

Help for Lawyers In My Predicament

BY ANONYMOUS

Approximately two years ago, I found myself in a deep, dark place from which I could see no hope for the future. The Patrick Sheeran and Michael J. Crowley Memorial Trust provided that hope. This is my story.

When I was in the sixth grade, I, like many boys my age, wanted to be like my dad. To accomplish this lofty goal, I did what came natural: I imitated my dad. For me, this meant that one hot summer afternoon, I pulled a tall glass from the kitchen cupboard, sat down at the dinner table, and filled the glass with W.L. Weller bourbon. I added some water and drank. Although it tasted terrible, I managed to finish the drink and feel, for the first time, the effects of alcohol. My head spun, I became dizzy, and I vomited for hours. This experience may have taught other children to stay away from alcohol, but not me. This was the beginning of a 30-year career of alcohol abuse. Long before I thought about being a man, I thought about being an alcoholic, or maybe I just confused the two.

I drank heavily through high school. The awkwardness of teenage social situations seemed less awkward with alcohol. I got used to the alcohol during undergraduate school and my drinking leveled off.

I dealt with the pressures of law school by drinking more heavily. Later, I would learn that alcoholism is a progressive disease, which, left untreated, grows worse with time. Alcohol made a significant part of my life pass by like a summer afternoon at the beach.

I finally came to a place where I had had enough: I was sick and tired of feeling sick and tired. I had tried to stop drinking on my own, but to no avail. I knew I needed help. I knew I needed *professional* help. I knew I needed to go to rehab. After years of saying no, no, no to rehab, à la Amy Winehouse, I realized that it was time to say yes.

Immediately after I made this incredible life-altering decision to go to rehab, questions arose. Where should I go? More important, how was I going to afford rehab? My practice was in shambles and my bank account was empty. My family was willing to help me with only a portion of the money, which left me

short of the funds to get the treatment I so desperately wanted and needed.

Just when all seemed hopeless, I recalled a CLE seminar during which a speaker mentioned the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program (TLAP). For me, when deciding to call TLAP or not to call TLAP, confidentiality was my foremost concern. When I learned that all calls to TLAP are confidential, and could even be made anonymously, it made picking up the phone easier.

When I finally reached for the phone, it felt like it weighed a hundred pounds. However, upon dialing the toll-free number for TLAP, I was greeted on the other end by a staff member, one of the friendly, understanding, and caring people at TLAP who immediately reassured me that everything I said was confidential and that I did not even have to give my name if I did not want to. I immediately began to feel better. At the end of the phone call, I knew that I was not alone and that help was available.

TLAP staff and volunteers provided me emotional support, as well as practical advice on precise steps to take over the next few days. They reassured

me that nothing I said would be reported to the State Bar. They were all about solutions and about how to go forward, not about how I got to this place. They were non-judgmental.

They asked me several questions about my alcohol use to assess my situation, trying to ascertain appropriate next steps. Then, they outlined the different options available to me, including doing nothing, and having no further contact with TLAP.

I decided that rehab was appropriate for my situation. The next hurdle was financial. This is when TLAP informed me of the existence of the Patrick Sheeran and Michael J. Crowley Memorial Trust. I was totally surprised to find that there was financial assistance available to help with the cost of treatment. I never expected financial assistance from a trust specifically set up to help lawyers like me.

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thriving law practice, with all the accompanying money and prestige. I was embarrassed to find myself an alcoholic, destitute, and alone. Me? Yes, me. I didn't want anyone to know. I was too proud to ask for help. What would people say?

Thank God for the Sheeran Crowley Trust. Thank God for the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program. I learned that there is help out there for someone in my predicament. There is help specifically for lawyers with drug or alcohol problems.

The Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program is not just another lame program with useless advice (e.g., directions to the nearest AA meeting and a recommendation to stop drinking). They were truly concerned about me as an individual, assuming a personal, active role in getting me the help I needed so that I

could return to the practice of law sober. I was only asked to complete an application to determine if I qualified for monies from the Trust. My application was approved. I was on my way to rehab. TLAP and the Sheeran Crowley Trust handled all the red tape.

Without the Sheeran Crowley Trust, I don't know where I would be today. It provided the financial backing to get me the help that I needed. I learned the rest was up to me. I've remained sober since my release from rehab and I have my law practice back. It's been almost two years now.

Thank God for TLAP. Thank God for the Sheeran Crowley Trust. ❀

THE PAT SHEERAN & MICHAEL J. CROWLEY MEMORIAL TRUST

In 1995, a group of Texas lawyers created the Pat Sheeran Memorial Trust to provide financial assistance to Texas attorneys who need treatment for substance abuse, chemical dependency, and mental health disorders and who do not have the financial means to pay for necessary medical care. In 2010, the Trust was renamed to honor the legacy of Michael J. Crowley.

The Trust is named in honor of TLAP's first director, Pat Sheeran, and one of the program's founders, Michael J. Crowley. Both helped many attorneys achieve recovery from alcohol, drugs, depression, and other mental health disorders. Members of TLAP's nonprofit sister organization, Texas Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, Inc., compose the volunteer board of trustees that administers the Trust.

The Trust is solely funded by contributions. Assistance is provided in the form of a grant, made payable to the specific treatment or service provider. To help protect the corpus of the Trust and to give applicants a significant stake in their own recovery, all applicants are asked to make a moral commitment to repay the grant. No applicant may be allowed additional grants unless previous grants have been repaid. For more information about the Trust, application, and qualifications, please visit the TLAP website at www.texasbar.com/tlap.

Tax Deductible Contributions: The Trust needs your help through your tax-deductible contributions. For more information, please contact Ann Foster at (800)343-8527 or simply send a check, along with a copy of the accompanying form to the Sheeran Crowley Trust, c/o Ann Foster, P. O. Box 12487, Austin 78711.

THE PAT SHEERAN & MICHAEL J. CROWLEY MEMORIAL TRUST: *Yes! I want to make a difference!*

Name: _____

Sponsor \$1000

Address: _____

Friend \$ 500

City: _____

Colleague \$ 100

Other \$ _____

I prefer to remain anonymous.

This gift is in memory/honor (circle one) of: _____

I have remembered the Pat Sheeran and Michael J. Crowley Memorial Trust in my will.

I have purchased a life insurance policy naming the Sheeran Crowley Trust as beneficiary.

The Pat Sheeran and Michael J. Crowley Memorial Trust is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Thank you!