



The college environment, perhaps more than others, seems to isolate student alcoholics and exclude them from the social scene. Some can find acceptance and support there; others must get out.

One alcoholic's story . . .

Editor's Note: This story was written from the point of view of a student alcoholic who chose to fight the disease without leaving the college environment.

There must be a lot of collegiate alcoholics who, like me, are trying to juggle school and the related bar-hopping partying norms without letting anything slip. And there must be friends who, like mine, don't notice anything slipping because alcohol and college seem to be the accepted mix, at least on this campus.

When my friends drink to let off steam, I'm the one who feels the pressure. I have tests and papers due, a job and boyfriend problems just like my sorority sisters, but there is a difference because I am one of those students with a drinking problem. No, wait. I mean I'm an alcoholic.

It's still humiliating to admit, but, like everyone says, that's the first step. Somewhat coerced by a DWI charge in April, I took the step and admitted my problem this summer. I'm an outpatient at the Independence Center in Lincoln and a member of A.A. I'm a real, live 21-year-old alcoholic.

When I came back to school this fall I was afraid my friends would alienate me. And I was afraid of the social pressure. I mean, going to the bars is such a big thing.

There was a certain risk involved. I had to change my lifestyle, but would my friends change, too?

FORTUNATELY, IT is the friends I feared who have helped me, though I think their help has been almost unintentional. They drink around me, and they talk about the bars around me, and they don't act any different than before. But there's no pressure. They don't treat me like I have the plague. Nothing is said about it. In fact, some of my friends don't even know.

I still go to the bars with them once in a while, but not

for the express purpose of getting drunk. I stick with soft drinks.

I do spend much more time alone now. I roller skate, run or swim, and I guess I've gotten into card playing lately. With the bar nights and hangover mornings I've saved, I just have more time to myself. And I like myself more since I quit sharing my personal time with alcohol.

I miss it, but life's more enjoyable, even fulfilling without it. Some lonely nights I question that and have to fight rationalizing that a drink would take the loneliness away.

I used to drink to forget my problems—I know, you've heard that line before on some soap opera—but drinking intensified them.

MY PERSONAL DEFINITION of alcoholism is when drinking causes repeated problems. The DWI charge was one. Then there were the fights with friends, the tests I missed because I drank instead of studying the night before and was too sick to show up for class in the morning.

A bad habit you say? No, it was a compulsion, and it was caused by a disease I could not control. It has nothing to do with willpower.

Drinking didn't cause all my problems, but it didn't help to be drunk at the time they were developing. I learned to give all those big, ugly drunk-inducing problems to God so they won't make me take a drink. A.A. stresses trust in God, or something higher than yourself, because you've already tried to fix it yourself and messed up. Someone has got to take over.

So I'm a 21-year-old alcoholic and I'm lucky. If I would have found out later, I could have alienated a husband, ruined my family or lost a job. And despite the social pressure around here, college and the friends it surrounds me with provide a built-in support system. I'm not sure I'd get that out of my own.

Dealing with disease

Last drink doesn't end battle with booze

By Deb Shanahan

Honesty was the key.

Being honest with herself about the fact that she could not drink normally and that alcohol was making a mess of her life opened the door for DeeDee.

DeeDee, 24, is an alcoholic.

Working at the Alcoholics Anonymous office in Lincoln, licking stamps and putting them on envelopes, DeeDee tells how drinking landed her in jail twice before her 19th birthday.

"I was almost relieved to find out I was an alcoholic, because I thought I was going crazy," she said. "One lady at the jail told me that if I got sent there again, she was going to send me to a mental hospital."

"She thought I was schizophrenic because I was so mean when I came in there drunk."

DeeDee said she was ordered to go through a 30-day treatment program which resulted in her staying sober for 10 months.

"It's hard. I'm a fun-loving person—that's partly why I'm an alcoholic—and there's a lot of peer pressure to drink."

"Here I was, into being honest, and I'd go to Little Bo's with my cousin and a guy would ask if he could buy me a drink. I'd say 'No, I'm an alcoholic.'"

"**YOU CAN** imagine how well that went over. Pretty soon I got what we call 'stinking thinking.' I told myself that all the guys in the program were sissies because they sat around and talked about how they were hurt and that I was too young to be an alcoholic."

"I went out and drank and never went back."

"Never" lasted three years, during which time DeeDee landed a job as a cocktail waitress and got married. After reaching a point where she was sneaking drinks

behind her husband's back and after one "last big drunk," DeeDee said, she turned to A.A.

A.A. is a voluntary, worldwide fellowship of men and women whose only goals are to attain and maintain sobriety.

The fellowship was founded in 1935 by Bill W., a New York stockbroker, and Dr.

Of the 12 steps, DeeDee said she thought the moral inventory was the most important.

"The longer you drink, the more messed up you are in your head from all the rationalizing and justifying. You become blind to yourself, so just coming to an A.A. meeting and putting the plug in the jug is

"The longer you drink, the more messed up you are in your head from all the rationalizing and justifying."

Bob, an Ohio surgeon, to help those who suffered from the disease of alcoholism and to keep themselves sober. Then, as now, the only requirement for membership was a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees.

Because members are guaranteed anonymity, no membership lists are kept, but it is established that there are nearly 30,000 groups and more than a million members in 92 countries. There are 49 A.A. meetings every week in Lincoln.

THE A.A. PROGRAM, DeeDee said, is one of total abstinence—members stay away from one drink, one day at a time, by working through 12 steps to recovery.

DeeDee said the 12 steps meant admitting that she was powerless over alcohol, that her life had become unmanageable because of it; believing in a power greater than herself and turning her life over to the care of God as she understood him; making a "searching and fearless" moral inventory of herself; admitting her shortcomings; and carrying the message to other alcoholics.

not enough"

Working with a relative, friend, minister or fellow member of the group, the A.A. member compiles a detailed list of past wrongs and shortcomings, makes a vow to correct the misdeeds, and then burns the list.

"**BURNING IT IS** symbolic—like getting it out and feeling totally forgiven. It's like a Catholic confession. What it does is force you to face yourself, to see your strengths and weaknesses.

"With me, I realized I loved how I was when I was drunk. I was funny and I could say anything to anyone. Now I know I can be a nice person without alcohol."

DeeDee said it is not necessary to be religious in the traditional sense to benefit from A.A., but that it is important to recognize there are some things in life over which the individual has no control.

DeeDee also said she found it necessary to change friends in order to maintain sobriety. Although some people continue to go to parties with their old friends,

DeeDee said she feels uncomfortable around people who are drinking and even becomes impatient with people who are drunk.

She said A.A. provided a social group and activities for her to meet new friends—men and women who understood and helped her maintain sobriety.

The mutual support from members within the group is another basic part of A.A. and DeeDee said it has two purposes.

"**LISTENING TO** 'drunkalogues'—people telling what it was like when they drank, what made them see their problem and how it's been since they stopped—at open meetings, a lot of times helps people to see themselves.

"A lot of times there are people in the room who don't consider themselves alcoholics—men, they hate that word—but it never fails, when someone starts talking about how he acted when he drank, you can see yourself."

And, she added, "drunk rescuing" is good insurance for veteran members.

"It's kind of good not to forget the past, good to tell your story. Then you remember how bad it was and remember that you don't want to go back."

For that reason, DeeDee said she always recommends regular attendance at A.A. meetings.

"It's kind of like believing in God—you never, ever finish it. It's an ongoing thing. You finish the 12 steps, then you start over."

"I met a person at a banquet two weeks ago, and he said it best of all. Now this man has 31 years of sobriety, and people kept asking him why he still went to meetings." He told them that going to a meeting is, to him, just like taking a bath.

"It's kind of like just another health habit. We do have a disease, and we do have to keep taking our medicine."