



# IN SIGHT

*Helping you improve the quality of your personal & professional life.*

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## A WOMAN ALCOHOLIC'S STORY

Alcoholism riddles my family tree: my mother is an alcoholic, my father was an alcoholic and addict who died in his addiction, and my maternal grandfather was an alcoholic, as were several of my father's brothers. Oddly enough, that knowledge didn't keep me from picking up my first drink. My parents divorced when I was small and my grandparents raised me. My memories of my mother are of a beautiful, glamorous woman who would swoop in and out of my life, bringing me presents and smelling like Estee Lauder perfume and scotch.

I had my first drink when I was fifteen. I was a bookish, sort of shy kid. We moved a lot during my school years and I didn't have a lot of friends. One night at an outdoor rock concert, someone passed around a bottle of wine. I drank to be part of the crowd, and I was astounded at the result. I felt more confident, prettier, less shy. I had the ability to articulate the witty comments that ordinarily stayed stuck in my head. I was flirtatious and outgoing. I also blacked out and was told the next day that I had acted wild and crazy. I didn't mind; the feeling had been exhilarating. Besides, I thought everyone blacked out when they had too much to drink. I wanted to chase that feeling.

I drank for over fifteen years, and if you asked me at the time, I would have said that alcohol wasn't my problem. Rather, it was my solution for a complicated life. I had accomplished a lot during those years of drinking: I worked while in college and law school as well as achieved good grades. Drinking was how I relaxed, how I coped with stress, what I did to celebrate, and what I did when there was a crisis. I never considered the risks I took when I drank, or the impact on others. I would show up late at home with no good excuse. I rode with people who were drunk and drove when I was drunk. I prided

myself on my work ethic, yet I never calculated the days I missed classes or was late to work because I "had the flu," "food poisoning," or some other mysterious illness. One of the chief characteristics of alcoholism is denial, and I was no exception. In my case, I would never admit (even to myself) that I was so deathly ill because of my drinking.

Towards the end of my drinking days, the complicated set of rules that I designed in an attempt to control my drinking began to erode. I not only drank at bars or at social events, but at home, alone. I looked for excuses to drink during the workday. While I used to concentrate my drinking on the weekends or vacations, I now drank every day, and it wasn't a matter of choice. The unnatural tolerance for alcohol that I prided myself on – the ability to "drink with the boys" – vanished suddenly one day. I lost the illusion that I could control my drinking or that what happened to me once I started drinking wasn't dangerous. I was scared all the time. Where I used to think that alcohol was a problem for other people, I realized it was a problem for me. But I couldn't imagine a life without alcohol, and that scared me just as much.

One night, after drinking at a business event where I should have stayed sober, I jeopardized my job and my husband walked away from me in disgust. I was alone, blacking out and coming to, and terrified. I swore that if I woke up alive the next day, I would go for help about my drinking. The miracle that happened was that I actually called AA the next day and went to a meeting. I listened to people talk about how the AA program had changed their lives, and they seemed happy, calm, and content. I envied them, but I couldn't imagine how I'd be able to stop drinking. I had a house full of booze, for one thing. I asked for help, and a few women went home with me and dumped my alcohol. They told me that I didn't have to think about not drinking forever, just one day at a time.

That was eleven years ago, and I'm pleased to say that through the grace of a Higher Power, I've been continuously sober. At first, I couldn't understand how I could fit going to AA meetings, getting a sponsor, and working the program into my "busy" life. Then I realized that AA was helping me to live the life I always wanted.

Life, even in sobriety, still has its challenges. I have made a number of significant, and sometimes difficult, transitions in my career and personal life. I know now, however, that no matter what the problem I never have to deal with it alone, and I don't have to drink over it. Today I'm happy being myself, fear and anger don't dominate my life, and I'm privileged to be able to help other people get sober. It's a great way to live.

Happy, Joyous, and Free