

Hi I'm an alcoholic.

That is something that I believed I would never say. To me an alcoholic was a dirty old drunk, swigging on a bottle of cheap alcohol while spending his days on the streets and nights asleep in parks, railway stations or homeless shelters.

I could never be an alcoholic! I was a married family man. I had a home, swimming pool, two cars in the garage and been employed in good jobs for over thirty years.

My understanding of alcoholism took a sudden change in my fifties when I found I was having trouble coping with life. I was continually depressed, unhappy and found nothing in life worthwhile. I went from binge drinking whenever possible to daily evening drinking which progressed until the point came when I no longer went to work - I just drank!

Alcohol was my solution to life. I drank to celebrate, empathise, commiserate, socialise, to fit in. In reality I didn't need an excuse - I drank on any day ending in 'Y', and told myself it was always 'five o'clock' somewhere. In a way I was fortunate as I drank alone at home - this prevented me from getting into certain trouble in the world - but not so for my family. An alcoholic is like a tornado, we damage those nearest.

Being an Australian male I grew up believing that men worked and the reward was to drink at the end of a hard day or week. It was my right and duty to partake in alcohol - the more I could drink the better - a sure sign of being a man! However for me, from my teens, I also found it a way to cope with life. When I drank I felt more comfortable within myself. Once I had the first drink or two I invariably drank to excess - at times to blackout. It wasn't the taste I wanted, I was drawn to the effect it had on me.

The progression of alcoholism took me from being able to control the periods between drinking sprees, although seldom the amount, to being a daily drinker where I came to truly understand the expression 'one is too many and a hundred is not enough.' Toward the end, each new day I would declare that I would not drink today, yet still I would find myself starting the day with cheap wine to get the effect, which then turned into another day of drinking anything available.

After many consultations with Health Care professionals - with whom I never told the complete truth of my drinking, nor did I ever accept their advice - I realised I couldn't do it myself. I accepted help and attended a clinic where I detoxed from alcohol and was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous - there a seed was sown. AA had an answer and the members were certainly living a better quality of life than I was at that time. Unfortunately I didn't accept the AA program as I still wanted to believe I could do it myself. My life actually became worse as I no longer had alcohol for release. That was over two years ago. With the help of fellow alcoholics and the program of AA, I have come to understand the disease of alcoholism, but knowledge alone has not helped me recover. The 12 steps of AA have given me a way to cope and live life on life's terms.

Alcohol is no longer my solution - there is hope with a new approach to life of honesty, open-mindedness and willingness - this has given me a way of life worth living.

My journey within AA is just beginning, but I no longer think of taking a drink. I attend meetings regularly to share what it was like (an alcohol fuelled mental, emotional and physical torture), what happened (I accepted help and worked the 12 Steps of AA) and what it is like now (far more enjoyment of life).