

Gay awareness

Drinking: There is a way out.

by Barbara and Frances

An alcoholic is often stereotyped as a skid row bum who has just spent his last buck on a bottle of ripple wine. The fact is, alcoholism is a progressively fatal disease that does not discriminate between people of any special culture, social class, sex or age. It is not a moral weakness. Statistics show that one out of every ten persons in the general population are alcoholic. It is also estimated that one out of every three, in the gay population, is alcoholic.

There is no doubt that society's antagonism towards homosexuality leads many of us to drink, in the bars or at home. But it is drinking alcohol that causes alcoholism, not social oppression. This is not to say that everyone who drinks is an alcoholic. Alcohol affects people differently. Some people can drink a lot and not become alcoholic. Others have become alcoholic after their first or second drink.

A few of the warning signs are an increased tolerance to alcohol, blackouts (alcohol induced amnesia), sneaking or gulping drinks and morning drinking. But, there is a way out . . .

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Once you have accepted the first step of Alcoholics Anonymous, you are on your way to recovery and the sobriety you want more than anything in your life. For many of us it comes as a great and unbelievable relief that we can stay sober for more than twenty-four hours at a time. It is also a relief to find ourselves welcome at AA meetings as people who can get well if we really want to. A miracle has happened to us, and one of the happiest aspects of the miracle is the friendships we begin to form with others who also are recovering from the disease of alcoholism. Many have commented on the spirit of joy that is to be experienced at AA meetings.

Gay AA meetings open the door to freedom—freedom not only from alcoholism but from burdens of self-loathing and guilt, as well as fears of exposure and rejection. We fully realize that an AA group with a homosexual identity is not for every homosexual alcoholic. However, some of us need more. We need the fellowship and example of men and women who have achieved good, healthy gay sobriety. We find happiness and feelings of complete acceptance only in settings where dissimulation is not required, and where one's homosexual lifestyle can be affirmed in all honesty and openness.

A gay AA group can be valuable to the homosexual alcoholic in many ways. In addition to the total freedom of honesty it allows him or her, its benefits include social contacts away from bar-oriented gay society, information about healthy ways of living a

gay life. Twelve Step work (carrying AA's message of hope to other suffering gay alcoholics), and so forth. For us, it is a happier and more wholesome habitat than the gay bar or the closet. We can be our real selves like all other AA members—airing our problems and receiving support and advice from other who have been down exactly the same road. We learn to give and to accept love from others—straight as well as gay.

Most gay AA groups observe a "double anonymity." In the same way that we do not reveal the identity of other AA members outside AA, we do not reveal the identities of fellow members of the gay groups even at other AA meetings. This double confidentiality allows many homosexuals to attend the gay meetings who might otherwise feel that they have to stay away.

In these groups, many of us learn, for the first time, that it was our drunkenness and not our homosexuality that turned people off. We begin to discover that we can be as friendly and selfless as we have often wished to be. We develop genuine respect for ourselves as human beings. We find that we can stop copping out—on life, on sobriety, on everything that we are and enjoy being—including gay.

Some questions you may have about gay groups of Alcoholics Anonymous:

Q. Am I an alcoholic because I am homosexual?

A. No. We can discover no connection between alcoholism, which is a disease, and homosexuality, which for us is the natural channel for our sexual feelings.

Q. Will I have to stop being gay to stop drinking?

A. No. But you will have to start living the kind of gay life that doesn't get you drunk.

Q. What will meetings be like?

A. Those that we are familiar with are like all other AA meetings—usually ten to thirty men and women attend, their ages ranging from early twenties to late sixties. The main difference is that we are free to discuss our alcoholism in terms of our homosexuality, with total honesty.

Q. Will I have to answer a lot of questions?

A. No. We hope that you will ask questions, however, and learn to listen to the answers.

Q. Is this really serious, or is it just a big cruising game?

A. Gay alcoholics attend gay AA meetings for the same life-and-death reasons that other alcoholics go to theirs. Those who use meetings for cruising are endangering their own sobriety.

Q. What will happen to me if I think I am an alcoholic but decide to continue drinking?

A. Probably incurable insanity, prison or death.

Q. What if my lover does not think I am an alcoholic and does not want me to get involved in this?

A. Nobody but you can determine whether you are an alcoholic or not. If drinking is troublesome for you in any way you may well be alcoholic. If you think you are, we suggest that you come to meetings and try staying sober for ninety days.

Q. Can I find a happy, healthy gay life when I am sober?

A. All of us who have maintained sobriety through AA have found a healthier, happier life in every possible way. In gay AA groups—as in regular AA groups—you need never be alone again.

There is a Gay AA group in Raleigh. For further information, call 847-6011.

(For information concerning other Gay AA groups in the state, please consult the calendar elsewhere in this issue.)

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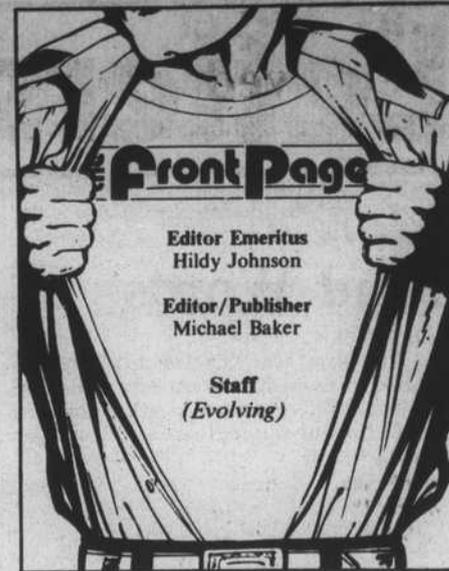
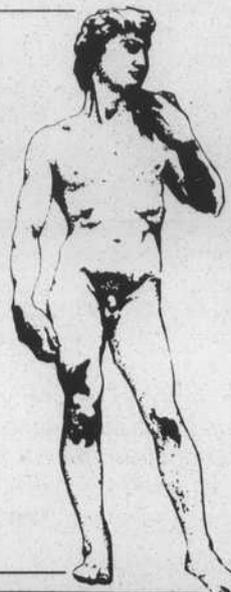
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