

# Alcoholism can be a deceptive disease

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fourth in the Courier and Freeman's continuing series of interviews with former practicing alcoholics. They are presented here in an attempt to explain some of the causes and costs of alcohol abuse. To protect the anonymity of those being interviewed names have been changed and in some instances job

that point in my life I was what you'd call a 'controlled drinker.' I never drank when I was sick or when the doctor told me not to. I knew that I had a low tolerance, that I could get crooked really easily, so I 'controlled' my intake."  
"My control wasn't damn near as good as I thought it was but I didn't find that out until much later," he added.

program for a major university. His job took him on assignments across the country. There was a lot of travel and a lot of meetings.  
"When I think back now I realize that I arranged most of my meetings as luncheons. At the time I told myself that the best way to convince the people I was seeing was to get them out of their

He kept on that way until the day he finally got serious about recovering from his addiction.  
"When I got serious about AA I learned that I needed the assistance of others to break out of alcoholism. I also learned that the only people who could provide that assistance for me were other alcoholics, other people who had gone through the same thing. I needed the free exchange of ideas that AA offers. There were no dictates from anyone, all they asked was that you listened, took what you could use and discard the rest," he said.  
"Since that day life has been a lot easier, happier, and more productive. The world is a good place to be in," he added.

pensive proposition for him.  
"I've lost a lot of personal satisfaction. I went from a good position to a day laborer. I took day labor work once I got off the booze and when I found that I could handle that I knew I was on my way back up. I knew I was serious about not drinking," he said.  
"I've lost about six years of my life and wasted about 12 years of it in all. I'm satisfied with my new life, as satisfied now as I was with my job back in 1964 but where I might have gone in those 12 years since then who knows? Since 1970, when I got off the sauce, I've had to spend an awful lot of my time regrouping. There were a lot of gaps that needed filling. There are still a lot of gaps." I've also lost a great deal of business experience but I think that's

counterbalanced by the fact that I know now that I don't know it all. I believe now that as long as I can learn from new experiences and new people that I meet that I can keep growing."  
"Physically, I've lost a lot of brain cells. Some of that was due to my alcohol intake, others were lost because of accidents I was in while an alcoholic. My reaction time has declined, my mental and physical speed of operation, my life expectancy although my chances are better now than they used to be. If I hadn't stopped drinking when I did, according to my doctor, I'd be dead right now instead of talking to you."  
"To thine own self be true."  
For Al that phrase has more meaning these days...now that he has stopped telling himself that he could "control" his drinking.

## Courier and Freeman

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descriptions have been altered slightly.

By Mike Billington  
Managing-Editor  
"It was back in 1966, I flew into Washington, D.C. with a business associate. I had bronchial pneumonia then, and I was on medication. My doctor had told me not to mix alcohol with my medication and for about two weeks I hadn't touched a drop. My friend was going on to Philadelphia and the last thing I remember is stopping at the airport bar to have a beer with him."

A month passed.  
He came out of his black-out to find himself in a hospital with a fractured skull and a bad case of pneumonia. It wasn't until later that he learned that he had fallen down a flight of stone steps and nearly died.

"I was out of this world for damn near a month," he said, but I didn't believe that alcohol was a problem in my life. At

Al is an alcoholic. When he was a practicing alcoholic he did not realize how deceptive the disease can be.

Now, after losing a couple of good jobs, fracturing his skull, and getting involved in a couple of car accidents that have erased parts of his brain for all intents and purposes, he does.

"I know I'm an alcoholic now and I know that believing that I could control my drinking was a purely erroneous thought. I was always an independent cuss, I never took advice from others and I didn't like to be pressured. That made me a slow learner...it took six years for the facts to sink in and one day, when I was out on the road, away from my family, I went to Alcoholics Anonymous...alone, and began the process of opening my mind to the reality of alcoholism."

It was not his first contact with AA. He worked for the government in Europe for awhile. On one of his assignments he was approached by a man who worked for him. The man was a reformed alcoholic. He wanted to set up an AA chapter. Al readily agreed and even referred people to the chapter.  
"I was going my good deed, being a nice guy I could diagnose other people's problems with alcohol but not my own. I was certain that I didn't have any problem with drinking...you see I could 'control' how much I drank."

He was in his mid-twenties then and already a full fledged alcoholic. His drinking pattern, however, was such that at that time few people realized that he was.

He came back to the United States to run a nationwide educational

offices, off of their turf so to speak, and out into surroundings that I was more familiar with. Realistically, I could have done just as well in their offices as over cocktails for lunch but at the time I did not believe that because I was an alcoholic and I needed an excuse to do a little controlled drinking."

His boss warned him, finally, that he was drinking to much and at the wrong times.

He agreed. On the surface at least. His drinking pattern changed. Instead of drinking at lunch he limited his intake until the meetings were over and then "celebrated" at night.

"Did I win? Hell no, I lost. I always felt that I had control. What I didn't know was that the celebrations were getting closer and closer together and the reasons for celebrating were getting farther and farther apart. Eventually they asked me to resign or my contract wouldn't be renewed. I resigned."

From there he went into independent contracting as a consultant. The pattern of his drinking persisted.

"I'd work like hell when times were tough and the funds were low but when the money came in I'd 'celebrate' again. I'd take some money and take a vacation. I began accomplishing less as time went on," he noted.

His family left him.  
His wife and children could no longer take what had become a serious drinking problem. Al didn't understand it completely, however.

In his mind he was still "controlling" his intake.

It was near Christmas and he was alone. To get his family back he promised that he'd go to an AA meeting and not drink.

There were some hidden conditions, however.

"I always looked upon myself as an honest person, so when I said I'd go to an AA meeting and not drink, I kept my word. After I'd gone I told my wife that I had gone and that I hadn't taken a drink. She agreed to come home again."

"I then proceeded to go out and 'celebrate' their return."  
He went through a pseudo-drying out period over the next two years; it was a time when he would get half dried out and go to AA meetings on occasion.

"I was just trying to reduce the hassels. That's why I would get about half dried out. In order to get about wanted my family back under the same roof with me I made some small concessions. I went to the meetings, I changed my drinking pattern again. I gave a minor point to win a major one. In the end, though, I was losing."

**INDUCEMENTS**  
Al began drinking in high school. He started drinking because he wanted to be "sociable" and "in" with the people around him.

"I just wanted to be a part of the gang and accepted by them. I wanted to come up, but I didn't know what I was reaching for."

The crucial point of his career as an alcoholic was his knowledge of his low tolerance for alcohol.

"I knew I could get drunk easily. I kept kidding myself I could handle it. As time went on, though, my tolerance increased and I found that I had a greater capacity for alcohol. The problem then was that I never felt that I had reached my limit. I was just being sociable."

**COST**  
Being an alcoholic has been an ex-

### Veterans can appeal claims

Many veterans and dependents are of the opinion that once a claim for compensation or pension has been denied by a VA Regional Office, the case is closed.

This is not true, according to Vincent E. Rogers, counselor, New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs. A denial of a claim may be appealed as high as the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C. the veterans official emphasized.

The counselor explained that if a claim for compensation or pension has been denied, a simple letter of disagreement based on a point of law may be submitted to the Regional Office where the denial originated. New additional substantiating evidence may also be furnished in support of the original claim. These actions can be taken by claimants who have had a claim denied before the necessity of appealing to Washington.

Rogers urged those individuals who have had a claim denied and wish to appeal to contact the local counseling center of the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs located at 201 State Street, Ogdensburg, 13669 for assistance.

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