

Case History of an Alcoholic

LOOK's unposed pictures record the end of an epic binge, and its treatment by AA

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This is Joe, an alcoholic, on the fourth day of a binge. He is drinking beer because that's all he can get at the moment. His last dollar is lying on the table. Finding the glass too slow, Joe drains the bottle till he blacks out. For him alcohol is not a beverage, but a disease; he can't cure himself, needs very specialized help.

One in a million is Joe, the subject of the remarkable picture sequence on these and the following pages. Joe (the name is fictitious) is an alcoholic--one of an estimated one million alcoholics in the United States today. With a few minor deviations, Joe's story could be the story of them all.

In his late 30's, he has been an uncontrolled drinker for 10 years. He has drunk himself out of jobs, friends, all the amenities of a constructive place in society. He has been drinking, not for a temporary lift or because he likes the taste of liquor, but to escape reality.

Psychiatrists say the alcoholic is an individual who, at some stage of his development, refused to grow up; he finds himself uncomfortable in maturity. Joe, like all alcoholics, has sought to drown this discomfort in the dream-world of drinking. In his sobering off-periods he has known guilt and remorse; but later, finding himself lonely or insufficiently appreciated--or often for no apparent reason at all--he would brood over his "separateness" and again futilely attempt to escape life via alcohol.

This vicious cycle which traps the Joes of the world has defied the sincere salvaging efforts of doctors, clergymen, the law. Threats and entreaties of families and friends usually are equally vain. Only psychiatric treatment, which is expensive and lengthy, had any consistent measure of success till Alcoholics Anonymous began its group therapy.

Now 10 years old, AA is an informal organization of some 15,000 ex-alcoholics.

Recognizing themselves as sufferers from a specific illness, their mutual concern is recovery from that illness for themselves and all men and women like them. Joe, who lives in Minneapolis, was helped by the AA group in his city. Because he hoped his story would encourage other alcoholics, he consented to publication of the record of his last drunken hours, and his subsequent steps along the road to sobriety. In presenting the complete chronicle, LOOK salutes the altruism of this man and the unstinted co-operation of his mentors.

Alcoholics Anonymous in action is pictured on the following pages [picture captions only]:

1 Coming out of his drunk at home next day, Joe (acquainted slightly with AA) has phoned for help. Two members, ex-alcoholics now highly respected in their community, answer his call, are ready to help if Joe really wants to get well.

2 Told that he needs hospitalization, he has a temporary change of heart, claims his call was a mistake. But these men, having been through the mill, can't be tricked, combine sympathy and discipline to get him into his coat.

3 On his way to the sanitarium, Joe shows signs of backing out again. But this doesn't worry his sponsors. They know from personal experience that this is an old routine for Joe, so they patiently steer him out of the car.

4 Once inside sanitarium, his face reflecting his condition, Joe is felt to have passed first stage of his redemption. No further effort is made to reason with him, to lecture, upbraid or reproach him. He needs rest, food, medication.

5 Joe is still resistant as he is undressed for bed. Before AA members can help him

constructively, he must "hit bottom" by admitting that he is an alcoholic and smash the delusion that he can ever hope to "drink like a gentleman."

6 Joe remains in a fog on his second day at the sanitarium. Because, like most alcoholics, he never ate while drunk and is undernourished, he receives vitamin injections. His sponsor returns, leaves cigarets, talks with doctor.

7 His brain clears on the third day, and Joe drinks pitchers of water. His sponsor calls again, quietly discusses his own case--and his recovery. Joe recognizes a kindred spirit, thinks: "If this man got well, why not I?"

8 Physically restored after three days, Joe waves good-bye to his nurse. In fresh clothing provided by his sponsors, he looks--and feels--a new man. For the first time, he faces the future with hope for recovery.

A sociable lunch after a meeting in an AA member's home shows Joe he can have a good time when sober--a vital first step.

Joe gains insight into his own problems at weekly AA meetings. As he hears others talk openly about their cases, his guilty feeling fades.

Back at his old job in a coffee-roasting plant, Joe is visited by AA friends who helped him get on his feet. Proudly, he shows them around.

With a new outlook on life, Joe has a good chance to stay sober.

The cycle of AA therapy is complete when Joe returns to the sanitarium to visit another who needs help. He now has a rough grasp of AA principles, knows that helping other alcoholics is a technique for preserving his own sobriety. For the first time in 10 years he has found a path to a decent life. It's too early to tell whether he'll stay on it, but AA's record of

75 per cent recovered is in his favor.

At the AA clubhouse, formerly one of Minneapolis' finest private homes, Joe learns about the inner workings of AA. They exact no membership requirements, no fees, no dues; require no special religious or medical point of view. They're not missionaries, reformers or prohibitionists, have no quarrel with alcohol as a beverage. The cornerstone of their therapy is mutual encouragement in the battle for sobriety which is the life-long concern of the alcoholic.

What are the symptoms of alcoholism? Test yourself . . .

The following test questions are taken from the pamphlet *Alcoholics Anonymous*, published by one of the 300 AA groups now active in America. If you answer YES, HABITUALLY, to any two of the questions, the chances are you are an alcoholic.

1. Do you require a drink the next morning?
2. Do you prefer to drink alone?
3. Do you lose time from work due to drinking?
4. Does drinking make you restless?
5. Has your ambition decreased since you began drinking?
6. Do you drink to attain social ease?
7. Do you show marked dislikes and hatreds since you started drinking?
8. Do you drink for self-encouragement?
9. Do you drink to relieve marked feelings of inadequacy?
10. Does drinking make you have trouble sleeping?
11. Is drinking affecting your peace of mind?
12. Do you show marked moodiness as a result of drinking?
13. Is drinking making your home life unhappy?
14. Do you crave a drink at a definite time daily?