

Ft. Yukon counselor offers advice for sobriety

by Mary Beth Solomon
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Someone told me the other day that drinking alcohol is not a problem, but a symptom of a problem. This phrase got me thinking about people drinking alcohol and why they drink. Perhaps it's true that there is an underlying problem when someone is continually drunk all the time. Everybody has problems and some how to resolve their problems. For example, some people can seek professional counseling or attend a group session or attend a short or long term treatment center. Whatever option they choose, one must work on the problem that causes them to drink.

I used to work in the area of counseling people with substance abuse problems. During the summer months, I worked at the Yukon Flats Recovery Camp. This camp was opened to anybody that wanted to work on their problems. The setting of the camp offered a chance to live off the land. Counseling services were offered to them during the times they were living at the camp. These people taught me what alcoholism was all about. In short, the way to destruc-

tion of oneself has seven steps:

- 1) Social drinking — the very first drink in our lives.
- 2) Dependent drinking — it becomes habit. For example, when one is tired, one takes a drink.

or relationships with others.

- 5) Falling into alcoholism — job performance becomes poor, starting to miss work or make excuses about being sick.
- 6) No control — people don't care how they look, nothing to worry about, they

Sometimes, I pray to God or use my emotional feelings to let out the frustrations like crying or yelling. Once I learned how to let these feelings out without the help of a drink, I began to heal from within and felt better on the outside. These kinds of emotional feelings are real and they need to be set free — then the healing can begin . . .

Sometimes it takes a long time for your family and friends to accept your sobriety, but eventually there will come a day they will see you, the real you, and be happy. And most of all — you will become healthy in body, soul, and mind.

- 3) Pre-alcoholic phase — starting to drink more on weekends.
- 4) Problem drinking — drinking starts to cause problems on the job, schoolwork

have lost everything like their job, home, family, friends, etc. Up to now they can control when to start or stop drinking, but now it's a constant drinking.

7) Organic deterioration — people wasting away like dead people walking around. This is the bottom. From here on it's a mental institution or six feet under the ground.

The above list was given to me by Titus Peter, counselor for the Yukon Flats CARE Center. We worked together at the Yukon Flats Recovery Camp, and I had learned some of his counseling techniques to teach others and continue to stay a sober person.

It appeared to me at the time, it was the alcohol causing all their problems, but it wasn't. It had to be more than just the drink. Lately, I began to realize that drinking alcohol was not a problem, but a symptom of a problem. The only way alcoholics knew how to cope with their problems was to drink. They drank to release the frustrations of their problems because they couldn't or didn't know how to handle their problems in a sober way. At the same time, I learned to accept people as they are — not what I wanted them to be. I respect the "Serenity Prayer" because it reminds me I can't sober anybody up, they have to do it themselves. It goes like this:

• Solomon offers encouragement for sobriety

Continued from page 5

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

In speaking with Titus Peter, he translates the serenity prayer to mean, "We cannot change people, we have to accept them as they are. In hoping that we will help them to change, we can change ourselves and our attitudes. We want to know what we do is the right thing to do." Therefore, I find that part of the healing process is to change our attitudes. Individual healing must take place if we are to help others. Many times I have my own problems, but I don't run out and drink. Many times, I would hope the problem or problems would go away on its own, but they don't go away. In some instances, the problems got worse as time went by. I had to learn how to deal with each problem the best way I knew how to resolve it, without drinking. Sometimes, I pray to God or use my emotional feelings to let out the frustrations like crying or yelling. Once I learned how to let these feelings out without the help of a drink, I began to heal from within and felt better on the outside. These kinds of emotional feelings are real and they need to be set free — then the healing can begin.

The outward signs we often see in our family or friends who abuse alcohol or drugs are they raise holy heck with the very people they love. Some people with-

draw into their homes and speak to nobody. Some people beat up anybody in their way. Some people go on binges. Some people destroy their homes and their possessions. Some couples fight. Siblings fight. Children fight with their parents or grandparents. Some people are killed. Some people take their own lives. Other problems could be that there is no money, no job, nothing to do, wishful thinking. Some people blame others, were ashamed of themselves, felt embarrassed or stupid. Some feel that nobody likes them. Some group of people are under peer pressure. Let's stop the hurts!

It's not easy to be a sober person. Some people think it's easy for me, but it's not. However, I'm still affected by the person who carries his or her problems around the village in a drunken stupor. I still get hurt by a drunken family member or friend raising heck around me or with me. I still get hurt when a person hurts the people I love. What can I do? Actually I can't stop these people from drinking. And I will not enable them to stay drunk either. Many times we think we are helping someone to stay sober, but on the other hand we are helping them stay drunk. For example, we pay for their light bill when they are unemployed, or we give them food to eat. Is it because we are sorry for them or keeping them under our control? I think sometimes we enable them to stay in these sad situations because we let them take advantage of our love for them. I still love and care for

this person that causes me and others pain, but I will not enable them to stay drunk. In other words, it's up to these individuals to stop the hurt and pain they cause or feel.

To become sober, it's up to you. Nobody else can stay sober for you, except yourself. To resolve oneself in living without alcohol or drugs, one needs to make up one's own mind to stop doing it. Get help if needed. Ask for help now before it gets out of hand. There is always a way to turn your life around — to a way of life without the booze. Many times, the problems that occur in our village, like vandalism, drunk driving or underage drinking are linked to the consumption of alcohol. Don't be fooled into thinking it's only alcohol that causes people to do something they wouldn't do sober. Drugs are a problem, too. For example, smoking marijuana causes cancer and kills some of the important brain cells we depend on — like the memory cells. I used to smoke "dope" and today I have a hard time remembering things from my past. Sometimes I'm reminded of a specific event I was attending and couldn't remember what they were talking about. Can you imagine not remembering something from your past and wishing you could? Don't let it happen to you by doing drugs.

One other important issue for staying away from alcohol and drugs is to make a commitment to leave your old life behind forever. Do it for yourself, not your

family or friends. Perhaps the time has come to work on the problems that led us to drink. Before taking that first drink, ask yourself, "What is the problem, and how can I resolve it without drinking?" Sometimes it just takes time to think out the problems and how you can resolve it. Sleep on it for one night. Lots of times there wasn't any problem but an urge to drink. What can be done to stop the urges? Talk to someone you trust. Verbal communication usually helps because you are conveying a message or problem you would otherwise not do, except when drinking. Exercise helps. Play basketball, go for a walk, look at your surroundings, play with your children, visit someone, volunteer around the community, rearrange the furniture, or get ready for the season. Be creative in your activities and it will be fun. The main objective is to have fun and stay sober doing it.

Life does get better as you continue to live a sober lifestyle. One must realize help is just around the corner, if only you seek it. Also, to realize that certain steps are needed to stay sober. Sometimes it's a daily fight to stay drug free. Some have to get help to define their problems then work on the problem. Learn to communicate with others. Play and have fun. Sometimes it takes a long time for your family and friends to accept your sobriety, but eventually there will come a day they will see you, the real you, and be happy. And most of all — you will become healthy in body, soul, and mind.