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depressed, my marriage was over, I was broke and I really didn't see a way to fix any of it. Intellectually, I knew virtually all of it was because I was a drunk, but I simply couldn't imagine living life without a buzz.

The worst and best day of my life happened when the owner of this magazine asked to meet with me last fall. I'd been a columnist for GCI for five years and, although I was essentially a freelancer, he had always treated me like a valued member of the staff. Part of me knew that my increasingly erratic behavior and the nearly constant smell of booze on my breath was more than enough for him to end the relationship and send me off into the cold dark night of bankruptcy and serious personal misery. I was shaking as I walked into the meeting and it wasn't just from the booze.

But, instead of simply firing me that day like almost anyone in his position would have done, he surprised me and said: "Let's get you some help." I left the meeting, got in my car and cried like a baby in relief and gratitude.

The company got me into an outpatient counseling program offered through the famed Cleveland Clinic. Admittedly, I went into it thinking that it would help me manage my drinking better but I could still have a pop or two to relax occasionally.

That wishful but idiotic notion lasted exactly two hours into my first group counseling session. I instantly realized that I was the poster boy for alcoholism: genetic predisposition (my father and other relatives); an unmanageable life; daily consumption (sometimes straight out of the bottle, thank you very much); secret, daytime drinking; depression; and self-hatred by the bucketload. I made a lame attempt to defend myself by giving one of the counselors my "I'm a high-functioning drunk" speech. Her response was, "Oh yeah? How's that working out for you?"

So, that very day, I quit swilling hooch and drank the abstinence Kool-Aid instead. I absolutely fell in love with the idea of being sober. And, miraculously, it was relatively easy for me

to not drink. Something simply clicked within me and I didn't have the cravings or DTs that plague many quitters. I've since met tons of other alcoholics and addicts who struggle every moment of every day to stay away from booze, pills and needles. I thank God, Buddha, Allah and my lucky stars that I haven't felt their pain.

That month of counseling was the most amazing experience of my life. Not only because of what it taught me about myself and my addiction, but because of what I saw in others – people from every walk of life – who were going through the same thing.

Sitting in that group was like being on the world's most interesting reality TV show that aired for three hours a day, four days a week. There was drama, intensity, weirdness and humor. I was in a room with cops, hippies, executives, nurses and ex-cons, each of whom had

open mind and really liked what I found. There are lots of people just like me who have hit bottom, stumbled into AA and built new and rewarding lives. Yes, there is an emphasis on faith – believing in a higher power – but it's up to you to define it. Me? I believe in karma. Do good things and good things will happen in return.

And they have. My life has changed dramatically for the better in the nine months or so since my lips last touched liquor. I'm calm. I'm happy. I'm productive as hell. I don't have to lie to others or myself... which is an enormous relief. I have a warm, honest relationship with my sons. The remarkable man who saved my life by getting me into treatment rolled the dice again and offered me a chance to run this magazine. And, to top it off, I met and fell madly in love with a fabulous woman – a soulmate with whom I intend to spend the rest

I isolated myself – another common tendency for alcoholics – and increasingly drank alone. A cheap-ass bottle of vodka became my best friend and confidant.

a unique and often astounding story of self-destruction. There was a mortgage broker who had been crushing and snorting a dozen Oxycontin pills a day. There was a kid only a little older than my son who'd been a heroin addict since the age of 15. And there was a galaxy of fellow drunks ranging from suburban soccer-mom winos to craggy-faced steelworkers to tweedy retired teachers. The group was as diverse as America because addiction doesn't give a damn about socio-economics, gender, race or religion. Addiction simply wants to own your ass no matter who you are. It is an equal opportunity destroyer.

As part of the program, I started going to AA meetings. I had always thought cynically that AA was a bit cultish and primarily designed to hand out donuts, bad coffee and religion to toothless hobos. But, I tried to go into it with an

of my days. It sounds crazy, but there is magic in my life.

In short, sobriety does not suck.

So why, gentle reader, have I filled several perfectly good pages of a trade magazine for golf course superintendents with this self-indulgent tale of the boozy rise, fall and rise of Pat Jones? Because, according to the doctors who study such things, the odds are that – of the thousands of my friends who read this – about 8 percent of you probably suffer from the same malady. And, I suspect, that number might be a tad higher in the crazy, mixed-up business of golf course management.

If you recognize yourself in my words, I hope you're as lucky as I am and you find some help.

Life's too short and too beautiful to be viewed through the bottom of a bottle. **GCI**



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For five years, our intrepid publisher paid his bills by providing sage business and marketing counsel to industry companies as a consultant. Now, he's doing it for you...for free. Check out Pat Jones's marketing blog – a site devoted just to marketing tips, research, trends and ideas for advertisers like you – at www.gcimarketing.blogspot.com.

Pat is at his most candid in the blogosphere, so make sure to bookmark "The Insider's Guide to the Golf Course Market" and add it to your feed on Google Reader, RSS or whichever format you prefer.



We're an App!

Got an iPhone, iPod or iPad? If so, join the stampede heading to iTunes to download the fabulous new Golf Course Industry app. Your monthly issue of GCI – along with exclusive digital-only bonuses – can be at your fingertips in a cool, easy-to-use format. (You can also download Lawn & Landscape and our other Green Industry pubs.)

The app is a small part of our overall strategy of offering our core product – compelling, relevant, useful content – in whichever format your customers want to receive it in. So far, we have print, website, e-newsletters, digital editions, iPhone app editions, video, podcasts, webinars, Facebook pages and Twitter. Coming soon...smoke signals!

In Your Face

Think Facebook is a fad? Thousands of your customers disagree. GCI has been part of the social media revolution for years, but now we're taking it to a new level. In August, we launched our new Facebook page, "GCI's Turfhead Café," to much acclaim and instant friending fever with key superintendents, assistants, architects, university folks, consultants and many of our supplier and distributor folks.

We modestly propose that the Café will become THE most popular Facebook page for superintendents and others in our happy little business. We plan to actively post key articles, videos, links and other cool stuff designed to stimulate conversation and interest among customers around the country. We also plan to work with you, our clients, to help you use the page and other social media opportunities more effectively. Get in touch with Pat Jones to find out more.

facebook

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you haven't noticed by now, GCI is the only media group in the market that's moving forward, improving and bringing you new and better ways to access your customers. Our readers sure have noticed. In a study just a few months ago, half of superintendents surveyed ranked GCI as the magazine that is **most improved over the past few years**. No other magazine was even close. Frankly, we're going forward...the others aren't.

And we're taking that momentum into next year. We already have our editorial calendar, rates and special programs in place for 2011. If you haven't heard from your sales rep about next year's planning, **call them now**. We have some very cool stuff in the works for next year and you need to know about it.

The bottom line is that we invite you to go forward with us by making GCI the core of your marketing program for the rest of this year and as you plan for 2011. There's never been a better time to think outside the box (and we're good at that) and there's never been a better time to put your trust in GCI.

BroadcastNews

As you may have noticed, we've made a pretty serious push into the land of online video this year. Quite simply, video is a great way to tell stories in a visual market like the golf course business. It also allows us to use events like chapter meetings, industry conferences and even corporate gatherings as a platform for coverage.

We'll be partnering with companies next year to produce video series on a range of topics. If you were ever thinking of integrating video or multimedia components into your marketing plan, now's the time to talk with your GCI rep to learn more about how we can work with you to tell your story on the tube.

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