

As long as I defined alcoholics as people who drank cheap liquor wrapped in brown paper bags, without jobs, and beggars on the streets who slept under bridges, I could continue to convince myself I was not one.

I was a judge and a former trial and appellate lawyer. I came from a loving home with wonderful parents. I had a good job, a nice home, and a husband who loved me. I drank only when I deserved it, and that was often. I loved to drink! Drinking alcohol made me like who I was and made me feel as if I belonged wherever I was. For many years I was able to skip that first (and consequently the second, third, and tenth) drink when I had important appointments, was in trial, or had family duties. Then one day, I realized I was drinking every day. On weekends I began to drink on Friday night and did not quit until Sunday night. I often had the flu on Mondays. I soon was unable to function, even during the week, without a drink in the morning. And then things got worse.

I also had a deep, dark, secret, which I told no one. Since college I had suffered from an eating disorder. I was obsessed with my weight, and became bulimic. For more than twenty years, I ate copious amounts of food and rarely kept any of it down. When others commented on the amount of food I was able to eat, I laughed and said I exercised it all off and had a good metabolism. I lived a lie. The pain of my secret went away when I drank. I was not hungry when I drank and did not want to binge/purge. The drink was the solution to all my problems until it stopped working. And then things got worse.

I tried to quit so many times. I tried to kill myself three times. The third time I landed in the hospital for four days. I was so ashamed that I could not even tell the doctors what was going on or that I had tried to commit suicide. I told them I just had a problem regulating my blood pressure medication! I began to understand that it would only be a matter of time before I lost everything. Death was far more preferable than the shame of admitting my problems to another human being. But still I could not quit. I prayed to my God for an answer and became angry when I wasn't fixed. Four days after my release from the hospital, I drank again. And then things got even worse. I was all-alone when I began to realize that I just might *not* die. Escaping under the bridge with a brown paper sack was starting to sound good. Hell would have been an improvement over where I was.

Then a lawyer I knew only in passing gave a talk to our local bar association. He had been sober for many years. He talked about his problems with alcohol and how his life had changed when he quit drinking. I admired his honesty and his ability to freely talk before a crowd of his peers. I believed I could trust him with my secret, and at this point I had nothing to lose. I confided in this lawyer and he took me to my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. I thought I would die of shame but something happened at that meeting. People just like me were sharing the dark secrets of their past, and these people could describe their return from a Hell I thought only I had experienced. I wanted what these people had.

It took me about a month of attending meetings before I finally put down the drink. Things did not get better right away. After several years in Alcoholics Anonymous, working the twelve-step program, and with some outside therapy, I learned that I am selfish and self-centered, and I must

reach out to help others in order to recover. It took several years for me to learn to cope with my anger and resentment at my husband, believing it was he who made me drink. Now I know that I am and always was responsible because I am an alcoholic. Although I still fret about my past and worry some about the future, I try to stay in today. Coming to Alcoholics Anonymous is no longer the worst thing that could have happened to me - it is one of the best things.

Having another lawyer twelve-step me had an added benefit. He urged me to become involved in the Texas Lawyer's Assistance Program and Texas Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers. When I attended my first annual statewide conference, I saw how other lawyers, just like me, had changed. These lawyers are GOOD people. They will stop whatever they are doing to help another alcoholic or drug addict, confident that to do so will keep them clean and sober. I only hope that, like them, I can give to others what was so freely given to me.

Today, over six years later, life is sweet. Not perfect or without problems but so sweet. I am free not just from alcohol but also from my eating disorder and depression. I love my job. After sharing my experience with my mother, I learned about some of the struggles my father, also a lawyer and who passed away eight years ago, had with pills and alcohol. I have been able to be there for my husband, who has had some medical setbacks during the last few years. I am not alone. I have friends who know my secrets and love me anyway. I am once again comfortable with the God I thought was not listening to me. Asking for and accepting help from others was the key that opened the door for me.