

# I WENT BACK TO A DRUNK

By Anonymous

*One black night she even thought of murder. Read the dramatic story of this Canadian woman's victory over liquor for her husbands love.*

Five years ago I wouldn't have given a plug nickel for my chances at happiness with the man I married more than 25 years ago, the man whom I had loved, and whom I finally despised, hated and sometimes thought of murdering. But here I am, back again, living a normal, happy married life in a Canadian town, loving and respecting that same man.

The average married woman, whose life has been free from the curse of alcohol, can never understand the humiliation, degradation and utter hopelessness of living with an alcoholic. It is a disease that isn't recognized until it has the victim so firmly in its grip that the chances for recovery, until recently, have been about hopeless.

Not only does this disease affect the physical health of the individual, but, worse still, it affects the brain to such an extent that everything becomes warped and the truth is not in him. It is pathetic and frustrating to see the man you love and whom your children adore gradually fall victim to an insidious disease which society considers only a weakness.

Years of pleading, of tears, of threats, were of no avail in the losing battle I waged against alcoholism, and it slowly destroyed everything I held dear.

It all began away back in the early 20s, in prohibition. Perhaps because "forbidden fruits are sweetest" many of our friends and

my husband considered it was smart and clever to produce a bottle.

At first I didn't drink because I didn't like the taste of liquor, but when I began objecting to some of the silly antics it was suggested that I was narrow-minded, a prude, and so on. So, I, too, drank a little and found that when I did I was much more tolerant. I never drank much because it made me ill, and deep down I really hated it.

It wasn't long before occasional drinking parties in mixed company appeared to pall on my husband and some of his buddies. They found that they could drink much more without wives around to scold if they drank in their offices.

My husband had a very good position for a young man - manager of a branch business - and had a comfortable office in which he and his buddies would drink in comfort.

It was at this time I began to realize that liquor was beginning to rule my husbands life. Foolishly I scolded, resorted to tears, which only infuriated my husband when he was drunk. Then horrible words were flung at each other, unkind thoughtless things were said, and our love became a bit tattered around the edges.

Like all alcoholics, when my husband sobered up after a bad bout he would promise never to touch the stuff again, and really meant it, for he hated himself and the things he did when under the influence.

In those in-between periods we'd be so happy doing the things we enjoyed; hunting trips, picnics, driving over the countryside with the children. In that period of happiness I would begin to forget the humiliation of the past. But he was in the grip of something he could not control.

Strange as it may seem I never thought my husband would become involved with another woman. Perhaps it was because he never seemed to be interested in women, and I was often teased about this by his friends. They said, "You need never worry about Bill, he is not interested in any woman but you." This was flattering, but small comfort when I realized that, although he wasn't interested in other women, he had a mistress in a bottle who held first place in his life.

I am sure that if there had been no children I would have left my husband in those early days, but when you have small children you think twice about giving up a home and security.

Even though my husband drank to excess he still managed to do his work. His boss who visited our city periodically, were heavy drinkers too.

Then came the depression of the 30s. My husbands heavy drinking bills, the repairs to cars he wrecked and fines used up any spare money we could have saved. When our salary cut came it meant retrenching, but fast. At first it was a bitter blow, but somehow I thought, foolishly, this would mean that there would be nothing left over for alcohol. But the setback acted as a stimulant and he drank more than ever to forget the depression. I found myself avoiding the butcher, the grocer and the landlord, as we soon owed money to them all.

During this period our six year old son had to have an

appendix operation. I shall never forget rushing him to the hospital late at night, and the kind neighbours who drove us, refusing my husbands request to get a bottle and bring it to the hospital for him. The doctor finally persuaded him that he could do no more good there and he was driven home where he proceeded to get drunk.

I stayed at the hospital, and it wasn't until 10 o'clock the next morning that my husband had sobered up enough to know whether the operation had been successful or not.

Finally, on Saturday, we agreed to meet at the hospital around 2:30 P.M. and have a long visit with our son. I got there at the appointed time and said that daddy would be along soon. Each time footsteps were heard in the corridor, our son would sit up and say, "I bet that's daddy now." Then the look of disappointment on his white little face was a knife twist in my heart. His dad didn't arrive and by 5:30 I had to return home, living in terror that my husband would visit the hospital drunk.

I arrived home worried and weary, and after getting dinner for the rest of the family began to feel a knot inside get tighter as the hours went by. Finally around 10:30 a neighbour phoned and asked me to come and take my husband home, as he was very drunk and was disrupting their party, which he had crashed earlier. After persuading him to return home I found I hated him and wished him dead.

I had long since learned it was useless to remonstrate with him when he was drunk and I tried to be calm and cool, but he would have none of this as he was in an ugly mood and spoiling for a fight. For several hours I listened to his drunken jargon and, finally, in disgust, I started to go to bed. This infuriated him, and he tried

to prevent me from going upstairs. Then I struck him. He is a big man and could have crushed me with one blow, but he had never struck me in his life. This night he was a different person. He followed me upstairs, threatening with each step to strangle me for striking him. He yelled, "No one can hit me and get away with it. I'm going to wring your neck."

When we reached the top step I turned and faced him, saying, "There's my neck, strangle me if you wish, it will be one way of getting rid of you for the children's sake." He stared at me drunkenly, his eyes bloodshot and full of hate. Then he spat in my face, turned, and went downstairs.

He was still asleep in his clothes on the couch in the living room after he got up. Then he asked me if he had been obnoxious the night before as he couldn't remember anything from the time he had crashed the party next door.

He wouldn't believe the things I told him and accused me of making it up. Then he became contrite and asked forgiveness and a chance to prove that he could be a decent husband and father again.

I remember when I first realized that the respect in which I held my husband had been supplanted by contempt. He had been drinking very heavily and brought home some strangers late at night. He walked into our bedroom with them, introduced me as I lay blinking at the bright light, and cursed because I refused to get up and get them food. Following this, he went on the wagon, or so he said, for a week or so. Then we were invited to a party by friends who could throw business in my husband's direction.

Before we left home I asked him to watch his step and he agreed. I remember so well what he said: "You keep an eye on me dear, and when you think I have had

enough just pinch my arm and I'll not have another drink."

After about an hour I noticed the usual signs: my husband tossing off large drinks too quickly, making repeated trips to the kitchen, our host eyeing him with suspicion. I quietly slipped to his side and gave him the warning pinch, looking into his eyes and silently pleading with him to go easy.

That pinch seemed to act with the suddenness of a match set to gasoline. My husband strolled over to the buffet where several bottles of whisky were open, calmly poured himself half a tumbler of straight whisky, then turning to catch my eye he tossed it off with an air of bravado.

I shall never forget the feeling of humiliation about half an hour and six drinks later when my hostess took me aside and asked me if I would take my husband home as he was spoiling her party.

Hundreds of such instances occurred during the next few years. Perhaps one of the reasons I stuck on was that deep down underneath I felt some miracle would happen, that basically he was a wonderful husband and father.

At last I got a position in a department store, working from 8:30 to 5:30. Our youngest child was now in school and I felt free to work. My husband lost his job and got another selling on commission.

One bitter experience occurred during the summer holidays when the children were home. My husband had been absent on a drinking bout for about two days and nights. I had told him after the previous bout that if he repeated it again I would visit a lawyer and arrange a legal separation. He agreed. Yet he arrived home in the middle of the night so drunk that he fell into a stupor as soon as he hit the bed. As I lay there listening to his mutterings and snores, I hated him

and actually wondered if I could press a pillow over his face and strangle him. It was such a temptation that I found myself trembling with fear....and I got up and walked the floor the rest of the night.

He finally got a job in a factory at a low but steady salary, most of which went to pay the back rent. But the heavy drinking continued, partly, I think, to drown his humiliation and frustration.

When he lost the job in the factory after a few months, he decided that he would have to go away to battle it out himself. My health was suffering, not from the work I was doing but from - the worry he was causing. The children avoided him, and when he was sober he realized this and was more depressed. So the break was made.

No one can know the relief it was to be free of worry and the thought of him coming home drunk. A cloud had been lifted from our life; the children felt free to bring their friends around; and by watching every penny I was able, with some money my husband sent to me at odd intervals, to pay off some of the pressing debts.

We corresponded regularly and although his letters mentioned his private battle I knew he was trying. The cheques became more frequent and a little larger each time, so that we were able to face our creditors. However, I was gaining a feeling of independence; and the children were older, one of them working. My heart was numb as far as any feeling of affection for my husband was concerned.

I began hearing of his drunken exploits again, and it was then that I wrote and asked him for a legal separation. He knew I meant it this time. He wrote and asked for a little time to prove he could win his battle against alcohol. I agreed to three months, and the

following week he wrote and said he had joined Alcoholics Anonymous. I had heard of this organization but didn't know very much about it, so I was quite sceptical. He wrote glowing letters of the work of A.A. and how he was endeavouring to learn more about it.

When he wrote, after six months, that he was coming home for Christmas I kept my fingers crossed and hoped.

We were delighted in the change in his appearance when he got down from the train. He was much thinner, had lost that alcoholic puffiness, his skin was clear and fresh. We talked for hours that evening about the therapy of A.A. and how it worked and I found my respect slowly returning. But I still had a deep fear I couldn't overcome.

After a few days, just a day or so before Christmas, he asked me if I had any wine or scotch in the house to serve friends. When I said I hadn't he remarked, "Don't worry about me, dear, those bottles are marked poison as far as I am concerned. Because I am allergic to alcohol, doesn't mean that normal drinkers can't handle it."

Fearful and trembling, I saw him come home the next day with a couple of bottles. It was with a sick heart that I saw him pour and serve it to our guests. But he didn't touch it, just quietly sipped a Coke. I couldn't believe it, and still had reservations. I knew he had fought a bitter battle, one of the hardest any man ever had to fight, and yet I wasn't convinced the victory wasn't permanent.

He returned to his job in another city and I carried on with my work. The children were happy with the change in their dad, but when his letters came suggesting we might become a family unit again, I rebelled. The children, now in their teens with the oldest

faith in their father. But because I had lived my own life for so long I didn't want to give it up.

My husband had established himself in his own business by this time and was doing well, and working hard to help other alcoholics. If we were to live together again I would have to give up my job, my freedom, and set up a home in another city.

It wasn't an easy decision to make, but after listening to my husband, who had never been a religious man, tell me that he would never have won the battle had it not been for a Power Greater Than Himself. I knew he had won and for keeps.

As a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, my husband would strike out those last two words, "for keeps." It is against the principles of A.A. to say, "I'll

never take another drink." They say instead, "I shall try not to take a drink TODAY."

I shall never forget the thrill of knowing that respect and love for my husband were slowly returning. I will never forget the night when he said, "Each morning before I get out of bed I ask for guidance and help through this day, and each night as I return to bed I say a grateful thanks."

Basic honesty, utter humility and a desire to help others is the foundation of a life of happy and contented sobriety, which I am now privileged to share.

The love and respect which I had thought lost forever have returned with a greater intensity and deeper meaning. Our children again love their father. I have no cause to regret that I came back to live with an alcoholic.