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## **The Solution Became The Problem**

**By Anonymous**

Alcohol always offered a solution to my problems. Growing up, I was short and skinny and wore glasses. I never felt like I fit in. I recently heard someone say, “I didn’t *have* a drink when I went to the first grade, but I *needed* one,” and that reminded me of my childhood. I was restless, irritable, and discontent from the start. I wanted to be accepted, respected and liked by other people. As a young child and on into my adulthood, I set about trying to do what I saw other people doing so I could gain their acceptance, their respect and their friendship.

When I took my first drink of alcohol, it relieved that fear and feeling of being different. I could be around other people and feel like I fit in – *and*, I could talk to girls. In short, alcohol did for me what I couldn’t do for myself. I grew up and graduated from high school in the sixties. I had a lot of friends experimenting with drugs, and drugs scared me. But I did think maybe I would try marijuana because I had heard it wasn’t habit forming. Because of this, I was able to smoke dope every day for twenty years and believe I was not addicted.

After I’d been in recovery for awhile, I found out that blackouts were a symptom of the disease of alcoholism. Before that, though, I thought black-outs were normal. If you were going to drink and have a good time, then from time to time you were not going to know what you did. When that would happen, I’d talk to my friends and find out what I’d done the night before. I can remember the first time I drank to blackout in college and woke up the next day in sad shape – I’d lost a contact lens and had gotten very sick. I asked my roommate how I’d gotten home the night

before, and he told me I had driven my car. Now, this caused me some anxiety, as I did not remember driving my car and I sure didn’t remember where I had left it. I was living in a dorm and had to look up and down all of the rows in the parking lot. When we finally found it, I remember having that nice warm feeling – I don’t think there’s anything quite like an alcoholic being reunited with his car.

It was then that I came across the 20 Questions in the Reader’s Digest, and in the privacy of my own home I took the 20 Question quiz to prove I was not an alcoholic. Now, I realized that if I

answered too many of these questions 'Yes' it was going to look bad, so I gave myself the benefit of the doubt, answering many of them 'Yes' but some of them 'No' just for good measure. When I got down to the bottom of the quiz I read, "If you answered even one of these 'yes' then you may have a problem. If you answered two of them 'yes' then you probably do have a problem. If you answered three or more 'yes' you definitely have a problem and need to get some help." So I went back and took the test again, this time answering only 'No.' What else was I supposed to do? After all, I couldn't be an alcoholic because I still had a family and a job and I was still going to work. After that, I started to build my case for why I was not an alcoholic. I simply could not envision my life without my "good friend" alcohol.

Over time, my blackouts got worse. My wife would tell me of things I'd done or said or reported to her that I had absolutely no memory of. It really got scary there for a while, and I began to tell myself that I was going to have to cut down or stop my drinking some time. Just not now. And not any time soon.

Then I had one of my worst nights. My wife and I were out of town at a legal conference, and I woke up in the middle of the night and saw that I had vomited in our bed in my sleep. I looked over at my wife and she had this look of terror and disgust on her face. I understood the disgust, but at that time, I didn't understand the terror. Later, she told me how scared she was that I might die of alcohol poisoning or might aspirate my own vomit and die. I had tried to convince myself that my drinking wasn't hurting anybody but myself, but I knew on some level I was hurting everyone around me. Those who were the closest to me were the ones I hurt the most.

So, I decided to stop drinking -- and I did stop for a week, maybe two. It was actually easy. As long as I smoked dope every day it wasn't a problem. I attended the State Bar convention that year, and ran into a good friend of mine. He and his wife were people that I used to party with. My friend looked good and was still fun to be around, but I noticed that he wasn't drinking. I thought that was strange, because I didn't know how anyone could *ever* have any fun if not drinking, but there he was. So one day at breakfast I told him that I'd decided I needed to cut back on my drinking or maybe stop. I told him I noticed he hadn't been drinking for a while, and I wanted to know how he'd been able to do that.

He ended up spending most of the morning with me telling me his story of alcoholism and recovery. He tried to get me to go into treatment that day, but I came to my senses and realized that the office could not function without me. I did, however, commit that I would go to Alcoholics

Anonymous and try it because that's what he had done.

And so I came back and through the help of my family doctor, I was put in touch with a man who came to visit me one day. He talked to my wife and me at our house. He told me about himself, about what it was like when he was drinking, what had happened to him, and what his life was like now. He invited us to go with him to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, and we went. My first meeting was June 26, 1988, and my wife's first Al-Anon meeting was the next Sunday night. She's been an active member of Al-Anon ever since and I haven't had a drink or any mind-altering chemicals since that time.

Before I went to that first meeting this man told me that it would be easy for me to go and find all the ways that I was different from each and every person there. What I needed to do was go and look for the ways in which I was the same as the other people there.

At the time I made my first meeting I had fully conceded to my inner-most self that I needed help, but I really didn't think that the program of AA or the twelve steps would work for me. Still, I could see that the program was working in the lives of other recovering alcoholics, and that gave me enough hope to be willing to try some of the things the program suggested.

I remember the first time I went to trial sober. I didn't think there was any way I could try a lawsuit without an alcoholic beverage or something else to help me deal with those pressures. It was several days into trial when I came out of an AA meeting one night and I realized that I was at peace. I was at peace with what was going to happen at trial. Whether we won or lost, it was all going to work out for the best. My job was to do the best I could and leave the results to a higher power. That was an amazing revelation for me.

What I've come to realize is that it isn't my mistakes that I learn from but that I learn from living with the results of my mistakes. I've had enablers in the form of my secretary, my wife and other people who have saved me many times from the consequences of my mistakes. But when I have to live with the results of my mistakes, I learn. When I can stop defending myself and my mistakes and, instead, start seeing what I can do to set things right, I can move from the problem into the solution.

Slowly but surely my family has recovered as well. We are now able to actually enjoy time together and we even look forward to it. We talk to each other about our lives, our feelings, our hopes and our dreams. I would be lying if I said that we are now the 'perfect' family. Of course, we have our share of problems, but compared to a few years ago, we have come a long way.

I thought AA was the worst thing that could ever happen to me, but participating in AA has turned out to be the best thing for me. I have heard people say that they were grateful to be alcoholic. Early on, I thought this was perfect evidence that these poor folks had brain damage. Today, I identify myself as a grateful alcoholic, because today I recognize that my alcoholism was truly a blessing. I am sorry for all the harm I caused. I wish that my wife and my family hadn't had to go through it. But were it not for my alcoholism, I never would have chosen to follow the suggestions of AA into recovery. The last seven and a half years have been the happiest years of my life. It hasn't all been good – some of it's been very tough – but it has been the best time. And everybody tells me it just keeps getting better.