

Hello, My Name is...

— Anonymous



Hello, my name is...and I'm an alcoholic. I may be like a lot of guys you know: family history of alcoholism, had my first hangover in my early teens, binged throughout my college years, but settled down to get through law school. As a young lawyer in a big firm, I would join the boys after work for a drink, which always ended up being a lot more than one. I "settled down" after marrying, not drinking as heavily, but drinking daily. The marriage ended after 12 years, prompting me to become very depressed and to drink alone, in the "comfort" of my home. When I did date, everyone I dated was a big drinker, too, so the disease went on unabated. I was even on the board of a facility for recovering alcoholics, and after board meetings I would come home—and drink. Many times I would pass out, with no memory of whether I had eaten dinner or not. I would have a beer on my bedside table every night to "help me sleep."

Although I had tremendous hangovers and depression, I was always able to convince myself that I wasn't an alcoholic. I didn't drink in the morning or during the day and was able to practice law without any problems. I was athletic and competed ably with the guys at the health club. I knew some folks who were "friends of Bill W," including one of my brothers, but I was quite different from those guys, and I had never known a woman who was an alcoholic. Yes, I am a woman.

Several pivotal moments led me to sobriety in 1993. One was sitting in district courts in the tri-county area (Wayne, Macomb, Oakland), representing clients in civil matters and listening to cases of drunk drivers and realizing that I could be one of those defendants if I continued to drink and drive. I love practicing law and could not imagine having my law license suspended or revoked. Another was always feeling lousy in the morning and wondering if the alcohol that I had consumed the night before could be smelled by others, leaching through my pores. I also considered how my mother would feel if she knew I "had a prob-

lem" with alcohol. Would she blame herself for not recognizing my problem? She had done all that she could to get our father sober, but nothing worked. He embarrassed me at more events than I can list and died at 60 in 1973. What if my drinking did that to my family or to my friends and colleagues?

In Yogi Berra parlance, the "final finale" that led to my ultimate sobriety was meeting another athletic woman (I will call her "Gena") at a competition, who happened to be the friend of a friend in New York, and inquiring whether she intended to stay after the competition for a beer. She easily shared with me that she would not because she was a recovering alcoholic and avoided the temptation. Instead, we had coffee in a nearby restaurant, and she generously shared her experiences as an alcoholic and as a woman in recovery. It was during that lengthy conversation that I was able to recognize my addiction, family history, and need to get sober. As anyone will tell you, it is not easy, but it can be accomplished. It is up to the individual and—as with my father—no one can do it for you.

When I am urged to "just have one" at a party, I will sometimes offer, "Thanks, but I think that I drank enough alcohol from 20 to 40 to last until I'm 60." I am happily married to a great guy (also a lawyer) who has never enjoyed alcohol. I am forever grateful to Gena for sharing her experiences with alcoholism and recovery so that I could face my addiction and find recovery. It was a tremendous challenge, but the best thing that I have ever accomplished. It is interesting to me that my old friend in New York has not seen Gena in many years. Do you believe in angels?

Postscript: When I first considered writing something for the *Michigan Bar Journal*, I thought that I might make a case for women having a harder time getting sober than men. However, I now think that there are so many different facts and circumstances in each case that such a clear gender distinction does not exist. I shall leave that to the experts. ■

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