blackout; I do not remember that incident for the life of me.

Different parts of my story come back to me as time goes by. I am so grateful, my 30s are great. I can't wait for my 40s. My 20s were horrible, and it has to do with the fact that by the time I took the LSAT exam I had been working in Boston for several years, I was a college graduate and I was a Trustee at a bank, and life was wild. The bank sent me for graduate school classes, where I got the highest grades, and where I was at the pub every night with everybody from the bank. All I did was drink that whole week, but I was a really good test taker, so I had a couple of beers on my way to the LSAT, and I scored in the 98th percentile, so how could I have a problem?

By the time I arrived at law school, the scary thing was — I had

become a daily drinker during the time after college; every night I got home and thought I deserved a drink. Every once in a while in the back of my mind I thought — does everybody need to have a safety valve of vodka in their house just to make sure they feel comfortable that you have something every night to rely on?

But who was I going to talk to about that? So when I got down there I was a little worried that my daily drinking was going to be a little bit of a problem, because I needed to study pretty hard. I found that all the students had a “work hard, play hard” attitude. I was a couple of years older, I was 26, but they were right out of college and drinking this Jaeger Meister, this dark brown stuff that I don't know what it was. But it was really bad, and the problem was that I had to drink during the day so I didn't shake by then, so I didn't need any more at night. And I basically wanted everyone to leave me alone, because my alcoholism was physically taking me over, and I couldn't handle what was going on.

It didn't matter to me whether it was the weekend or not, I needed alcohol so I wouldn't shake before I would go to class, so I would just have a little wine.

The problem was that everyone knew everybody at law school. Everyone was at the same parties, there were only 100 of us in each class, and there was a lot of drinking. The one day I was drinking at home before I went to the party and I couldn't find my way there, I got lost, and where did I get lost? In front of a military academy, where there were policemen and breathalyzers, and so I got my first and only DWI. And here I am at law school, and I remember being really upset because I was stuck in jail, and every other person at that law school was at that party except for me, and they were all drinking and couldn't come pick me up, and I was the only one that got arrested.

I finally got out of there and I went home and I popped a bottle of champagne because I got out of jail. That story went around school, and I remember feeling funny that people were thinking that I drank too much, and I thought who are they? Everybody was drinking a lot, and there was another student that was in a serious car accident, alcohol related, but she wasn't arrested because they got her home in time. And I was pretty mad that I was going to have to face going to alcohol classes as a result of the legal work that was being done for me when I came back — but I never made it back to school.

I went home for Christmas break, but I was diagnosed with a form of pneumonia because my body was so worn down that I had a double respiratory distress syndrome which is a lot like SARS. I had a 2 percent chance of survival, and I had weighed 220 pounds because all my organs had shut down. You can see my trache scars and chest tube scars. The doctors didn't know how much alcohol was actually in my system all the time. I think the reason I blew a .35 at my DWI was because I had a base of about .2 going on all the time. If I dipped below that I would actually start shaking.

No one had addressed any of this, and I looked fine until I was in the hospital, and all my hair fell out, and I missed my second semester at law school. Hadn't done so well anyway, so I didn't really want to go back there, and I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I took off for Australia for a year, and when I came back I went to a law school in New York.

Moved back in with my lucky parents and decided to try it again at law school. There I guess I was basically in blackouts half the time, I was passing out in my car, making it to classes sometimes, sometimes not, I did make it through the first semester, even got an honors in contracts. I ended up doing two first semesters of law school, because my first law school's credits wouldn't transfer, so I just started over.

In the second semester it was just so bad, I was having trouble regulating my drinking, I couldn't tell where my tolerance was anymore, and I basically needed to function but couldn't function, and I passed out in one of my exams; what a nightmare. When I woke up I just said I am not going to be able to do this, I can't, I am never going to be a lawyer, I am never going to be. I really was killing myself and I couldn't stop.

I couldn't stay sober at AA either, so they told me I needed more help and I went to rehab. I don't really remember, and the next thing I know I was in rehab that summer. From there I called the Dean and told her that I wanted to come back and what did I need to do. And she let me take the exams that I had missed by studying by myself that fall, using the notes that I had, most of them were pen-lines down the page, but I read what I needed to read, and I caught up, so I graduated a semester late, and my self-esteem was pretty low.

Ego deflation is part of recovery in AA, though, it doesn't really suit me, didn't suit me in law school, everyone else was pretty full of themselves and I was really, really scared, but it really didn't do me

a disservice. Actually, I ended up winning lots of awards and my clients really love me.

I am a grateful attorney, I know from where I've come, and I just look forward to my future.

I know when I was confronted that I didn't want to stop, because I didn't know that I could, and a lot of people can't.

I know I am blessed. I know a lot of people die, but if we don't address the problem, then what good is that?

So I don't know the answers. We do not always want help, but once we get it, we can become tremendously productive and helpful and useful members of society. I promise. ■



DEPRESSION: One Attorney's Story

I am a lawyer and I suffer from depression.

It is my hope and intention that writing about this illness, in a personal way, will help my fellow attorneys and their families recognize depression and seek out help. Depression is, in my experience, not something that you can handle on your own. Many of us have tried and failed. Often times, it is the recurring attempts to handle it alone that make it worse and further entrench us in hopelessness. When such hopelessness is left unchallenged, our lives become like a house whose windows are never opened and where the sun never shines. Under the sway of depression, your mind becomes a giant and powerful contraption whose seeming purpose is to recycle negative thoughts and emotions.

There is hope and a way off this painful treadmill. But the promise contained in that hope begins with recognizing the fruitlessness of continuing to deal with this problem by yourself and without help.

We may prevent ourselves from seeking help because we fool ourselves into thinking that it really “isn't that bad” or because we feel guilty about our affliction. We may think: “so many people have it worse than me, what right do I have to feel this way? Snap out of it!!” But such demands from our inner selves fall on depression's deaf ears. In our desperate efforts to escape depression's grinding melancholy, we try to rationalize why we shouldn't feel depressed. Yet, the core pain and power of depression will, sooner or later, reduce this strategy to rubble.

Some of us have attempted to dull the unremitting pain of depression with alcohol or drugs. While I have never been attracted to either, my father was. He died of alcoholism. Like so many people who suffer from depression, his sorrow was compounded by the disease of alcoholism. For him, resorting to alcohol was an attempt to flee the pain of his own life and perceived inadequacies.

In my private moments, I would pray to God to send help. He apparently heard my pleas because when I was finally ready to give up, the real love and care of my wife, family, friends, and law partners came shining through. But that only happened when I stopped denying my depression and dealing with it on my own, and admitted that I had a real problem and needed help. That help came in the form, initially, of my family physician who listened to my somatic symptoms: interrupted sleep, body aches, chest pain and waves of fatigue which felt like cement running through my veins. He recommended that I see a psychiatrist. When I heard the word “psychiatrist”, I felt dread: “What the hell do I need to see a psychiatrist for?” I asked myself. Yet, I was so battered by depression’s symptoms that I grudgingly went.

The psychiatrist peered at me over his horn-rimmed glasses like a biologist examining a bug. I told him my history. He listened soberly for some time before speaking. He told me that it was important to understand that depression is a complex disease and that how I felt wasn’t my “fault”.

Depression, he said, could be thought of like heart disease or diabetes. It needed medical care and treatment. I was not thrilled by this news, but I was somehow hopeful. Relief would come in the form of medication which soothed me when my mind and body could not do it alone.

Equally important to the medical aspect of depression was finding a good psychologist. When I first started taking the medication, I thought all I needed to do was to take a pill to “feel better” and make depression “go away.” I now see that this was naive because medication is not a “cure” for depression. At best, it helped stabilize me, quiet my somatic symptoms and give me the energy to begin learning how to run my life while depressed.

My psychologist taught me that many of the thoughts about myself and life in general were made up of “crooked thinking”. Such warped thinking consists of everything from vast generalizations (“nobody really cares about me”) to self hating thoughts (“I’m not

good at anything”). I guess all humans suffer from this malady in one form or another from time to time. In a clinically depressed person, this tendency is taken to the extreme in the most negative way.

My therapist listened to my thoughts and lovingly challenged them. He suggested that many, if not all of my more crooked thoughts, were simply untrue. He challenged me to rethink some of my most basic, unconscious assumptions about life. To say that my efforts thus far are a work “in progress” is an understatement. Yet, there is a profound sense of hope which comes from the light of seeing that one’s depressed thinking can be challenged and changed for the better.

In this quest, I am searching for the wisdom to lead a better life. Part of that wisdom involves consciously seeing the goodness of life and appreciating all the things I have to be grateful for. In the great speed and noise of daily life, we all must make time to do this. The great Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, once wrote: “If the only prayer you say in your whole life is ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.”

Today, I am doing much better. As I look back at the whole experience, I feel a great desire to help and be of service to my brethren who suffer in silence, often needlessly, from depression. Years ago, a reporter once asked Mother Theresa what God expects from humanity. The young reporter anticipated a complicated, pious and theological response. Mother Theresa replied, so simply and eloquently, that God expects us to be “a loving presence to one another”. I hope and pray that this article, in some small way, expresses a loving presence to others and offers hope to those attorneys who suffer from depression. ■



PRACTICING ALONGSIDE DEPRESSION

As a civil trial attorney, I have been fortunate to have over the last several years an amazingly skillful, hardworking and successful law partner. It just so happens that this partner suffers from severe clinical depression. This psychological illness not only impacts my partner’s personal life, but also directly affects his professional practice. By courageously dealing with his depression, I am pleased to say that my partner has actually enhanced his professional practice and magnified his positive contribution to our law firm.

Over the years we have been able to effectively grow our law practice while assisting our partner on his steady path toward psychological wellness in a very stressful and competitive profession.

We have been able to achieve this success through cultivating social and emotional supports for our partner, while developing appropriate strategies to overcome the inevitable obstacles posed by his illness. Necessary support is offered both socially and emotionally, and manifests itself in many ways. Emotional support has been extended to our depressed partner through a willingness to discuss the frequent struggles and stressors accompanying our partner's illness.

Building a supportive environment entails an open dialogue and communication regarding the illness of depression and its specific manifestations, including the effects of prescribed medications. Accommodating and encouraging ongoing psychological treatment and psychotherapy is another essential element of this supportive environment. Active social engagement is also an important support structure. For instance, frequent and regular lunch meetings out of the office have proven very restorative for our depressed partner.

Developing strategies to help our partner successfully deal with his illness focuses on reducing and tempering the considerable stressors that accompany the adversarial civil litigation process. The implementation of flexible work and trial schedules, the intentional and thoughtful staffing of trial teams and out of town work assignments all take into consideration the needs and concerns accompanying our partner's depression illness. Additionally, regular and frequent planning and scheduling meetings are an essential strategic component. Special care has to be given that case and work loads and trial assignments are fairly distributed and shared evenly throughout the firm, even though special consideration is given to our ill partner's needs and requirements.

Overcoming the inevitable obstacles posed by our partner's clinical depression can only be achieved through this cultivation of social and emotional support and the intentional development and implementation of specific coping strategies. The illness cannot be simply ignored or kept in the closet. Care and concern combined with purposeful action are absolutely essential to the continued health and well being of our partner and the positive advancement of our law firm. The steady growth of our law practice and the continued effectiveness and wellness of our partner are a testament that clinical

depression can be successfully managed within a vibrant civil litigation practice through proper support and purposeful strategic planning. ■



DEPRESSION ETHICS

The first knock at my front door came at 7 a.m. I ignored it, but I'll get back to that in a minute.

I threw up my hands in desperation and told my psychiatrist, "I guess I'm just crazy."

Every time I had tried to work during the past two weeks, my heart started pounding, I was short of breath. I could do nothing but stare at my blank computer screen. Oh, that's not true. I could play games. I could surf the net wasting time. I could shop on EBay for things I didn't need. But, I couldn't work. I didn't want to leave my house.

I had three briefs due. I had two contested divorce trials coming up. My wife was going to Europe on a business trip for a month and I would need to drive my two teenage children to various summer jobs and activities. I would be the chief cook and bottle washer. The gardens needed tending. Did I mention that the three associates who work for me needed my almost constant guidance and advice? Office billing was way behind and we were in a serious negative cash flow situation.

I had to make myself get the work done. But I couldn't.

I was stressed and depressed. All I could force myself to do was read cheesy detective novels and watch reruns of Law and Order. What would I do without that all-Law-and-Order-all-the-time channel? I had lost my ability to motivate myself, but more importantly, I had lost all confidence in my ability to do anything. I questioned my competence as a lawyer and feared I was hurting my clients more than I was helping them.

The second knock on my front door was a bit more insistent. It came at 7:05 a.m. I stayed in bed.

According to a 1991 Johns Hopkins University study, the legal profession suffers with the most members who are clinically depressed. The North Carolina Bar Association reported in 1991 that 26 percent of its members, that is one in four lawyers, suffered symp-

toms of clinical depression. Of that group, 12 percent had contemplated suicide at least once a month. Those findings are supported in surveys of lawyers in Washington and Arizona where high depression rates were linked to high rates of alcoholism and drug abuse. The Iowa Lawyers Assistance Program reports that lawyers abuse alcohol at a 50-to-80 percent higher rate than the general population and that lawyers suffer depression at twice the rate of those in the general population. GP/Solo, the American Bar Association's magazine for solo practitioners and small firms reported in late 2004 that more disciplinary problems arise from "chemical dependency and emotional stress" than any other cause.

Lest there be any doubt, if left untreated, depression is fatal. In recent years, two members of our local bar have committed suicide. Both had been seriously depressed. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that 15 percent of persons who are clinically depressed kill themselves. A study done from 1994 to 1997 by the Canadian Lawyers Professional Assistance Program found suicide was the third leading cause of death for lawyers: cancer and heart disease are the number one and two causes of death. That study showed that for every one suicide in the general population, there are five suicides by attorneys. Lawyers and judges aged 48 to 65 are most at risk.

The third knock on my door came at about 7:10 a.m. I ignored it again and then heard a car door close. An engine started and I thought I heard my unknown visitor driving away. I was relieved.

Our ethics rules are designed for self-policing. When we know about a problem we have a duty to report it. In this way, we avoid governmental regulation of the profession and we assure the public that we are trustworthy. The zeal for reporting, however, does not include a zeal for helping. Rather, it is an effort to uncover problems, punish the guilty, and protect the public. The lawyer needing help is overlooked.

In recent years, there has been a rush to create lawyer assistance programs. Virtually every state now has one. There are similar programs in Canada and the United Kingdom. The mostly-voluntary network of attorneys work to assist attorneys who come to their attention. Unfortunately, the system is far from perfect. The usual problems do exist: under-funding and low staff levels. But these programs are run by extraordinarily dedicated persons. Frequently, the directors are attorneys themselves who have gone to the edges, or bot-

toms, of sanity or addiction and managed to work themselves back one step at a time. They are unsung heroes of our profession.

Every lawyer should understand that lawyer's assistance programs are designed to help. The directors are compassionate people with a variety of resources at their fingertips to help attorneys who need to deal with a host of problems including depression, drug addiction, alcoholism, and a number of other issues. The programs are confidential. Despite the focus of ethics rules on reporting recalcitrant attorneys for discipline, attorneys seeking assistance from their state lawyer assistance program need not fear retribution from the state ethical investigators. In fact, those seeking help frequently avoid the policing action of the ethics investigators.

So, what was my problem? Why couldn't I pick up the phone and report myself? Why couldn't I seek the help I needed? Simply, people who need help are in denial. Things are never that bad. They deny they drink that much. They say they could stop taking the drugs anytime. They say they are in control. They tell colleagues everything is ok.

The final knock came at 8 a.m. When I didn't answer this time, the doorbell started ringing. It didn't stop until I answered it. It was a member of our Inn of Court, the lawyer I discuss most of my problem cases with, and more importantly, an extremely good friend.

He gently demanded that I tell him what was going on. He also insisted I fix him breakfast. The nerve! But as I did, he told me about his bouts with depression. He acknowledged that periodically he resumes his drug treatment. Depression can be a life-long battle. He encouraged me to see my psychiatrist. He offered to help with the work that was piling up, although he didn't help cook.

After our breakfast, he discretely told a few close friends and colleagues about my depression. My phone started ringing. People wanted to know if I was ok. They wanted to help. They asked what they could do. Of course the answers were difficult. Yes, I was ok. I appreciated their thoughts and there was nothing they could do. This answers spilled out automatically like "How are you?" rolls off the tongue when you greet someone in the street. Still, my isolation was broken. I couldn't hide any more. I did call the doctor and I did get the help I needed.

The good news is that depression is treatable. With the appropriate medication, counseling and life changes, recovery is possible. I know. My doctor has combined drug therapy, counseling and stress-

reduction techniques to help me get out of what I described as a funk to my friends. She knew what the problem was and that it would not go away by itself.

As I started treatment, I worried excessively about my work. How would my briefs get done? How could I go to trial? Despite the number of lawyers in my firm, this was my work. No one else could really do it. Could I get a note from my doctor excusing my absence to give to judges, just as my mother had written for me as a child to give teachers when I missed school? The answer was no. In the end, I drafted sketchy motions to continue blaming an illness that I never really described. Fortunately, the judges involved, all of whom have been in our Inn, were understanding and forgiving. My office staff stepped in and helped me to make certain we didn't leave clients unprotected. And my friends from the Inn kept popping in to see if I had time for coffee.

There is a self-imposed stigma and isolation attached to needing help. The ethical demands of the model rules place attorneys in very difficult situations. Self-reporting seems impossible. Reporting friends and associates who are having trouble is not fun. "Reporting" has a negative connotation and just doesn't feel good. Indeed, the whole system runs counter to the general intent of the American Inns of Court. The Inn is a place of mentoring and support. We prize collegiality and friendship.

My friend's knock at my door came before I was in any serious ethical difficulty. He knew something was wrong and he chose not to ignore it. With his support, and the support of others, I got help before I slid down the slippery slope of inaction, denial and darkness.

There is no specific ethical rule requiring attorneys to watch out for each other. We can put blinders on and pretend we have no duty to help those with problems around us. But, isn't an ounce of prevention worth a pound of cure? If we help other lawyers with their problems before they get to the point where they face serious ethical complaints, we benefit them, ourselves, and our profession. All it takes is that we pay attention and that we care.

I may be crazy, as I told my doctor, but I believe lawyers are caring people. We became lawyers to help others.

We are American Inn of Court members because we value our friendships. So, when we know it's necessary, we should knock on our friend's door and insist that it's time for breakfast. It's the ethical thing to do. ■



Lawyer Distress Revisited

I can only offer my personal experiences as a woman who is a lawyer and as a recovering alcoholic who has worked in the field of lawyer assistance to impaired attorneys on the local, state and national bar levels. My comments then are very personal and unique to my experiences. They are not developed in any way that can be quantified with psychological studies or statistics or any other type of empirical data. They are from the head and from the heart. They are based on twenty-nine years of being a woman in the practice of law and over twenty years of being an alcoholic who is working a daily program of recovery.

I will not debate whether or not the practice of law creates dysfunction, requires dysfunction or perpetuates dysfunction . . . When the dust settles at some time in the future, we may discover that the very traits that in excess are dysfunction, such as rigid control, perfectionism, aggression, excessive compulsive behavior, outspokenness and a tendency to go against the grain, also make for effective lawyers who are exacting, vigorous advocates, tenacious, assertive and willing to take on any and all challenges. These seem to be valued attributes in the lawyer and second nature to the alcoholic. I will leave to others to argue and debate whether or not that is the way law, in the end — a learned profession — even ought to be practiced.

A very troubling theme — what I like to call “the disappearing woman” has emerged. It is difficult to clearly identify the woman who is an active alcoholic and therefore hard to profile her.

In my opinion professional women are torn by their conflicting desires and self-imposed needs to be accepted in a “man’s profession.” Rightly or wrongly, this is externalized by acting as tough, working as hard, thinking and drinking like men. This conflicts with a belief that these behaviors just are not appropriate for nurturers, mothers and educated women of my generation who were bred to be “ladies and scholars.” Frequently when a woman does come to terms with her alcoholism, recovery is very hard to achieve because a woman is hardest on herself first. Much has been written in alcohol recovery literature about “guilt and shame” as twin themes that serve as barriers to recovery. I concur that feelings of self-loathing help to perpetuate women’s alcoholism. These feelings can continue on although the woman is abstinent from mood altering chemicals. They serve as roadblocks to our efforts to be caregivers to ourselves

and to be role models to other women seeking recovery. Alcoholism is not a “ladylike” behavior. This continuing stigma of shame also keeps women from getting help until it is very often too late and their jobs are lost. Because of their physical differences from men, women tend to have shorter drinking careers than men. They get into trouble and have adverse consequences from their behavior sooner in their lives than do men. My observation has been that the drinking woman who is in the problem stage of drinking or actively alcoholic does not survive the rigors of a legal career as a “functioning alcoholic.” Women fall off the career track sooner because of their drinking. No time, then, is invested in intervention and recovery. They lose years sorely needed to acquire “lawyering” skills and to build client contacts and careers.

There is so much loneliness in alcoholism. Women attorneys, with lower marriage rates, higher divorce rates and lower re-marriage rates, lack powerful social supports needed to enhance personal fulfillment: marriage, family, interaction with others, high self esteem.

The tension, the drive to perform, is palpable. For me, the need to escape into the oblivion of alcohol was a necessity. It helped me to socialize, it helped me to relax, and it helped me reward myself. By the time I took my first job at age twenty-six, I was drinking to quiet my nerves at the end of the day. I drank to escape the pressures of work and the terrible feeling of being inadequate for the job. Contributing to my slide into addiction was a willing physician who prescribed large doses of Valium. Tranquilizers and other prescription drugs were now a necessity.

I was in trouble very early on in my career. Overwhelming anxiety and fear followed me through the early years. The fear of being found out. Every night, I would creep home to the bottle to quell the willies, to anchor the “free floating” anxiety, to drown my self-loathing. To the outside world, I was brittle. I drank like one of the boys. I drank to excess on occasion. And though I always tried to refrain from certain activities I personally considered in bad taste, such as drinking and driving, there came a time when I joined a law firm and was chastised for not drinking with the clients. I perceived this as an open invitation to drink. I had found a home at last, I thought. The change that alcohol wrought in my personality was becoming complete. I was still professionally unsure and terrified. I was not well accepted by the other partners and could not enlist their help or support. I frequently showed up hung over. I sobered up in

the middle of the day, played catch up with my work from the prior day and started the cycle all over again at night, drinking until I passed out, calling it sleep.

A woman who is an alcoholic is not a pretty sight. Bloating, circles under my eyes, bruised from falling down and bumping into things, I ended my drinking career after being fired from the law firm. My drinking had arced from being so vitally important to relax and socialize, to one of needing my drug to function. Nearly losing my marriage, almost losing my home, I surrendered to my addiction and sought assistance. How hard that help is to accept! I was doubly impaired. I was well educated, and this sort of thing is not supposed to happen to the terminally bright.

When I read of the isolation and the withdrawal of the woman alcoholic, I am touched. I know these women. I have worked with these women. I was one of these women. I've seen alcoholism rob them of their dreams, their careers and their families. And I see how hard it is for them to get back on track professionally. The professional world tolerates few mistakes from a professional woman. The guilt and shame factors make it hard for other women to be associated with the recovery community. Many women fear retaliation within their law firms. Women's recovery mirrors women's experiences, which can be intense and less subject to institutionalization than men's experiences.

Those of us who are recovering and have connected still marvel at how difficult it is for others to identify and to help female professionals. It is a cardinal tenet of recovery that helping others helps ourselves. And helping another to recovery, sharing experience, strength and hope is very satisfying. ■



MY NAME IS JUDY S.

I am a woman, a lawyer, a mother, a wife and an alcoholic. The recent issue of the State Bar News had an article titled "Women lawyers work to find 'balance' in their lives." If that isn't hard enough, imagine adding the complexity and turmoil of alcoholism.

I began drinking in college. I always drank big when I drank, had whopping hangovers, but the negatives of feeling bad were enough to motivate me to control alcohol in my life. I went to a Big Ten

University, joined a sorority and graduated with a clinical degree. I married the day after my last final exam to the man I went to prom with. He had graduated from Yale and was headed to graduate school. I worked in hospitals and community mental health programs for the years he studied. Promotions came, increased responsibility and authority were earned, a graduate degree was realized and work life was fulfilling.

I always had boundless energy. I could work long hours, rise early and be productive. Young children proved a turning point. I always experienced myself as running at 133 rpms. Coming home from a high profile, high stress position in local government to two small children was tough. I used alcohol to transition from the boardroom to Candy Land, bingo and diapers. I often passed out as I put the children down to bed. I began to drink at home before parties so that no one would see me drink too much. I became less honorable in many of my dealings, hiding why I felt poorly some days, drinking at lunch “with the boys” in this male dominated environment of the ‘80s, had lots of hangovers and made lots of excuses for my unpredictable actions during and after events. As with all alcoholics, I became self-centered. I had to be aware at all times of where I was in my states of either inebriation or hangover. Increasingly, I would awake at 2 am after only 3 or 4 hours of sleep. Once sober, I learned that this was the sugar rebound from the alcohol. I read lots of books about alcohol, alcoholism and women. It was as if learning the right piece of knowledge would give the key to the willpower not to drink. I made lots of promises to myself not to drink that were broken. I was lucky, as my hangovers never made it attractive to take a drink as a way to cure either the anxiety or my sense of shaky, nauseous sickness.

One December night in 1987 I drank myself so sick I had a two-day hangover and scared myself in a new way. I called a friend I had met that summer who had a gentleness and sense of well-being that truly attracted me. I had spent several months regularly offering her drinks when she finally shared with me that she was sober and a member of AA. She came over to my house and spent many hours telling me her story. She asked me to join her at an AA meeting the next day, which I did. I’ve never had another drink.

But my journey doesn’t stop there. I got sober and thought that all that was wrong with me had been the drinking. Now that I wasn’t drinking and didn’t have hangovers, I needed to do what would make me feel whole. I decided to become a lawyer. You know, be important.

Without drinking and hangovers, I had lots more time. I still had all my energy. So, with a husband, a house and two children in early grade school I entered law school. I loved it. I did law review, got an offer from a prestigious firm and graduated. I was 42 years old.

I lived life believing that I had to control everything about myself and my world if I was going to keep it all together. I stayed with the firm for four years, then spent 5 years negotiating and administering contracts in health care. I became a workaholic. I continued to feel not-connected and lacked a sense of well-being. And yet it made no sense. My children were healthy, adjusted, accomplished; surviving adolescence with bumps but grace, both attending good colleges. Our church was a mainstay in our family lives. I was successful in “important” work. My marriage was solid and we were financially secure. And yet I was restless, irritable and discontent. I lived in fear about lots of people. What was wrong with me?

I had been a fringe member of the Lawyers Assistance Group in my area. As I struggled, I became a regular attendee of an AA meeting that lawyers attend who seek to be sober and recover from the disease of alcoholism. For the first time I was honest about my fears. For the first time I listened to people who were calm and had a richness of person and character that I wanted for myself. Their stories told of their struggles to regain anything in their lives after having lost jobs and professional reputations and families and houses and cars. Some had even lost their right to be a lawyer. To a person, they told much the same thing. First, they had to admit that they were powerless over alcohol and that their lives were unmanageable. Next they had to believe in a power greater than themselves that could bring them to wholeness if it were sought. For me, this is God, and I finally knew that I had sought God to remove alcohol, but kept myself in control over everything else in my life.

This group over these last three years has shared with me how law itself creates many challenges for lawyers with alcoholic personalities. Just because you gave up the alcohol, it doesn't mean you gave up the alcoholic personality. Many of us drank for 20 – 30 years. Most of our adult formative years evolved around alcohol. Why would we think that old ideas would leave just because alcohol was gone?

A judge from Oregon spoke to lawyers in recovery at a spiritual weekend sponsored by our local Lawyers Helping Lawyers Committee. He recounted the early years of Alcoholics Anonymous and how the journey of a small group of men offered healing to the

world. Carl Jung, after spending a year treating a man who then quickly proceeded to drink, said that alcoholics were persons who were born not feeling well. He suggested we lacked a connection to wholeness. Our first experiences with alcohol resulted in the circuit closing and we felt whole. Much later, alcohol failed us and we stopped feeling the gap close, but continued to drink, seeking that prior experience of the gap closing, of wholeness.

Wow! Did that description ring authentically for me. I spent much of my childhood feeling like an outsider, experiencing the absence of wholeness. There were easy reasons. My mother was mentally ill and had extreme manic and depressive episodes. I experienced the impact of both. At manic times she would herd all four of us kids to places, gregariously showing us off to unknown people in the crowd. In depressed times she never left a dark bedroom, voiced her desire to die, had suicide attempts and was whisked off frequently to the Sanitarium for months and years. My dad remarried when I was a teenager, to an alcoholic who blamed me for her depression. It's only now, after 17 years of sobriety that I can fathom the impact for a little girl to grow up without a mother, without knowing the kind of forever and whatever love that functional parents give to their children. It's only now that I can understand why I believed that my survival depended on my own actions, my smarts, my ability to line things up for my advantage.

As lawyers we learn to use our intellect to create the story the situation needs. Truth becomes situational. For alcoholics, the justifications and excuses for our actions flow effortlessly from our training in argument and language. For alcoholics, the fabric of life we lead to hide our drinking makes it difficult to come back to the core honesty that is the essence of the good lawyer of high character. I learned from the lawyers in this group how they made a life in recovery that always has them able to see what's right and do what's right. They can be the strong advocate yet always be kind, gentle and loving. I call this the Power of the Lamb. It is such a relief to live from the Power of the Lamb after years of discontent trying to make it relying only on myself.

Today, I feel whole. I feel connected in my work, my family, my community. Thank you to my lawyer friends in recovery. ■



Resources

Where do you turn? Friends, family members and colleagues can play a role in identifying a substance abuser, an addict or an individual with mental health concerns; the organized bar has several alternatives for obtaining help.

The New York State and New York City Bar Associations have lawyer assistance programs with full-time, professional staff providing assessment, evaluation and referral for treatment, as appropriate; interventions, and training on alcoholism, drug abuse and stress management.

You may contact the New York State Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program Director Patricia Spataro at 800-255-0569; and the New York City Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program Director Eileen Travis at 212-302-5787.

You need not be a bar association member to receive their free, confidential advice. All lawyer assistance program services are confidential under Judiciary Law §499 (see inside back cover).

Several local bar associations have volunteer committees which can provide advice and support to lawyers suffering from alcohol and substance dependency. Those counties/boroughs are Brooklyn, Erie, Monroe, Nassau (with a part-time lawyer assistance director), Oneida, Onondaga, Queens, Rockland, Schenectady, Suffolk and Westchester.

The following websites have more information on lawyer assistance efforts in New York State:

www.nylat.org

www.nysba.org/lap

www.nycbar.org

New York State Judiciary Law §499.

Lawyer Assistance Committees states:

- 1.** Confidential information privileged. The confidential relations and communications between a member or authorized agent of a lawyer assistance committee sponsored by a state or local bar association and any person, firm or corporation communicating with such committee, its members or authorized agents shall be deemed to be privileged on the same basis as those provided by law between attorney and client. Such privilege may be waived only by the person, firm or corporation which has furnished information to the committee.
- 2.** Immunity from liability. Any person, firm or corporation in good faith providing information to, or in any other way participating in the affairs of, any of the committees referred to in subdivision one of this section shall be immune from civil liability that might otherwise result by reason of such conduct. For the purpose of any proceeding, the good faith of any such person, firm or corporation shall be presumed

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54 STATE STREET, SUITE 802, ALBANY, NEW YORK 12207

