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Biography: "It Might Have Been Worse"

Chet R.

(p. 382 in 2nd edition, p. 373 in 3rd edition, p. 348 in the 4th edition.)

They Stopped in Time

"Alcohol was a looming cloud in this banker's bright sky. With rare foresight he realized it could become a tornado."

Chet's sobriety date and place of entry into A.A. are unknown.

He was raised in a family of modest circumstances, in a small town in the Midwest. He attended public schools, worked part-time after school and during vacations, and participated in some athletics. But ambition to succeed was instilled in him by his Scandinavian parents who had come to this country because they thought there were better opportunities here.

Wartime service in the Army (presumably World War I) interrupted his plans for success. After the war he continued his education, married and had a family, and got started in business.

He worked hard and in time became an officer and director of a large commercial bank, and also became a director in many important institutions.

His drinking did not start until he was thirty-five and fairly successful in his career, but success brought increased social activities which involved alcohol. At first it was just an occasional drink, then the "nineteenth hole" at the golf course, then cocktail hours. Eventually the increased drinking substituted for what he really enjoyed doing. Golf, hunting, and fishing became excuses to drink excessively.

He made promises and broke them many times; went on the wagon and fell off; tried psychiatry but gave the psychiatrist no cooperation. Blackouts, personality changes, hangovers and remorse resulted in his living in constant fear. He thought no one knew the extent of his drinking and was surprised to learn later than that everyone knew. His wife tried to control the amount he drank; tried leaving or threatening to leave. Nothing seemed to work.

After a drunk which ruined his wife's birthday party, his daughter said "It's Alcoholics anonymous - or else!"

A lawyer in A.A. called on him the next day, spent most of the day with him, and took him to his first meeting that night.

At first he wondered if he belonged in AA because he hadn't had the experience of jails, lost jobs, lost families that he heard others describe. But the answer was in the first step. Most certainly he was powerless over alcohol, and for him his life had become unmanageable. It wasn't how far he had gone, but where he was headed. He was wise enough to recognize that.

He began to realize how his obsession with alcohol had lead to self-pity, resentments, dishonest thinking, prejudice, ego, a critical and antagonistic attitude toward anyone and everyone who dared to cross him, and vanity. It took him some time to realize that the Twelve Steps were designed to help correct these defects of character and so help remove the obsession to drink.

A willingness to do whatever he was told to do simplified the program for him. He was told to study the AA book, not just read it, to go to meetings, and to get active.

He was desperately in earnest to follow through and understand what was expected of him as a member of A.A. and to take each Step of the Twelve as rapidly as possible.

The fact that AA is a spiritual program didn't scare him or raise any prejudice in his mind. He couldn't afford that luxury. He had tried his way and had failed.

When he joined A.A. he did so for the sole purpose of getting sober and staying sober. But he found it was so much more. A new and different outlook on life started opening up almost immediately. Each day seemed to be so much more productive and satisfying. He got so much more enjoyment out of living, and found an inner pleasure in simple things.

Above all, he was grateful to A.A. for his sobriety, which meant so much to his family, friends and business associates, because God and A.A. were able to do for him something he was unable to do for himself.

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