

The Last Four Days

I looked both ways, and then pulled the car out into the northbound lane. Unknowingly, I pulled out right in front of the 50' long tractor trailer. He had to lock up his brakes and barely escaped hitting me. He let me know in a rather aggressive manner that I had caused him some consternation.

Two weeks earlier, Sally my wife said, "Maybe the problem is your drinking." I said, "I don't think it is, but I'll quit for six months, get the alcohol out of my system and then I'll start drinking again." A week and a half went by, and everything seemed okay. I didn't understand anything about alcohol withdrawal, but that's what I started to go through. When I pulled out in front of the truck, I only thought I had looked both ways. I really didn't look, or I did look and didn't see it; I just pulled out.

On that same drive, I snapped out of an unconscious state halfway to the next town and couldn't remember who asked me to get in the car to appraise it and how long ago that had happened.

The terror of blacking out started to take over my very being. The truck incident happened the first day of the last four days. I didn't sleep at all for the last four days. The second day I was driving to work to attend the sales meeting that I was running. I felt chilled to the bone and couldn't figure out why. I look down, and I didn't have a shirt on. I did have on a three-piece suit and a tie (today it seems funny, but it certainly wasn't funny then). This incredible fear set in; I wondered what was wrong with me. I thought perhaps I had a brain tumor or some other catastrophic thing was wrong.

I went back home, put a shirt on and went to work.

I started making lists. I felt that the lists would protect me. I made very simple lists: get up, shower, shave, get dressed, and drive to work.

At work, I would have a list that I had made the night before to help me get through the day. However, nothing worked. If you came into my office and you were my best friend, I was terrified of you and I didn't know why. It just kept getting worse. No sleep again that night. Day three went the same; the terror and not knowing what was wrong.

That night I watched the 10:00 PM news. They announced that Freddie Prinz had committed suicide. I started crying and I couldn't stop. I didn't know then why I started crying; today I do. I believe he was just like me, and he couldn't handle it. And, he checked out.

I was on my third night of no sleep, and I didn't know what to do. I made my last list. The list said tell Sally, call Don, and call the doctor. When Sally got out of the shower it was approximately 10:30PM. I told her about all the insanity that had been going on the previous three days (I hadn't shared this with anyone). I thought she would be able to give me some support, but instead my story terrified her. She became worried about the children's and her own safety and later she told me she had thought about taking the kids and leaving the house to get away from me. Fortunately she stayed.

Around midnight I called Don. Don and his wife Charlie are very good friends and Don is our attorney. When I called, Don's wife Charlie said he was out taking a walk; she would find him and have him call me back. Don called and came to the house immediately. He listened. I talked for an hour and 1/2 to 2 hours about all the craziness that was in my head. I felt some relief because he listened at such a deep level.

Don was a trooper that night. My terror had gotten so bad that I was afraid of the dark. But I couldn't handle anyone looking at me. So I asked him to leave the lights on, because I because of my fear of the dark. But if he or anyone looked at me, I would cry. He was moving furniture, putting his chair next to mine so he could sit by me; but not look at me and we left the lights on.

One of things I told him was that I also quit smoking. I figured why not clean up everything at one time. He said "it seems to me that given up too much at once. Why don't you have a cigarette?" I grabbed a pack of cigarettes, and smoked 5 cigarettes in 10 minutes. The nicotine helped a bit.

Just before Don left at three in the morning, he said "Bill, I don't know what's wrong with you, but call me if you need me."

Next I called my doctor. He was my ace in the hole. I just knew that he would know exactly what was wrong with me. When I was in his office 2 weeks before he asked me how much I drank. I took the amount I drank, cut it in half and divided that by three and when I told him the quantity, he said, "oh my god that's a lot of alcohol." The doctor had prescribed antabuse; a pill that if I drank while on the medication, I would become violently ill.

I called the doctor at three in the morning. He was my last hope. Sally had said, "I don't know what's wrong with you," my friend Don, who is very bright and very logical, said "I don't know what is wrong with you," but I knew that the doctor would know what was wrong with me.

The first thing that happened is that the doctor fell asleep on the phone. This was early Saturday morning, and he said "I'm going skiing tomorrow, so hang in there and come in and see me on Monday." I said, "I don't know if I can hang in there." He said

“you'll be okay.” At the end, he said, “I don't know what's wrong with you but let's talk about it on Monday.”

I didn't sleep that night I drove to work Saturday morning and I decided I would sit down with my boss and try to explain to him what I was going through. The first thing he said is “maybe you're under too much pressure and you need to step down from your job.” And I said “it's not about the job; there's something going on and I don't know what's wrong.” He said, “well I don't know what's wrong with you, but call me at the house if I can help,” and he left.

About 10 o'clock that morning. I called my wife and said you need to get me something, I'm falling apart. Somehow she got a bottle of Valium and brought it down to me.

The prescription said take one every four hours so I took four immediately. Once the valium kicked in, I thought I had discovered the cure for alcoholism; that alcoholism was nothing more than a Valium deficiency. Unfortunately and fortunately that's not true.

The dealership was very busy that day and I had appraised approximately 25 cars. I think we traded for 20 of them, and Lord knows how they ever got rid of those cars. Because of the effects of the Valium I had the feeling that I knew what the vehicles were worth before the people even left their homes to come to the dealership. Valium was my friend.

Unfortunately, the pills started to wear off; because when I took more they didn't seem to help. I was just trying to get through the day. I had to call someone in my office to talk to them about their being late and missing work.

The man I called in to my office was a recovered alcoholic and drug addict, who the General Manager had hired by going over my

head. I didn't want to hire him. I didn't mind an alcoholic, but I did not want any drug addicts in the dealership. The funny thing is, I had this huge bottle of Codeine cough syrup that I kept in my lower right-hand drawer, that I would take hits on during the day to get through the day.

Joe sat down in my office and started to tell me why he had been late, and missed some work. He said he was taking Antabuse (the same pill I was taking) and he accidentally got a swallow of a mixed drink and it made him sick and that's why he missed work.

For some reason I started to tell Joe about my *friend* that was going through all these problems. He listened. He just kept nodding his head. I realized my ability to speak and my voice had gotten so bad that I sounded like I was 100 years old and was having trouble structuring sentences.

I stood up. I went over to close my office door and said “it's not a friend, it's me,” Joe looked at me and said, “I know, and I know what you're going through and what's wrong with you.” He then proceeded to tell me some of his own experiences, some of his own stories about alcohol and drug withdrawal; about the symptoms, about everything that I had been seeing, feeling, hearing and experiencing. He knew me, and he knew what was wrong with me. And, he had a solution.

In that moment, hope and grace filled my heart and my soul. For that moment I knew I was going to be okay, I trusted Joe with my life. Because he said “I know what's wrong with you,” and I believed him.

He made a phone call to a psychiatrist that I knew and had helped Joe. He came home with me. He watched my kids, while Sally and I went to see the psychiatrist he had called. After about a ten minute discussion the psychiatrist said, “you need to go to a

treatment center tonight.” I said “I can't” he said, “why not?” I said, “If I go I'm going to lose my house, my wife and my job.” He asked, “If you don't go what's going to happen?” I said “I'm going to lose my house my wife and my job.” I went.

Joe drove me to the treatment center that night. I was terrified and still going through the alcohol withdrawal. I clutched a bottle of Valium in my hand on the way up the hill and said to Joe, “do they make you wear uniforms up there?” He said “no.” I held up the bottle of Valium and asked, “Can I have some more of these?” He said “sure.” I took some more.

The horror of the last four days ended and my new life began (even though they took my Valium bottle away from me).

In the recovery process there was work to do. . I had to stop doing the things I had done that got me to drink. I had to clean up the wreckage of the past. In that process I learned how to be a good husband, father, friend, employee and employer. I wasn't lonely anymore.

Today I have a life that is indescribably wonderful. I have a freedom that I have never known before. I know myself, I like myself, and there is no one I would rather be than me.



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