



“To be an alcoholic I thought you had to queue up outside the pub before opening.”

It wasn't long before I had a breakdown. I tried to kill myself. It wasn't to be the last time.

Luckily, I was too drunk to succeed.

I, and my superiors, were convinced the breakdown had been caused by overwork. The possibility of my being an alcoholic was never considered.”

The alcoholic will do everything in his power to avoid facing up to the truth, to avoid coming to terms with the fact he has a problem.

He sees himself as the innocent victim of circumstances.

“Somehow I muddled on. I was still drinking heavily, now mainly for the effect. And of course the more I drank, the more I had to drink to get that effect.

To be the last man left standing on his feet was my philosophy in life. And that wasn't easy to live up to in the crowd I drank with.

I resigned from the company I'd been with for four years, and got a job as a head barman. And, of course, my drinking increased with the availability of the drink.

I left this job after 18 months, quite convinced the management were against me. But, of course, I took my troubles with me.

About now I lost both my fiancée and my driving licence. Both losses were due to drink.”

Drinking eventually becomes the most important activity in the alcoholic's life, and everything else revolves around it.

“I got a job in a hotel nearer home. But they brought in a new manager, and it didn't take him long to discover the kind of barman he had. I was sacked.

It did dawn on me about now that there was something wrong, but I still didn't suspect alcohol.

Things began quickly to go downhill. Hours, sometimes even days were being lost to me, during which I could remember nothing. It was a terrifying experience.”

Alcoholic amnesia (temporary “blacking out”) is when the alcoholic wakes up in the morning and does not remember what he has done or where he has been.

He has not passed out or lost consciousness though drink.

He simply has no memory at all of what has happened during the drinking bout.

“I next went to work as a barman in St. Andrews. This time I only lasted a week or so. And practically all I can remember of the job is arriving, and later being sacked.

“My name's Ken Culley, I'm 26 and I'm an alcoholic. I started young.

At school I'd put an anorak over my blazer, change my tie, then nip round to the pub at lunchtime for a couple of pints. I was sixteen.

Occasionally I was drunk in class, but the teachers never said anything. The other kids, though, they really looked up to me.

I'm not sure why I started drinking. Perhaps because I came from a family where drink was always available, because it made me feel big, or just because I liked it. I don't know.”

There are as many reasons why people become alcoholics as there are alcoholics, but it's certainly nothing to do with being a strong or a weak character.

Alcoholism is a condition which causes severe health problems, but the alcoholic often does not realise that it is his drinking which is at the root of his troubles.

“I left school at 18 with seven 'O' levels, and was immediately taken on as a technical assistant by a very large building contractor.

The future looked bright, until I started work. Then my drinking became worse, much worse. I was drinking with two older blokes, workmates, and I suppose I tried to keep up with them.

I was drinking at lunchtime, and even more heavily in the evening. I considered 8 pints and a few doubles a night to be normal, civilised drinking.”

The narrow line that divides controlled drinking from uncontrolled drinking is easily crossed.

Alcohol is a drug.

Regular heavy drinking leads to alcohol dependence, which simply means that, more and more, the alcohol is controlling the alcoholic.

“The warning signs were there, only I didn't know enough about alcoholism to recognise them. And there was no one to warn me.

About a week after this I woke up in a police cell cut to bits and covered in blood. I had no idea how I got there. The police told me.

They'd been called to a Dundee hotel the night before when I'd thrown some garden gnomes through a plate glass window, then thrown myself through, and then assaulted the manager.

In court that morning I suddenly realised, for the very first time in six years that I needed help. I asked for it.

I was put on 12 months probation and referred to the local Council on Alcoholism. There I got help and advice. Not from do-gooders or preachers, but from people who understood what I'd been through because they'd been through much the same themselves.

I responded so well to this treatment, my probation order was lifted after only 7 months. Yet all I did was stop drinking.”

The whole of the alcoholic's life is affected by his drinking.

Sometimes it takes a social catastrophe or a really serious bout of illness to make him face up to the truth. But the signs will have been there for years if only he had chosen to see them.

“I haven't had a drink for two years now. If someone was to put a bottle of whisky and a half million pounds in front of me now and offer me the money if I drank the whisky, I wouldn't.

Money can't buy the happiness and peace of mind I'm now experiencing.

I'm enjoying life. I'm studying. In one year I'll be qualified. I still occasionally like going into pubs with friends, but now I drink coke. I'm far happier and far more outward going than I used to be.

I'm glad to do this publicity because just one person may recognise the warning signs I didn't recognise. And so save themselves a trip through hell.

If not you, then someone you know.

You can write to the address below in complete confidence. They will send you some useful information and a list of addresses where you can get knowledgeable, practical help. Either alone, or with a group.

Or contact your local Council on Alcoholism, or your Alcoholics Anonymous group. They're in the telephone book.

Whatever you do, do something. And do it now. You're not too young to have a serious drink problem. You're never too old to overcome it.”

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