

# Early Stage Alcoholism Undetectable

## Special To The Post

Tony and Bill are great friends. They work together. They work out together. And they drink together. Sitting side-by-side at the bar, it's difficult to tell one from the other. They drink virtually the same amount. In fact, they drink the same drink - scotch and water. They laugh at the same jokes, listen to the same music. Admire the same women. There is one major difference between Tony and Bill, but it's a difference no one can discern at this point.

Tony is an alcoholic. The reason no one can tell Tony is an alcoholic is because he's still in the early stages of the disease. His reactions to alcohol and Bill's reactions are virtually the same - on the outside. Both enjoy drinking; they get slightly euphoric, relaxed. It seems like a good and normal way to spend time together. If they overdo it and drink too much, they both suffer the same result - a hangover.

But some changes are happening inside Tony's body that aren't occurring inside Bill's. Changes that have to do with adaptations of the liver and the central nervous system. Irreversible changes that mark the beginning of alcoholism.

"There's virtually no way for people to recognize the symptoms of early-stage alcoholism," says Jim Emmert, Executive Director, Charlotte Treatment Center, an alcohol-

ism and chemical dependency treatment center. "On the outside the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic drink and behave just about the same. It's not until the middle stages of the disease when problems begin to appear that people start noticing the symptoms."

Emmert says this delay in the onset of obvious symptoms is the reason for much of the misunderstanding that surrounds the disease. For example, the idea that the alcoholic is responsible for his own disease.

"As the disease progresses the alcoholic begins to drink more. Most people think if he didn't drink so much, he wouldn't be alcoholic," says Emmert. "Actually, his escalating drinking is the result of a physiological change that happened early on. In fact, increased tolerance is one of the earliest symptoms of the disease."

Another symptom displayed by the early-stage alcoholic is that of improved performance.

According to Emmert, concentration, memory, attention span and creative thinking all improve in the non-alcoholic with an ounce or less of alcohol. However, when his blood alcohol level (BAL) reaches a certain point, deterioration begins. The more he drinks, the more he deteriorates. But, when he stops drinking and his BAL returns toward normal, he begins to improve.

The primary difference between

the non-alcoholic and the alcoholic is that the higher his BAL, the more the alcoholic's performance improves, to a point. Often a BAL that would render one person virtually nonfunctional has been recorded in another who displayed scarcely any symptoms of intoxication. And, for the alcoholic, the closer his BAL descends toward normal, the more deterioration he experiences.

"For the early-stage alcoholic, an increased BAL means improved performance. That's why we often hear people saying they work better when they're drinking, that they can drive better when they're drinking. This can be true of the early-stage alcoholic. So naturally the drinking experience is rewarding to him. He feels better, he is able to perform better. If he could just maintain that high BAL, he could continue to function on an improved level," says Emmert. "But this, of course, is impossible."

Alcoholism is a progressive disease. Unless it is interrupted, it will continue to get worse. The alcoholic will begin to show the more obvious symptoms of the disease. He will inevitably begin to have alcohol-related problems in different areas of his life. It is when these problems begin to appear that the alcoholic reaches the middle-stage of his disease.

The length of time between early- and middle-stage alcoholism varies with individuals, says Emmert, who explains that the progression happens rapidly for some individuals, sometimes within weeks or months. Others may drink for years before they cross that "invisible line" between the hidden, early-stage of alcoholism and the more obvious middle-stage.

What about early detection and treatment for first-stage alcoholics? Emmert doesn't hold much hope.

"There's really no reason for the early-stage alcoholic to suspect he's got a disease," Emmert says. "He's not drinking any differently than many of his peers, alcohol isn't causing him any problems. In fact, it's still pleasurable. There's no reason for him, his friends or family to be concerned."

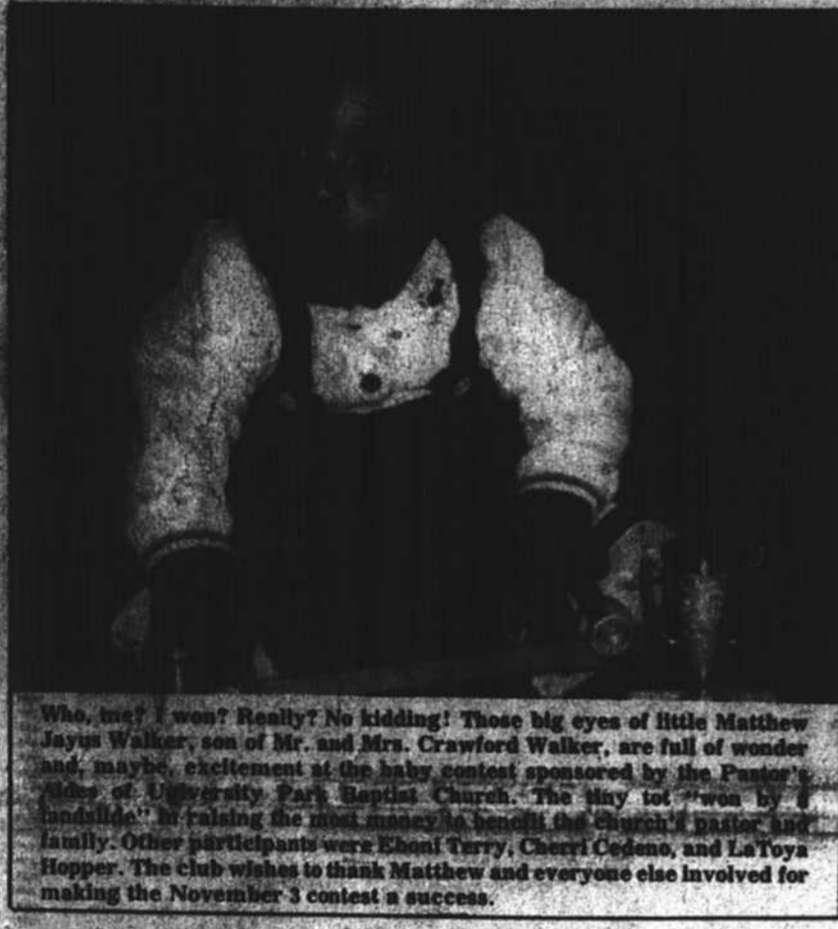
Emmert states, "We can't prevent the disease yet, we're just beginning to be able to predict who might get it. We live in a society that encourages drinking and shuns alcoholics. And one that knows woefully little about the symptoms of the disease. Given these factors, there's virtually no chance that the early-stage alcoholic won't progress at least to the middle stages of this disease."

More information about alcoholism and its treatment is available through Charlotte Treatment center, 704-554-8373.



The Pi Phi chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity recently celebrated its 22nd Annual Achievement Week Banquet. Using the theme "Toward the 1990s-Uplifting As We Climb Through Education and Economic Development" members of the fraternity awarded many of its members. Pictured above is one such

honored individual. From left to right, Sterling Woodard, the 1984 Omega Man of the Year presented the 1985 Omega Man of the Year award to Kenneth Diamond while chapter basileus, Tony Singletary looks on. (Photo by Peeler's Portrait Studios)



Who, me? I won't? Really? No kidding! Those big eyes of little Matthew Jayus Walker, son of Mr. and Mrs. Crawford Walker, are full of wonder and, maybe, excitement at the baby contest sponsored by the Pastor's Club of University Park Baptist Church. The tiny tot "won by a landslide" by raising the most money to benefit the church's pastor and family. Other participants were Ebony Terry, Cheryl Cedeno, and LaToya Hopper. The club wishes to thank Matthew and everyone else involved for making the November 3 contest a success.

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