

What Happened?

(Slipping from Social Drinking to Problem Drinking)

I started out as a social drinker. I loved the taste, the smell, and the camaraderie of drinking. I also enjoyed drinking alone. In truth, I loved the effect produced by alcohol. I enjoyed drinking for many years. I credited the environment in which I drank for my many successes. I had confidence in establishing relationships, creating business, being successful in civic activities and in practically all my relationships.

Slowly, without my realization, my relationship with drinking and the environment to which I had attributed my success began to change. I lost a step at work. I went from being the fair haired boy to the one who was not always able to complete projects on time. My projects sporadically were replete with errors, whereas in the past I delivered them flawlessly and ahead of schedule. Periodically I would bounce back to being my old self, only to return once again, to making mistakes.

While drinking, I began to experience short periods during which I couldn't remember what I did. It was more difficult to find drinking partners who drank like I did. I began to do things while drinking that shocked me the next day. I didn't go home at night; instead I drank and ended up going home with someone I barely knew. Sometimes I even wrecked the car I was driving. I was failing as a husband and a father.

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It isn't important that you relate to the things that I did or what happened to me while I was under the influence of alcohol. What is important is whether you relate to the feelings created by reading about my experiences. Do you have your version of my story? If so, see if you can temporarily set aside your prejudices, denials, doubts, and fear long enough to open your mind and heart to this message. It may change your life.

The American Medical Association has determined that alcoholism is a disease. Unlike most diseases, alcoholism is the only disease that tells you that you are not ill. Yet if my story resonates with you, chances are you may have a problem with alcohol. You may be an alcoholic. Alcoholism is like pregnancy in many ways: you either are or you are not. If you are, how far along are you?

Alcoholism is a progressive disease; it always gets worse, never better. Alcoholics have what is called the phenomenon of craving, which means once they take any alcohol at all, they cannot predict how much they will drink.

I was on a trip to Boston to attend the wedding of a friend's brother. My wife, Sally, said "Please don't drink too much. We have this executive loaner car and you don't know the people or the area and I'm afraid if you get drunk you will wreck the car." I agreed to just have one or two drinks. Unfortunately, there was an open bar at the reception- just the kind of drinking environment I loved. I had one drink, then another, determined to stop before I was

out of control. But I couldn't stop drinking, even though I wanted to. I loaded that car with a group of strangers and got into a wreck. Fortunately, it was a minor accident, and no one was hurt.

I awoke the next morning terrified, because I had wanted to stop and couldn't. I didn't know what to do. Sally and I talked about it. I temporarily adjusted my drinking, started drinking more at home, switched from beer to scotch, started exercising and convinced myself I was okay. In a short amount of time, the downward spiral continued, as my drinking progressed into alcoholism.

Today, my life is alcohol free and indescribably wonderful. Whereas previously I couldn't imagine a life without alcohol, today I am a good husband and father. I am a loyal friend. I have friendships that I didn't know could exist. I know who I am and there is no one I would rather be than me. I don't hate alcohol or judge people who drink. I think drinking is wonderful for the people that can handle it; I'm just not one of them. My life now has meaning and purpose. I am successful in all areas of life and I help others achieve the same in their lives. How fortunate can a man be?

There are many solutions and many paths that lead to the life you want. Perhaps you are unable to even know what is waiting for you; because you have never really known who you are or what your purpose is. I know this: Life will only get better once you decide that you want the very best for YOU!

I don't know what solution is best for you. Some of the solutions available include residential treatment centers, outpatient treatment, programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, or one-on-one counseling with a trusted advisor. I do know that anytime we eliminate anything significant from our lives, we create a void. The void will fill. You have to decide what to fill it with.

My suggestion is to start with what seems the most appropriate for you. Perhaps you have a friend, relative or business associate who has experience with a recovery process. Many businesses offer confidential counseling through Employee Assistance Programs. However, if you want more anonymity you can speak to your family physician or a therapist. There are also 12 step programs that will ensure your anonymity. The best solution may be an independent consultant or executive coach who has expertise in this field along with a business background.

My last suggestion is this: Do something today. There is a way out. You are not alone.



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