

## I'M JOHN AND I'M AN ALCOHOLIC

When I started my drinking career many years ago I had no plans of destroying my life, destroying myself physically, preparing myself for an early death and slowly removing myself from God. I don't know exactly when and how all these things happened but I know my drinking started very simply when I was twenty one. I bought a six pack, two for Friday night, two for Saturday night and two left over for the following week. It wasn't long before I was into twelve packs and two-fours. I remember when I was younger they would advertise beer on T.V. There was always a party atmosphere and I had this illusion that if I kept drinking, someday, I'd make that party. The funny thing is the more I drank the less there was of this party atmosphere in my life. I thought I was having a good time but I was never happy and I couldn't figure out why.

I honestly believe that alcoholism is a disease that protects itself, my mind was busy justifying my behaviour. I thought if I didn't drink before noon, got up for work every morning, went to church every week and sometimes twice a week, I must be okay. Then I got voted in as a deacon and Wow! I **must** be okay. But I was still never happy. I spent my time blaming. If my wife wouldn't bother me, if the kids wouldn't be so miserable and noisy, I wouldn't have to drink. It was my boss' fault, my job's fault, the people I worked with, my neighbors, the place where I lived. So we moved from one area to another, and then to another.

### **ALL I WAS DOING WAS RUNNING AWAY FROM MYSELF AND FOR SOME REASON THIS SELF KEPT FOLLOWING ME.**

Towards the end, alcohol allowed me to do a lot of things that I wouldn't have ever done sober. When I hit bottom I figured I was the loneliest person in the world. I had a house, a wife and four kids, my other family around me and our church community. We had everything but I was all by myself. It was just me and the bottle and the only thing that could relieve me at that time was death. I never had the courage to commit suicide but I did think about it. Our marriage was very close to ending, I was going

## I'M JANE, THE SPOUSE OF JOHN

Our family had to be perfect, nobody could know that we weren't functioning right, particularly Sunday mornings. We had four children and it was very important to sit in church and look good so nobody would suspect that we had a problem. I would worry about John's breath because of his drinking Saturday nights and feed him peppermints throughout the whole service. I didn't really focus on the sermon,

We kept everything from John. I taught the kids very well, don't tell your dad, come to me with your problems, just go to your rooms and be quiet I'll take care of it because that's my job. We talk about the insanity of the disease of alcoholism; I was a pretty good nut case too. I bought the beer, I went to great lengths to juggle grocery money, take back milk-jugs, whatever I could do to scrape up enough money so that he had his beer. I always had to make sure there were fifteen beers in the fridge, if he took one out I'd put one in. You can imagine how busy you would be just worrying about that all the time. In my mind, if he was to run out of beer, there would be a big scene. Somehow, in my mind, I knew if I kept him happy then maybe we could talk about his drinking and he'd stop. Somewhere over the years I lost myself. I was always full of anxiety and had very low self-esteem. I couldn't talk to anybody. I felt very ashamed that we had a problem. I knew there was too much drinking, but I believed that maybe I was to blame, maybe if I was smarter or looked better or could cook better or be a better mother, things would be different. When our oldest boy was fourteen, he came to me and said, "Mom, I think Dad's an alcoholic. He has a drinking problem". That was a shock to me because I had tried so hard to protect the kids, keep it from them. And what did I do? I said, "No, he has a hard time with work and he has to come home and have his drink and there's no problem". Everything I did revolved around alcoholism. What we did, alienated John. We didn't mean to hurt him, we were just trying to function as a family, keep things at what we thought was normal. When sobriety came to our household I thought everything would be okay,

## I'M JOHN con'd

to lose the house and I was going to lose another job. Fortunately, by the grace of God, I found myself in this new area. We went to see our minister. The first thing I got from him was a long sermon about my sin and the three steps I had to take to get reconciliation and this was blah, blah, blah, but at the end he said, "Do you want to go to an A.A. meeting?" I was not convinced that I was an alcoholic, yet I went with him. And that's when I started my recovery. Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship that is very warm, these people have been there, they've been through the same things that I have been and I liked it, but I still didn't believe I was an alcoholic. It took me three months to realize that was my problem. The fact that I kept going to meetings was by the grace of God. He kept giving me this little twist, "Go to another one, go to another one."

Over the last two years we've gotten involved with Family Outreach, we're reading a lot of books and learning a lot about alcoholism. At times I tend to over intellectualize what alcoholism is and I forget what it was for me in my heart. You wouldn't believe what it was like when God finally said, "Okay, you've had enough, let's start this thing in recovery." I haven't had a drink in almost seven years now. There are still periods today when I hit this dry drunk. Things are not working for me, I stop going to meetings, I figure I don't need those meetings, I shouldn't be an alcoholic. Then I start going to meetings again and all of a sudden this thing is picking me up. The program of A.A. is a life long program for me, without I cannot survive.

**John**

## I'M JANE con'd

but that's not how it was. In the beginning you're all messed up and I thought it would help if I could figure out why he was drinking, so I was analyzing and reading and very excited about everything but John didn't want to talk about that. It took a lot of talking, for both him and myself, with the kids, to have all of us realize that it was okay to have things out in the open, that we didn't have to keep secrets any more. I didn't realize how sick I had become until I got into a recovery program.

**IT HAD TAKEN A LONG TIME TO GET THIS SICK, NINETEEN YEARS OF THE DRINKING, GETTING WELL WOULD NOT BE INSTANT. THAT WAS PROBABLY THE HARDEST TIME IN MY LIFE.**

I believe if it were not for Al-Anon that we would not be together. It takes courage to come into a program like that and you really have to work at it but if you do, it can change your life. I had to relearn and change my thinking on a lot of things. Through the program I realized I had to let John work his A.A. program and I had to work my Al-Anon program. That first year we kind of grew apart. After that it was a little better and slowly it started coming back together. I am so thankful for what we have today. Through Al-Anon I got my self confidence back. I started to become happy again and that was a wonderful feeling because I had lost how to be happy, how to feel good. Al-Anon taught me that no matter what John would do with rest of his life, if he'd go back to drinking, if we'd even be together, I was going to be okay. That was a really good feeling.

Recently we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary and it was more of a celebration of the years of sobriety in our lives. That I am thankful for. I always felt that it was our faith, that it was God keeping us together, that we went through what we did for a reason. Never give up on the alcoholic, there's hope, there's healing. **Jane**