

# Cold turkey: a tough way to quit drinking

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the second in a series of six interviews with former alcoholics presented here in an attempt to explain some of the causes for alcohol abuse. In some cases job descriptions have been altered slightly and names have been disguised to protect the privacy of the individuals being interviewed.

By Mike Billington  
Managing-Editor

For most people a fall of more than 12 feet onto an asphalt driveway is an event of at least some noteworthiness.

For most people breaking a finger on the job is cause for at least some alarm. Neither of those two incidents mean much to Jerry, a former alcoholic and a former carpenter. He did fall off some scaffolding once, and he broke a finger on the job once, but both times he was in the midst of a blackout caused by alcohol addiction and in neither case did he realize what was happening to him until after it was over.

When I fell I cracked some ribs, but honest to God, I didn't know that until almost a full day later. I broke my finger when a tool chest fell on it. It never did heal properly," he said waving a calloused and crooked ring finger in the air.

"Guys I worked with told me that I yelled my head off," he continued with an embarrassed laugh, "but I don't remember anything about it." A bachelor, Jerry saw duty in the Korean war with the army. He learned his trade in the service, having enlisted after high school "because it seemed like the natural thing to do, all my friends were going in."

Career Began Early

He began his drinking career in the service because, even though he was only 17 at the time, "you could get a drink by just asking for one as long as you could put your money down at the PX (post exchange). When I got sent over (to Korea) it was even easier. I don't think the Koreans have any age limit on drinkin'." It was so damn easy to get loaded and everybody felt sorry for himself in those days. It was an easy way out to go and tie one on three, sometimes four, times a week," he said during an interview.

He received a Purple Heart while in Korea, the result of an artillery attack. After he got out of the service the Purple Heart and the highly visible scar on his cheek made his drinking career an easy one to follow.

"Folks were always buying me a drink," he recalled, "even when on those rare occasions I didn't really want one."

All they had to do was ask me about my scar and I would tell them I got it in Korea. They started inventing things, you know, stories about how I got it in their own minds and pretty soon it got to be that there was a drink in front of me every time one got empty."

"I was a real hero to a bunch of drunks in those days," he added.

Physical Addiction

In 1958 the local economy was booming and he was working steadily, almost more than he could handle. He decided to move into a bigger apartment and bought a new car.

He never moved, however, into the new apartment because he was always "just a little short" and within three months he sold the car because "I couldn't keep up the payments."

He was, at this time, physically addicted to alcohol.

"I couldn't see what was happening to me at the time," he explained, "and all my good friends, some of them could see what was happening to me but they never told me, they never said a word about my drinking. It was as if it was something that was embarrassing. Eventually, rather than say something to me about it, they just stopped being where I was. I found myself looking for new friends because the old ones deserted me."

He is careful to say that his old friends "deserted him" then because he feels that it was their duty to say something to him about his drinking since he obviously didn't know what it was doing to me. No, they were too polite to say anything and they just drifted away."

Cold Turkey

When he finally realized that he was an alcoholic, "the days on the job were getting shorter than the days in between them, I couldn't keep one it seems," he tried first to cut down on his amount of drinking hoping that he would stop being an alcoholic.

"That didn't work, though, because it's like the guy who tries to cut down smoking that way, first time something goes wrong he's back up to pack a day or more. Same with me, I tried, really hard too, to cutback on my drinking hoping that it would be okay but then something would go wrong and I'd be drinking myself into another stupor," he said.

"The only solution was to quit altogether," he added.

Cold Turkey

Experts claim that going cold turkey is the worst and most dangerous way of beating alcoholism.

Jerry agrees. "I decided to go cold turkey because I couldn't cut down on my drinking and

was getting scared. If I had had any sense I would have gone to a doctor and then to a hospital where someone could look after me but instead I locked myself in my apartment and went crazy for awhile," he said.

"I learned a lot about myself in the 10 days that I spent holed up like a rat. I would lie to myself, rationalize, cheat and I probably could have been convinced to kill someone for a drink, when I wasn't busy vomiting all over the floor. I couldn't keep anything in my stomach, and when I didn't have anything there to start with I got the dry heaves which was worse."

He says that he stayed in his room for 10 days and that every time he felt that he was going to break under the pressure of needing a drink he would try to eat something.

"I figured that way I'd be doing something positive, but it didn't work because, I kept throwing it back up, but when I was vomiting I didn't have time to drink and each time I did I could tell myself 'see you stupid fool, see what you've done to yourself.' It all helped in the long run."

His cousin checked in on him once every six or seven hours to make sure that he was alright and to offer him moral support, he noted, and to bring him food and occasionally cook it.

## PVRS answered 79 July calls

The Potsdam Volunteer Rescue Squad traveled a total of 777 miles during the month of July in answering a total of 79 calls.

An average of six people responded to each call.

According to chief Bill Corbett, one of those calls was the result of an assault while 12 were requests for oxygen or heart attacks.

The squad responded to five home accidents, nine automobile accidents and eight miscellaneous accidents. They were also on the scene of 18 sickness or unknown illness calls, five fire calls, one coroner's case and one demonstration. The PVRS stood by at four local public events, had nine local distance transports and three long distance transports.

Squad members were also available at three parades.

The squad building is located on Cottage Street adjacent to the Central St. Lawrence Health Services Potsdam Unit.

"It was hard for him to stay though," Jerry noted, "because every time he came by the place smelled worse from my vomiting and I must have looked like death warmed over."

"Towards the end," he continued, "I had lost a lot of weight, I needed a shave and I smelled to high heaven. I couldn't stand myself so I had him (his cousin) take me over to his place where I got a shower. I was starting to feel like a human being again after a couple of hours then I went home. I got sick all over again when I saw that mess."

At the end of his 10 day stint in his apartment he went to the doctor.

"He really bawled me out, told me I was nothing but a jackass and put me on a special diet and told me I'd be lucky if I lived out the month."

Jerry did manage to live out the month but the fight was far from over for him.

"I thought that if I could go 10 days or

so without a drink I'd be cured but it takes a lot longer than that to really get away from it. Your body still needs it, you see, and you get these cravings at the oddest times for a drink. Lots of times I found myself wandering downtown and looking in the doorways of bars before I realized what I was doing and kept on walking," he said.

"The biggest friend you have is time, but it's also your biggest enemy," he noted.

"Time away from booze helps you and every day you can do without if you're one step closer to being cured. But when you have time on your hands, you get bored, and when you get bored you want to drink all the more. I didn't think I could fight the urge to drink if I got bored so I tried really hard to fill up my days with things to do."

Among the things which he filled up his days with was a newly found Christianity. He became involved in a

church and began using the skills he had as a carpenter to help the church do some remodeling.

"For me church became the answer to my drinking problem. It might not be the answer to everyone's problem, but it gave me the same things that alcohol used to. That sounds funny but if you look at it you can see that what I'm saying is true. For example I used to drink to calm my nerves and now I calm them with prayer. I used to drink because I was bored - didn't have anything better to do - but now there's always something that needs doing."

When I needed a little courage before a job interview or to face a new social situation I'd take a little drink to help me over the rough spots...now God helps me over those same rough spots and with a lot less pain."

"And besides," he grinned, "it's a lot cheaper to say a prayer than have a drink - a lot cheaper all the way around."

# Courier & Freeman

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## Personal Touch

Louise Collins

This year the Hannawa Falls Volunteer Fire Department Field Day was a great success. The event kicked off with a dance on Saturday evening. This was followed by a parade on Sunday which included floats, bands, and marching units with and without music.

Prize winners for the field day included parade winners Norwood (first), Parishville (second), and Colton (third) for departments with music while West Potsdam, Pierrepont and New Bremen placed first, second, and third respectively for departments without music.

The West Potsdam Auxiliary unit took the top prize for marching auxiliaries followed by Pierrepont and Edwards.

Float winners were "Saturday Night," "Little Bo-Peep," and "Colonial Uniforms."

In band competition Colton snapped up first place followed by Parishville.

The First Blue Brigade took the marching prize for units other than firemen. They represented Post 6338 Ladies Auxiliary in Gouverneur.

Waterball winners were Lawrenceville, Natural Bridge and New Bremen.

In women's waterball competition West Potsdam took first followed by Pierrepont Number Two Team. In softball the Hut dropped the Timber Tavern by a 14-4 count before losing to the Shoreline by a 13-4 score.

James Rickie was the all around point winner in the motorcycle events while Flacco's dropped Credle Equipment in women's softball by a 17-10 margin.

Nellie Towne received a telephone call from her son Salem (Buddy) from Loveland, Colorado that he and his family although in the flood area were all safe and well. This year he moved his offices and workshop to Loveland.

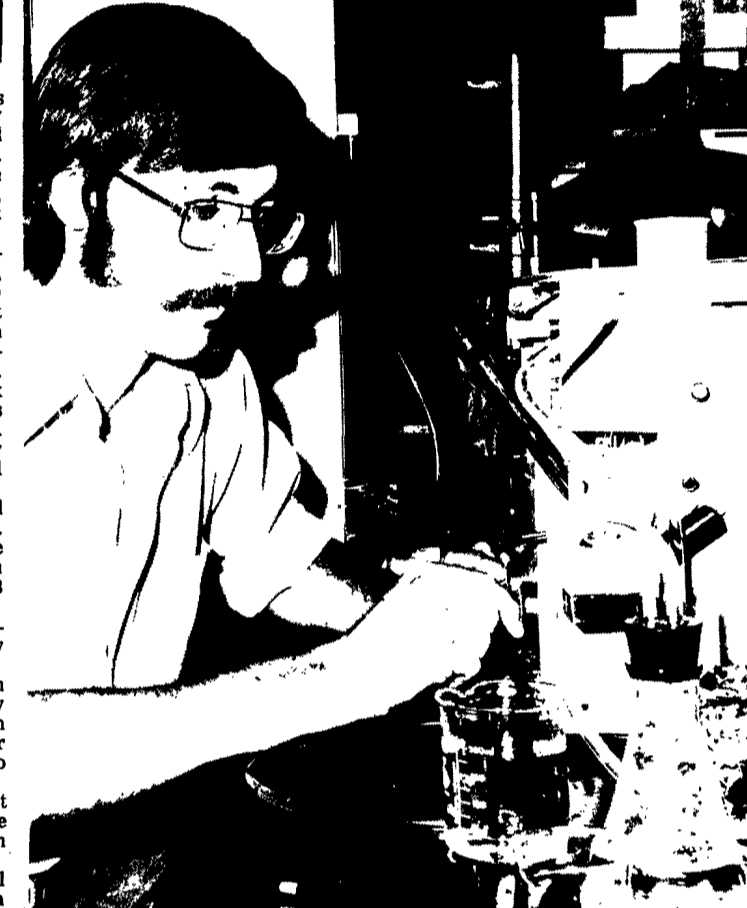
Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Mosher spent the week-end of July 31- to August 2 with the Paul Earle family and called on many of their former neighbors and friends.

Each year since they left this area they have returned for the annual Firemen's Field Day and lent a hand at the field. Rick and Susan (Earle) Place left Friday, July 30 for Houston, Texas where they both have employment and will make their home.

Dr. and Mrs. Henry Geidel of Lowville spent the week-end with his mother Marie Geidel.

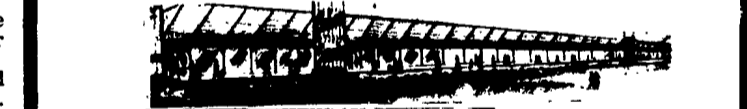
Also visiting her were her niece and daughter from Stanford Conn., Mrs. George Leyden and Mary Ann.

At the United Methodist Women business meeting held at the Church Thursday evening it was decided to have no more baked food sales this season.



ROBERT COLLINS is studying a particle counter used in the summer research project he is involved in at Clarkson College. The project is being sponsored by Clarkson's chemical engineering department and funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). He is using particle chromatography, a separation process, to study the components of coal fly ash, a pollutant. He is also setting up an experiment on temperature and crystal growth to gather data for a paper on heat transfer.

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