

Alcoholism is Family Disease

Public Health Message—

(Editor's Note: This article is part one of a two-part series printed as a public health message at the request of the Barrow Council on Alcoholism. Part two will appear next week).

Alcoholism is a family disease. This statement is widely accepted by the people who are working in the field of alcoholism and related disorders. In most alcohol programs, emphasis is upon recovery of the alcoholic and the family's role in bringing about sobriety and helping the alcoholic to a new life. The condition of the family is often as serious as the drinking is to the alcoholic. In rehabilitation, we are concerned for the problems of the family members, as well as for the problems of the alcoholic.

The personal problems that occur in those non-alcoholics who are affected by an alcoholic individual most often become so serious that treatment is essential whether or not the alcoholic finds help.

Many of those who seek help for an alcoholic loved one will be on the edge of nervous exhaustion or worse. Many have admitted struggling with the problem for years, refusing to seek help from anyone out of a sense of shame and remorse. Many have closed out the world, their friends, children, and family, because of the same sense of shame and frustration, and through the terrible sense of responsibility that the alcoholic is their problem, and it is up to them to get the alcoholic sober and to keep him that way.

It has become evident that all those who are intimately involved in the life of an alcoholic, have emotional and spiritual problems in common. The way that each attempts to adapt his life may be stamped with a certain individual uniqueness, but each shares very basic problems and concerns.

BEING MARRIED TO AN ALCOHOLIC IS A DISEASE

It is a disease very similar to the husband's alcoholism. It is an emotional obsession, with the resultant spiritual and physical breakdown. She is controlled in every area of her life by the fear, resentments, limitations and rationalizations that come from being married to an alcoholic.

The control exercised over her by her emotional obsession often becomes so complete that there is rarely a waking moment when the problem is not on her mind. Her life is governed by trying to find ways to keep her husband from drinking. She makes repeated vain attempts to change her way of life to satisfy him, so that he will be happy and not drink. When he is not home, her mind is on him and his problem, because of what he might do and what might be happening to him.

When he comes home, she is unable to meet him without fear of what he might be like, drunk or sober, or for fear that she might cause him to drink again. Her life is a life of complete surrender to the problem of living with, and attempting to solve, the alcoholism; it may be a surrender to the extent that life ceases to have any meaning. All other relationships with family, friends, and God have been replaced by a slavery to the sickness which now governs her life.

While she can excuse her emotional problems and failures by the age-old rationalization:

"If he didn't drink, everything would be alright," deep insecurities trouble her. "What is wrong with me that I married a man like this?" Add to this underlying insecurity the continual barrage from the alcoholic, who maintains that he wouldn't drink if she didn't do this or that, and the sum total is a woman whose self-image is repeatedly damaged, so that she has no honest appraisal of herself. Many of the outward poses or pride, superiority, self-esteem, and personal adequacy may be evident.

The alcoholic becomes the excuse for the non-alcoholic to justify her own irresponsibility. Almost every area of family life can be affected by the attitude of the wife who says, "Why should I try when he never does anything?" The alcoholic becomes a scapegoat for a large assortment of her sins. The children also can use the alcoholic as an excuse.

As the disease of alcoholism progresses, the non-alcoholic is required to take more and more responsibility upon herself. As time goes on she finds herself managing every area of family life in a vain effort to pick up the pieces of a home on the verge of destruction. She assumes full responsibility for the management and protection of the children, often going to great lengths to protect the children from their father.

She acts as an emotional buffer between the father and his children. She manages the finances, the house, the garden, their social life, their sex life, and everything else that she can control. Her underlying motives are fear and resentment. She takes care of the alcoholic's problems as well as she is able. She makes excuses for his failures, his absences from work, his drunkenness at parties. She bails him out of jail, or goes to work to pay off his debts.

Unhappily all these acts of management backfire for two reasons: (1) her husband is already convinced that he is a failure, and her willingness to handle those parts of his life in which he is inadequate add to his sense of worthlessness, which is one of the real reasons he is an alcoholic; (2) by mothering him, by keeping him out of trouble his drinking should cause, by making his excuses for him, by earning a living for the family, by bailing him out of jail, she makes it possible for him to drink with little trouble and thus intentionally helps prolong his drinking career.

Aleuts...

(Continued from page 1)

AEC spokesman David Jackson acknowledged Monday that the 16 day tours made by two four man teams to villages might have been spurred by the Aleut League lawsuit against Cannikin.

Final briefs in the suit were filed Monday with U.S. District Judge Raymond Plummer. This decision on the request for an injunction against the AEC is still pending.

The AEC reportedly spent several thousand dollars ferrying their scientific teams to the Aleut villages.

Two Aleut translators who accompanied the "environmental affects" tours said the educational briefings may have eased apprehension about Cannikin but probably won't have any effect on the people who filed

the suit.

"The most common question," according to Jerry Davis, team leader was "will the tests hurt our fishing." Aleut people asked the AEC team about the dangers of earthquake, volcano, tidal wave (tsunami) and radiation poisoning.

In briefing an estimated 1200 people from Cold Bay to Nikolski, Davis said the teams tried "to explain the environmental effects and to tell particularly how the test would affect the residents of the Aleutians."

The teams, who chartered Reeve Aleutian planes and two amphibious BLM aircraft showed a film of Milrow, a one megaton nuclear test on Amchitka on October 2, 1969.

During the last week, the AEC sent environmental monitors to 22 villages on the Aleutian chain, where they will remain until Cannikin is fired. Should Cannikin accidentally generate a tsunami, earthquake, or radioactive cloud, the monitors will be able to warn Aleut villagers of the dangers. However, no emergency evacuation arrangements have been made. The environmental monitor will have direct contact with ground zero during the blast.

According to Anatoly Lekanof, an Aleut who accompanied one team, the idea of an AEC official present through the blast with direct communication has partially assured many villagers.

"Maybe if this briefing had been done six months or a year ago, it would have given the people more of a chance to think about it," said Mrs. McGarvey.

Sheldon Jackson Enrollment Up

The fastest growing accredited college in Alaska for the past several years has once again shown largest percentage gain in fall enrollment. Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka, announced that the fall enrollment was 283 students, including 132 full time students on campus an increase of 10% over the previous year.

Commenting on the increase, Dr. Orin R. Stratton, President of the college, said, "I am sure the credit for the faith the students place in the institution must go to the excellent faculty and staff and the help past students have given us in developing the college to the place where it is today. We expect a continued rise in enrollment as we strive together—students and staff—to provide the finest education in an atmosphere of personal concern."

The college, one of three two-year colleges on the West Coast with boarding facilities, has grown more than 40% in enrollment over the last three years. It is located on a 354 acre campus that overlooks the Pacific Ocean at the edge of Sitka. Two year curricula are offered in Fishery and Wildlife Management, Education, Business Administration, Logging Management, Secretarial Science, Data Processing, Aviation and Forestry as well as the Liberal Arts.

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