

## Will J Story

My name is Will J and I'm an alcoholic. I'm also a lawyer and a volunteer for Lawyers Helping Lawyers. I want to tell you something about my story so it might help you better understand alcoholism, yours, or someone's you care about.

I came to the bar over thirty years ago, as an associate in a law firm. In those days, drinks at lunch were not unusual, and the Friday happy hour with friends from work often drifted into the late hours – to the disappointment of my wife and young children at home. Early on, I discovered I was drinking every day, two or three drinks before dinner. As the years went by this increased, slowly. I usually didn't drink in bars. I drank at home, just like my Dad did -- the normal way. But by the time I was in my late thirties I wouldn't want to eat dinner with the family because I wasn't done with my drinking. Many nights the family would have their meals while I sat in front of the TV, sipping away.

For a long time I really didn't see anything wrong with this. My career was advancing well and I was getting known for what I do. I never had any legal consequences; my work got done well and on time. I was very active in bar, community and church activities. If I had a meeting at night, I'd save up my drinking for when I got home. Often that kept me up into the wee hours.

As time went on, I became more and more groggy and irritable in the morning. So I'd schedule phone calls, meetings and administrative tasks for then. After lunch, when I was feeling better, I'd get down to the more difficult legal work. Eventually I stopped drinking at lunch because it slowed me down for the afternoon and I needed to be productive then. Of course, at conferences and on vacations I'd have a glass in my hand any time of day. My wife wasn't very happy about my drinking but she wasn't openly giving me grief about it either.

Back in the eighties, I began to wonder if I were an alcoholic. So I went in for a few sessions of "alcohol counseling." I tried the controlled drinking they recommended, which was not a problem for me for the week it lasted, and then went back to my regular pattern. I decided I was just one of those guys who likes to drink. Much of my consumption occurred late at night, after my wife was asleep. I did embarrass her at a few public functions. She could never understand why, when we came back from a party, I always fixed myself another drink or two. "Haven't you had enough?" she'd ask. No, I hadn't.

For many years my life and career just went along like this, daily drinking with no obvious consequences. I continued to hold my place on those published lists of respected lawyers. But for the last years of my drinking my life just slowly got worse. I became resentful about outside commitments. I got irritated when the phone rang. My law firm didn't appreciate all I was doing for it. Days began to grind along. I'd get up, shower the sweat off, dress and drive to work. Around six o'clock I'd head home looking forward to the cocktails that were waiting for me. My life had become reduced to working and drinking. I had no hope; only the promise of numbness at the end of the day.

One evening in 2003, I was sitting at home reading a brief in a case I was working on with a lawyer in another firm, a lawyer open about being in recovery. When the phone rang, I picked it up to hear my colleague say, "You've been drinking, haven't you." "Yes," I said. "Do you want to do something about it?" he asked. "Yes," I replied. I don't know where that "Yes" came from, but it was the truth. That was my last drink, so far. A few days later he took me to my first AA meeting, I picked up a white chip and I've been coming back ever since.

Most lawyers are resistant to change. But my life has changed. It hasn't been perfect since that day, but it sure is better than it was. I'm not anxious or worked up about an uncertain future. I'm not ashamed of the empty bottles piled in the recycling bin. I give much better legal advice because I'm not afraid how my clients will react. I have gone deeper into law practice but have also expanded my artistic and leisure activities. Today I'm deeply grateful for the privilege of working with other alcoholics, both through AA and the Lawyers Helping Lawyers Program. There is a way out of this disease; it's not hopeless. When one of us helps, the other miracles can happen.