



In Bounds

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My family has a history of Alzheimer's disease. Aunt Ellie, my maternal great Aunt, became a victim of the syndrome in her 80s, as did my maternal grandmother also in her 80s. And my mother may have been showing signs of either Alzheimer's or dementia shortly before her passing at the age of 76. No one will ever know for sure.

But one thing that is for certain, the process of watching a loved one lose his or her sanity is heart breaking for everyone involved. The symptoms can range from simple personality changes to hallucinations, arguments, striking out and other violent behavior. Losing interest in previously enjoyed pastimes and losing awareness of who you are can also manifest. What could be worse you ask?

How about witnessing this transformation within yourself as I did for so many years while I wrestled with my alcoholic tendencies. Yes, many of you have read my story before, but some may not remember it or perhaps need to reread and reflect upon the detrimental effects of a compulsive behavior.

Just what is an example of a compulsive problem? How about drinking a pint of vodka on the drive home followed by a six-pack of beer consumed casually to "cover up" the smell of booze upon your breath. Or perhaps saying morning prayers to have the hangover go away only to begin drinking mid afternoon. Maybe you have the inability to pass up the pull-tab box in a bar or the consistent weekend trips to the casinos. How often do you call your bookie? Are you plagued by a desire for illegal drugs such as cocaine or even marijuana? Or are you running up credit when your bank account is empty?

The consumption of alcohol was my compulsion of choice. And with that repeated desire came the break-up of my family, the exploitation of my hard-earned dollars, the paranoia of being "found out" and the loss of my sanity. For 20 years my desire, and choice, to drink caused me to do things many would consider just plain nuts.

With haste every evening I drove to one of six different liquor stores for that bottle and six-pack. Evening phone conversations were often repeated and too often not remembered. Hobbies once enjoyed became secondary unless they allowed me to drink at the same time. Mood swings made me difficult to live with. Gosh, at times I found it difficult to live with myself! My addiction to alcohol was driving me crazy. And here is the kicker, I knew it was happening the whole time and watched myself spin in a slow motion spiral as I searched for spiders in my empty bottle of vodka.

Eventually, and thank God for it, my fear of insanity drove me to a psychologist, forced me to admit that I had a problem and then caused me to search for help.

On March 5th, 1995 I took my last drink. The following day I began the rest of my life, sober and appreciating the gift I have been given. The first month was a challenge, but I was empowered with the tools necessary to limit my compulsion to desire without acting upon the obsession. Of primary help was the code of the recovering alcoholic, the 12 Steps.

If you are like me and carry a compulsive behavior, be it gambling, drug addiction, obsessive spending or any sanity-stripping

fixation, then the Steps may be able to help you overcome your challenge. That is of course, only if you want to regain your sanity. And that is a key to success.

A person has to want to find the "cure" more than continue the compulsion. Nobody can do it for you. It boils down to choice. Indeed when first in treatment I was told that I had a disease. And believe me that alone helped my stick with the program. But after witnessing the actual disease of Alzheimer's I question if the desire for alcohol is an illness or a compulsive choice. Upon thoughtful reflection, I had and still have a strong compulsive tendency. But within my personal program is the freedom of choice.

As I came to find out more and more about my sad state of mind I learned that I had the internal support system to stop drinking, my own "greater power" is there with me at all times.

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

- 1 We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2 Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3 Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
- 4 Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5 Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6 Were entirely ready to have God remove all of these defects of character.
- 7 Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- 8 Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- 9 Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10 Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- 11 Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.
- 12 Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.

This very second, with the help of my "greater power" I choose not to drink. And in five minutes or five hours I will choose not to place myself in a situation where I have to pin my insanity to the mat in an effort to maintain my sobriety.

The beauty of my program goes well beyond a conscious effort not to drink. Controlling my sanity is dependent upon my understanding that there are many things in my life I have no control over. However, there are things in my life that I need the courage to control. Hence the often heard and seen prayer:

God, Please grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Understand I am not trying to pontificate a religious perspective. But rather provide each of you, my friends, the opportunity and tools to conquer your own demons if you have the desire to. For those of you suffering with a compulsive behavior, get help. It could save you coin, it could save your relationships and it could save your health. But most importantly it will save you from going insane.