

Breaking the Cycle

It is my opinion -- though it certainly would not stand up to a Robinson-Daubert challenge -- that some of us are born alcoholics and some simply drink enough, long enough, to become alcoholics.

I was invited to speak at an AA Convention a few years back and my oldest son, himself a recovering addict, introduced me. He said in his introduction that when he was a teenager he vowed he would never, never drink like his dad did!! History does repeat itself -- in more ways than one.

In my family for at least five generations, the "fruit of the vine" has been a plague. As a teenager I vowed that I would never, ever, drink like my mother did. The trouble was that from my first experience with alcohol to my last, after I took the first drink, I simply could not guarantee that I would not go off on a binge. The binges became more frequent and more long lasting.

Time and again I promised myself, my wife, my children and my God that I would never get drunk again. It wasn't that I lacked seriousness about the problem -- it was simply that I could not not return to drinking. Willpower, guilt, remorse, vows, pledges were to no avail.

I told myself over and over again that I drank just like my friends did, including friends who were judges. However, I realize, once I got sober, that my friends would have a few and go home while I would remain with the next shift of friends who would have a few and go home. When I left to go home I'd find my way to a new watering hole with "friends" I didn't know -- or wake up in a flea trap hotel -- a place I wouldn't be caught dead in -- just dead drunk.

I need not relate the difficulties my addiction caused in my professional life. Hangovers disabled me frequently. Somehow, the men for whom I worked did not realize the terrible trap I was in. Probably that was because I had a loyal group of "enablers" in life. Judges seemed particularly understanding when I got "virus" and had to ask for a day of "recovery" during a jury trial. My wife was my chief enabler. Although she pleaded for me to control my drinking she was simply fantastic at explaining to others that I had come down with flu, virus, mumps, measles and I would be pitied and babied back to health.

On one particular Saturday morning, however, she caught me before I started drinking and told me very firmly that she had learned that she did not cause my problem, she could not control my problem, and that she surely could not cure it, but that she was unwilling to continue helping me to stay sick by lying or explaining away my absences from the office or from court. If I continued to drink myself to death it was

my doing -- she would no longer take part in it. My sick mind convinced me that my beloved wife had turned bad! I did not realize it at the time, but I was close to the end of the line.

The time eventually came when all of my defenses, alibis, lies, and rationalizations came to an end. I reached out for help to a young priest who is now the bishop of the Austin diocese. He knew about alcoholism and sent a man to visit with me. That man told me his story -- much like my own -- and his recovery from the alcohol trap. "AA was the answer", he said. Had I made a list of things I didn't want to take part in, AA would have been near the top of the list, but in my desperation I agreed to go to a meeting with him to a place called the "Twenty-Four Hour Club" down near the waterfront. It was filled with men and women whom I could readily see were down and out. But surely I wasn't like "them"! Next came a meeting in River Oaks. "This is more like it" thought I. It was some time sober before I realized that the same problem existed in both venues. Alcohol had knocked us all to our knees. How overjoyed I was to see one of our great judges and great trial lawyers there. I thought I was the only lawyer who had ever fallen victim to booze or other drugs.

"One day at a time", I was told is all I had to worry about. The past is history -- the future is a mystery -- today is a gift -- perhaps that's why it's called the "present." I came to truly love the principles of AA and to love the men and women who shared their experience, strength, and hope with me. Helping one another to recovery is what this great movement is all about.

Today, over 36 years later, I've been freed of any need to drink alcohol or to use any other kind of mind-altering drugs. As a result I'm a better man, lawyer, husband, father, grandfather and friend than I've ever been.