

Starting and Stopping

by DON KOOYER, C.G.C.S.

Willow Lakes Golf Club Baymeadows Country Club

COULD it happen to you? Nobody really thinks it will happen to themselves. Fortunately, I can let my friends know how much it meant to me that you helped when it was important. There was no slogan when I was a teenager "just say no to drugs and alcohol". I remember standing around in the pool hall smoking a Lucky and drinking a Hamms beer just "being cool". Now, I just didn't stand around and drink, I was set up boy. Not only did I get fifty cents an hour but good tips and a good rack of 9 ball would get a pack of smokes from the winner, and sometimes a beer. Believe it or not, the first greens I worked on were on the 8 greens in the hall with leather holes on each side and ends. The better the grooming of the greens, the better the reward. Each night after brushing and grooming the green covered slate, Leon, the owner, would let us hustle our own game for free and reward our good job with a few free beers until the smoke settled in the joint and

we had to close. On the way out we could buy a sixer to go, the laws not being too strict. I guess they were long necks too. While riding around in my brother's '58 Ford convertible listening to Chuck Berry, Elvis, and Gene Vincent rocking and rolling, my friends and I and our chicks were out of booze. Now our town wasn't the smallest in America but we did have what most American small towns had in the 50's; five churches and 16 bars—at least it seemed like it! I pulled around in back of the Spot, opened the back door and looked through the smoked filled card room. The sweet odor of tobacco, snuff and beer drifted throughout the bar—a smell I will never forget.

Willie is stacking the poker decks and emptying the spittoons. I wave and he nods and comes out back and talks to us. Willie is a graduate of the pool hall at maybe 22 years of age. We haven't made it to his stature yet. The girls seem to think he's the greatest. Willie is our supply line for more refreshments. For

\$1.19 each we can get as many six packs of Budweiser as we can drink plus 50¢ each to the supplier. All of the guys in school saw Willie throughout our senior school years. Willie is probably still dealing cards at the Spot, charging \$5.50 per six pack, waiting for a wave from the back door.

As I sat in the barracks at Fort Leonardwood, Missouri, drinking a Budweiser some years later, I didn't need a back-door man, just had to have a quarter to drop in the converted coke machine and a G.I. could drink his whole pay check if he wanted to. Getting back to the barracks and sitting on my bunk reading a letter from my brother back home with a news clip (six die in car wreck) speeding and booze take lives of, well, you know, my friends. I thanked God I was where I was and had a beer for my departed friends. It didn't dawn on me that I had the same bomb in my hand. When do you stop?

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When I was in the service if you didn't, go to the E.M. club or the N.C.O. club for drinks and conversation you sat in the barracks and looked at the wall. More pool and drinking with the guys. I had been drinking for 10-11 years by now. Believe me, that is a lot of hangovers, headaches, upset stomachs and bad driving. Don't drink and drive! I shudder to think how many times I have driven when I shouldn't have. I remember when we (my wife and I) were out at parties and she would tell me that she should drive. I wouldn't let her when I should have. My wife never was a drinker and I couldn't figure out how she could have any fun at parties without drinking. She used to tell me that I could have just as much fun without drinking but I wouldn't believe her. That was how I started drinking, with a crowd, and I really thought if I didn't drink, my friends wouldn't talk to me. Believe me, that is not the case, as I have found out.

When I first married the couples that we ran around with either belonged to the band that we played in or were groupies that we partied and drank with. Again, playing in bars and at parties all night then loading equipment up and going home at 2 a.m., or to another gig down the road driving half drunk and tired. Fortunately I left the music business and moved into the turf industry some 20 years ago. When I left the group I slowed down my alcohol consumption and have since quit.

One more news release has come into my life since I quit drinking and driving. The lead guitar player and I sat down when our band split and talked about our future with our families and careers. We both were drinking beers at the table and said we would stay in contact every few years and see how each of us was doing. Well, my friend is a certified public accountant but he lost his family by divorce. His ex-wife said drinking caused it (when do you stop?). I couldn't believe it was the booze, even though I think it caused a shaky situation in my own marriage a while back. I thank the Lord again it wasn't me. As I write this article, I hold this news release (accountant runs man down, cited for driving while drunk)—one week later—(man dies, accountant faces 3-5 years in prison). When do you stop? You can quit—I did and I don't want to loose any more friends.

JUST SAY NO!! ■