

Former 'Good-time Charley' transforms into model citizen

By Robert Wisler
staff writer

It may be too simple to say that because Jim B. stopped drinking, he is the person that he is today.

But stopping drinking was the big step back from the brink of death, and continued efforts to refrain from drinking led him to seek a better way of life.

He has it today. More successful than he has ever been in his job as a real estate salesman in Redford Township, he and his wife are busy — but satisfied.

It has been 6½ years since he drank. The difference, he believes, is the difference between life and death.

Jim drank for 25 years, from the time he was 15. At the end, he said, "I knew that if I continued drinking, I would die. I think I was almost dead when I went into a hospital for treatment."

He stayed at Brighton-Hospital 17 days and came out to plunge into the AA program. In time "the program took a hold of me. I found I didn't need alcohol. I began looking for a better understanding of life. I found it."

(Jim's last name is not being used because of the AA program's preference for anonymity.)

He regularly speaks to church congregations and high school classes and groups of prisoners and down-and-outers. He counsels alcoholics and visits those who call AA looking for help. He is proud that his influence has helped his two children and his two step-children to become Christians who are "growing spiritually."

His MOST prized possession he believes is a deep and abiding faith that he is a "born again" Christian and a person being used for God's purposes.

It's a considerable distance from his life of seven years ago.

At that point he was a "third-stage" alcoholic — "you drink not to enjoy it, but because you must," he explained.

For Jim, that final year of drinking included a fifth a day, three-day binges, a succession of cheap bars; leaving his wife, and being taken back repeatedly; constant tremors and shaking, few meals, a 30-day leave from work to drink, physical deterioration and feelings of helplessness.

At his lowest ebb, he had an idea, one which comes to alcoholics with depressing regularity in the later stages of their drinking. Why not kill himself?

He reasoned, with some justification, that his ex-wife, his two kids, his present wife and his two step-children as well as his siblings and their spouses would be better off without his problems.


He thought he could put his car into the garage where he was then staying and wait for the fumes. He started for the garage but the overwhelming mixture of fear, loneliness, despair, helplessness and sorrow overcame him. He stopped and cried out to a God who had no meaning to him. "Please help me."

In some undefinable way some of the tension left him, he recalled recently. Although he would have big failures ahead, Jim feels that at this moment he started coming back to life.

He called a family member who got him together with two members of AA.

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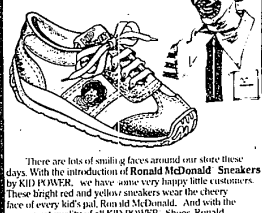
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