

NOT GOOD AT ALL

A police cell is not the best place to wake up in, but when you do and can't remember how you got there it's not good at all. A week or two earlier my mate killed a bloke and it could just as easily have been me that did it. Coming out of a blackout was not uncommon for me nor was checking my clothes for blood while trying to figure out if it was mine.

Why did things like that keep happening? I had a happy childhood where my parents gave me love and taught me right from wrong so what could be the problem?

I started drinking when I was fifteen and that's when things changed for me. Going to the pub every Friday night and loving it. My mates seemed to manage to go out on a Saturday and Sunday as well but I couldn't, as I spent all my money on Friday. Blackouts started right from the word go. Drinking the whole weekend progressed to drinking seven nights a week before very long.

I became a football hooligan, and was more interested in getting drunk, fighting, rioting than the football. When I stopped going in to work I got involved in crime to pay for my drink and the lifestyle I thought I wanted. Court appearances and short prison sentences were not uncommon for me as my life became more violent. It felt like being on a merry-go-round that I couldn't get off. It didn't feel right at all. I blamed people, places and even bad luck but never alcohol.

I ended up being sentenced to nine years in prison, which was reduced on appeal. With some remission I served three years. When I got out I swore I would never go back, and I meant it. But it wasn't long before I was going down the same road again.

Then something happened, I met my wife. She was good, kind, and was always smiling. Soon we fell madly in love with each other. She was good for me and I knew it. I was working, times were good, and slowly my life began to get better. The only thing that spoiled it was my drinking. Showing her up, getting into trouble, and going off on benders. We tried moving town to a small village but I took my problem with me because I continued to drink.

I was drinking more at home and started hiding bottles all over the house while waking up on the settee or the floor. I missed the birth of my first son through drink. I thought I was a good Dad but only took the kids where I was able to drink or took my own with me. Drink driving was something I did often and at times had my boys with me.

My wife found out she had a brain tumour, which they could not operate on, as it would kill her. We were told she wouldn't live three years, which was over seven years ago. I just used it as an excuse to drink more.

People told me I was an alcoholic and that I should stop drinking. If I wanted to I could give up drinking tomorrow I would tell them. I just didn't want to. It was my only pleasure in life. Besides you would drink like me if you had my problems.

One by one my family and friends turned their backs on me because they could not watch me killing myself any longer. Even my wife left me a few times. The people I was hurting the most were the people I loved the most while at the same time telling myself at least things can't get any worse, but they did.

Over the next couple of years I got done for drink driving twice, lost my job through drink, my self-respect, confidence and any pride I had left. I stopped washing, shaving, and didn't change my clothes. Becoming dependent on alcohol, I needed a drink to do anything. I couldn't even answer the phone without a drink. My health began to suffer and I was never away from the doctors. While I could not sleep naturally I drank myself unconscious only to wake up three or four hours later looking for a drink again. Depression, panic attacks, shakes, sweats, and alcoholic fits all became a part of my life.

When I hit my rock bottom it felt like alcohol had took me to places I didn't want to be with people I didn't want to be with. I had gone insane. Alcohol had taken everything and was coming back for me.

For about two years I tried to give up drinking. Trying everything from doctors, pills, psychiatrists, alcohol workers, and rehabilitation centres twice. But I just could not stop. In the end I gave up on myself and just wanted to die.

When I found AA I met people who had drank like me, thought like me, and had done things I had done. All they asked was that I stay away from one drink for one day and get to as many meetings as I could. Going to lots of meetings I joined a group, and found a sponsor who guides me through our 12 Step programme. My life has got better. My family and friends are back and I have found new friends in AA who are fantastic. We get invited to all the family occasions and I even gave my niece away at her wedding last year. I am happy and content through accepting life on life's terms.

I have not needed to pick up a drink since I found AA nearly three years ago.

Jon
2007

Over 30 convictions later

My first ever jail term came at the age of thirty. At a time when all my friends had gotten married, settled down and had families, I was on my way to jail.

Was I surprised by all of this? On reflection, no. I had had plenty of warnings going to court many times over the years for various offences ranging from breach of the peace to firearms offences.

I have been fined thousands of pounds over the years for football related violence. When that didn't seem to have any effect on me my punishment was increased to community service, which ultimately led me to prison. Again this did not have any effect on me as I continued to cause havoc all across the country following my beloved football team.

During this period alcohol played a significant part in my life. I couldn't see it at the time as I thought that this was what young lads do on a Saturday. Go to the match with their mates and get "steaming" and have a do with like-minded hooligans. Over thirty convictions later I was finally sentenced to five years imprisonment for grievous bodily harm.

Even in prison I was able to get hooch. I remember after one session I wanted to take one of the officers hostage but the other prisoners declined. I still did not realise I had a drink problem. I was unaware of Alcoholics Anonymous and could not wait for my release so I could catch up on lost drinking time. Upon release I continued to drink and my drinking got progressively worse never better. Going on benders for four or five days at a time I turned into a liar and a cheat. As long as I was out drinking with my pals I did not care who I hurt including cheating on my wife.

After many years of suffering my wife divorced me, I lost my job, was banned from driving, and had my house repossessed. During this period of my life my drinking really took off big time.

I was to serve another jail term but this time I was in the big league as I was up on firearms charges and looking at a fifteen-year sentence. Upon my release I remarried and continued to drink. The same old pattern was developing by going on benders and cheating on my wife again. Everyone close to me suffered because of my drinking.

I finally contacted AA. However, I have to say that I only went to keep the wife quiet. Not going for myself to get well, I finally crumbled to the mental obsession for alcohol even after various lengths of sobriety.

Why was I so weak willed I asked myself on many occasions? I did not realise that it was the first drink that got me drunk. That once I took the first drink I was powerless over alcohol and was unable to stop.

My recovery hasn't been easy; in fact it has been very hard at times. However I now attend AA for me. I have had to learn that when a crisis comes into my life I do not turn to the bottle. Living one day at a time with the support of the Fellowship and my sponsor I am sober today and that in itself is a miracle. For that I am truly grateful.

Patrick
2007

Me against the world

The first time I got a prison sentence I knew right away I was not going to like it. They took me out of the "dug box" and one of those medical orderlies came at me with what looked like an upside-down Dalek with a bulb in it and started to look at me from an angle I had not even seen myself.

When I look back now I wish this invasion of my privacy had brought about the changes in my lifestyle that may have prevented many future humiliations but it didn't.....

This bad experience was just lumped in with all the others in what I now call the "Calimero Syndrome" which was a cartoon I used to watch in the early seventies about a little black chicken born into a family of yellow chickens. He always seemed to get picked on and his favourite saying was "It's an injustice, it is, it is." Or, "It's unfair, they are big and I am small." This little boy lost example suited the poor wee me attitude I had developed about myself from an early age.

Even before I picked up the first drink I had a problem with alcohol. I grew up in an alcoholic home, which gave me the perfect alibi to shift the coat of blame away from myself. If my early battle was against my Dad it quickly escalated to the level of me against the world. Any authority figure would do and I soon built up a bundle of trouble. I used up my get-out-of-jail free cards early with a visit to the Children's Panel for a wee wrist slap which was followed almost immediately with a high court appearance for a serious offence caused in a blackout as the result of heavy drinking. Prior to this appearance I had to attend the Sheriff Court where I was found not proven. Another charge I had little memory of.

These early events were the beginnings of a twenty-year battle where those closest to me witnessed a steep downward spiral while my relationship with alcohol got steadily worse. I had become all the things I had promised myself never to be growing up in an alcoholic house. I was ashamed, guilt ridden, and remorseful. Continually breaking heartfelt promises left me carrying a heavy load. Knowing the difference between right and wrong didn't prevent the effects of the first drink taking place. It hung about waiting to ambush me whenever I dropped my guard. Once I had taken the first drink I always followed through with the next one. I used to think that this was just an attitude that I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, but I was to find out it was much more serious than that.

I came to a turning point in my life when again faced with losing my liberty. I had become a fall down drunk who was angry and resentful at the cards life had dealt me. Some judge was about to send me back to prison because I was a menace to society, so, you could say I came to my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous through fear. My back was against the wall and I was desperate.

I brought all my hostility to AA and it simmered just under the surface. A part of me felt like a victim but I now know that this was just Calimero re-surfacing. I didn't know if AA had any answers for me but my ears pricked up when I heard Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde being mentioned for I had long thought that I turned into a different person whenever I took a drink and was often shell-shocked when I discovered what this different person had done. In AA I had heard many hopeful experiences of lives being transformed. People gave me plenty of encouragement by talking about staying sober one day at a time while suggesting I try to keep an open mind. No one said that they thought I was an alcoholic, only I could decide whether I was or not, and of course what I wanted to do about it.

Marc
2007