

Alcoholism's effects: from denial to surrender

For years, the fields of psychiatry and psychology have claimed depression is the most common mental disorder in America.

Recently, a National Institute of Mental Health study revealed that alcohol abuse and dependence is the most common disorder, affecting 13.6 per cent of the population.

This estimate is probably low, considering that many people who drink to excess do not admit to their alcoholic tendencies.

Some people, like myself, who recognize that they have a problem with alcohol try various ways to either control or quit drinking.

The two most common choices are to try to stop drinking on one's own or to join the 12-Step Program of Alcoholics' Anonymous (AA).

The differences between these two choices are quite apparent—the results are either success or failure in both scenarios.

Many people, I am sure, can effectively stop drinking by relying on their own will power, but for many alcoholics, AA is the only successful way to stop from picking up the first drink.

The struggle to not take the first drink is an extremely exhausting effort for an alcoholic.

The decision to stay sober has to be made on a daily basis. Alcoholism is and allergy.

In the past few years, I have tried to quit drinking on my own several times and have been successful—for a couple of months.

Typically, these periods of respite only acted as confirmation that I did not have a drinking problem.

As soon as the next stressful situation arose, I would be back to my old drinking patterns.

Sometimes I could control myself and have only one or two drinks.

But as an alcoholic, every time I picked up the first drink, I was in jeopardy of triggering the allergy that would not allow me to stop until I passed out.

The mind of an alcoholic has a baffling way of denying the actuality of the disease with little effort. Therefore, stopping on our own is often impossible.

The program of AA provides daily meeting for the alcoholic to attend. These meetings act as a constant reminder that I am an alcoholic, and it makes it much more difficult to accept any form of denial that is so easily found when I have tried to stay sober on my own.

Other alcoholics in AA act as reminders when they share their past experiences in meetings, but just as important, they are a support that I did not have when I quit drinking on my own.

I, like many alcoholics, have felt alone most of my life. The fear that I was the only person that was experiencing the isolation, the anger and the guilt that is so common in this disease was overwhelming at times, so I would just drink more.

With the support available in AA, I came to realize that I was not alone. There are millions of people who share these same feelings. And with the program I do not have to be alone in my struggle to stay sober.

The problem that I faced in trying to quit drinking relying solely on my own will power, was that there was no one to talk to that understood what I was going through. The loneliness I felt cut through me with icy precision. The pain of loneliness would become so unbearable that I would give into my disease because at least when I drank I had a friend—alcohol.

Unlike staying sober on one's own, the AA program gives people support, friendship and love that a loner does not have. Through the 12-Step Pro-

gram, I have found a higher power to fill my emptiness and to give me the courage to pursue my life's dreams.

When I quit on my own, I experienced what the program calls a dry drunk. I was not drinking, but I continued to convulse with pain and guilt. I had no idea that there was any other way to deal with these feelings except to drown them with alcohol.

The program allows me to grow and overcome character defects that have had a hold on me since I began to drink. As a dry drunk I was stagnating in my own misery. The drinking alcoholic is in constant anguish even if he or she is not able to admit it.

The first step I had to take as an alcoholic was to acknowledge that I was powerless over alcohol and realize that the alcohol made my life unmanageable. The drinks were no longer numbing the pain, so taking this step and finding the help offered by AA has enabled me to achieve eight months of sobriety.

These eight months have been the happiest time of my entire life. I have tried both ways of quitting drinking, and by far, the happiest, healthiest way is with the help of Alcoholics' Anonymous.

Alcohol awareness week opens students' eyes to reality

by Keri VanDoren

Alcohol Awareness Week, an SGA sponsored event, began last week. On Thursday after fall break, the festivities kicked off with SGA serving mocktails in the cafeteria. During the duration of the week, students and faculty could be seen wearing buttons that simply read "AWARE."

There were no activities on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. However, on Monday the message continued. Throughout Alcohol Awareness Week resident students received information concerning the consequences of drinking, either under their door or in their mailbox. Students also received the phone numbers of three local cab companies, in hopes of reducing drinking and driving.

On both Monday and Tuesday, SGA sponsored their own version of Jeopardy with a quiz about alcohol and its related factors. If a student answered two out of three questions correctly she received a "boo pop" with a "boaware of alcohol" message on it. In addition to the quiz, students were encouraged to sign a pledge not to drink and drive. Students could receive a "boo pop" for this also.

SGA reported there are over ten million alcoholics in the United States, and alcohol-related deaths are the number two killer, secondary to cancer. Meredith students were not the only ones recognizing those whose lives had been altered by alcohol—people nationally observed this week of

mourning.

Wednesday was dead day. People all over the country, including Meredith students pretended to be dead to mourn those that had died as a result of alcohol. Meredith students dressed in black, didn't talk all day, and wore a tag saying "Alcohol did this to me. . ." followed by a made up explanation of their death.

That night at 7 p.m., people gathered at the gate house on campus for a candle-lit march. About 25 to 30 people participated. The procession was very solemn as the participants walked up to the fountain in front of Johnson Hall with their candles. SGA President Kelly Formy-Duvall said a few words to wrap up the week of events. In conclusion,

everyone blew out their candles in unison.

Formy-Duvall said, "I thought it went pretty well."

On Thursday, Formy-Duval and other members of SGA attended a conference called "Co-operating Raleigh Colleges Contortion" or CRCC. Representatives from NC. State, Shaw, St. Mary's, Peace, and Meredith attended. It was said that Meredith College had the best participation out of all of the colleges.

According to Formy-Duval, "SGA wanted to focus on education."

The organization wanted students to be aware, even if they don't drink, because non-drinkers are victims, too.