

## Drinking, Depression and Denial

Hello! I'm from rural Southeastern Ohio, where my parents moved our family when I was about five years old. We had previously lived in a suburb of Columbus, and the transition from urban to rural living was easy for me. My brother and sister were a few years older had a little more difficulty, I suppose because they had friends in school and were more established 'socially' than I was. We lived on a small farm -- greenhouse, fruit trees, vegetable garden, pumpkins and the like -- with two houses on our property, connected by a breezeway. As time passed the area became more residentially developed, but property values remained steady and the area maintained that 'country living' feel.

My first recollection of getting drunk (getting sick, really) was when I was nine or ten years old. My sister and her friends were having a party in the 'second' house. I sneaked gulps of some kind of sweet wine (Mogen David or MD 20/20, I can't recall for certain). After awhile I went to the 'main' house where Mom and Dad were, and into my bedroom, where I guess I passed out, and eventually vomited. The next morning my parents were somewhat dismayed, to put it mildly. My brother was at the outhouse, and I was waiting to go next. I remember asking him if it was normal to get sick and see everything in 'threes' when one drinks.

I will jump ahead a few years to when I was about 14 years old. I started working as a gas station attendant, working 25-30 hours a week after school and weekends, and paying taxes for the first time. I met another young man working there named Steve, and we soon became best of friends. One night, the two of us managed to get hold of some Genessee Cream Ale and our first joint. Of course, I got sick again. We both got sick. The two of us continued to dabble in pot and alcohol, and it became part of our usual routine. We eventually were caught with some pot and empty beer bottles, and got into typical teenage trouble. Steve died in an accident a few years later.

Fast forward about four years. I met a girl at a party, and we hit it off. We got married in 1988, primarily because we were pregnant! My daughter was born, and I began a career at a power company. I was drinking, but not using other drugs at that time. My son was born in 1991, and in 1992 I transferred to Circleville as an apprentice lineman. I would stop after work "with the guys" at a couple of the local bars as a matter of routine. In 2000 I was having extreme vision problems, and after numerous tests, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I stayed in a state of denial, and began drinking more to anesthetize my physical and mental changes. I didn't see or feel the changes my body was going through, but later I found out that people around me were keenly aware of those changes. I got my first DUI in late 2000 after a union Christmas party. I picked up a second offense in 2003, and I lost my job as a result of being incarcerated for 120 days. My wife filed for divorce on Valentine's Day of 2003, and she moved into her own place about three weeks after I was released. We attempted to reconcile, and after about six months she stopped divorce proceedings and we moved back in together. Her insurance had enabled me to get treatments for my MS (they were very expensive) and required injections into my thigh, tricep, and lower back six times daily. My drinking increased in quantity and frequency. A change in insurance carriers caused me to be unable to continue my medical regimen. My wife's grandmother moved in with us briefly, and died at our home. It was a very difficult time for us. In April 2005 I picked up my 3rd DUI, which I fought in court for awhile. I was accepted into Drug Court in September 2005, but I continued my normal pattern of drinking and working, working and drinking, and descending further into depression and denial. In January 2006 I was charged with yet another DUI. I stayed briefly in a regional correctional facility, and by some miracle was transferred to the transition center where this AA group meets, and started my new understanding of the nature of my disease. I was sheltered away from access to drinking and drugging, and spent my days doing chores, and developing and working a program to help me maintain sobriety. This became my 'job'...not the 8 hour a day kind, but a 24/7 kind.

I am coming to understand my past thinking and behaviors for what they were, and what I was allowing to control my thinking processes and actions. Today, I work my 12 steps every day, and revisit them as often as I necessary to keep from falling back into old behaviors and patterns. Compassion, empathy and humility are beautiful words. But getting an alcoholic mind to learn

them, feel them, and practice them is ironically a very painful experience. Odd as it may sound, accomplishments and failures can both be relapse triggers for me. But the most important thing in my life today is my SOBRIETY. I hope that doesn't sound selfish, but it is the truth.

Today, I try to surround myself with caring, determined, spiritual people. I work at being true and honest with myself, and am finding a new life known as *serenity*. Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you.

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