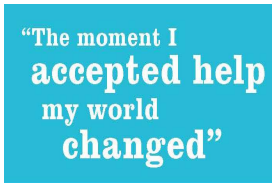
Roger’s Story: “Connected and Committed”



"Tom, I need a private word with you." "Sure Roger, no problem, what do you want to talk about." "Well, a few things, let's take a walk." "OK, sounds good." "First of all, Tom, thank you for helping to arrange this treatment center ....for me....you're a wise counselor...the facility is great, the professionals are well trained, the curriculum is good, the time is even well organized." "Roger, glad you like it."

"Well, Tom, thanks, but ...this '28 day thing' ...stay... they call it here...is just not for me...I'm going to stay 7 more days so I make 10 days, then I think it's best for us to have a full immersion session...you know...sort of a transition session... I'm thinking we should start with 3 hours of intense treatment, take a 30 minute break, then go for another 3 hours...break again for 30 minutes....

regroup...then I'm on my way....so I can get back into the real world...get me going again...you know... what I mean....come on!...I have a business to run, I have to get on with my life." (Tom stopped walking, turned so he could look (at) Roger directly in the eye, and said to him)... "ROGER, STOP MANAGING THE PROGRAM, LET THE PROGRAM MANAGE YOU."

Roger B. managed everything in his life. Always. Good looking, charming, articulate, worldly, fluent in Portuguese and Spanish, intelligent, abundant sensitivity, a product of the finest schools money could buy, married to a beautiful woman, successful financially, CEO of his own Public Relations firm, seven terrific children, fifteen gorgeous grandchildren, life just came easily to a favored son born of privilege. Roger had it all. Life was grand. Or so it seemed.

The facts told a different story: Roger was a drunk and a liar. Like most alcoholics, Roger denied that he had any problem with alcohol. From his idyllic Chicago childhood of wealth and excess to his lofty success in business, Roger knew how to play the part; he was a brilliant actor. He drank daily and increasingly more often, regardless of time of day, for 39 ½ years from age 21 to 61, yet no one knew how much he really consumed, not even he. He liked being the leader. Roger was just so smooth and persuasive. He talked his way through and out of everything. When Roger was

in the room, people were attracted to him and listened to him. Roger thrived on the attention.

Never in trouble with the law. Countless times driving drunk. No DWI's. Good health. Athletic. Not a medical crisis to speak of. But blackouts , however, became a reality as the years ticked by. Roger could not shake his addiction to alcohol. He was fully dependent on it.

Cunning - baffling – powerful: Alcohol , (from AA – How it Works). Alcohol took over Roger's life; He enjoyed it – everything about it. Roger loved how alcohol made him feel. He really liked it. Alcohol and wine especially tasted good. Very good. At 14, Roger took his first drink at a family friend's house. Roger recalled enjoying the taste of the alcohol but he got so sick that he vomited all over Mrs. Stern's exquisite

Persian carpet. When he arrived home, he told his mother what had happened and his mother said - "Roger, the polite and gentlemanly thing to do is to go right back over to Mrs. Stern and apologize"... never uttering a word about her son drinking alcohol.

His earliest memories include his executive father having a few - "belts" – soon after walking in the door from the office. The maid set out the ice bucket and glasses at 5:30PM. Roger's mother joined his father. Cocktails were a ritual, a passage of day into evening. Roger came to believe that drinking alcohol was the normal thing to do; he accepted his parents drinking. Drinking was part of the family life. Alcohol was ever present. As Roger put it, looking back, "my parents weren't abusive about their drinking, they just liked to drink, held it together well...rather accomplished social drinkers...my two brothers didn't really drink like I did, but truth be told, my father functioned as a steady, heavy drinker and my mother, no doubt, became a practicing alcoholic."

When college came, Roger was off to the races. Alcohol tasted better than it ever had before. Parties, getting drunk and having a good time were commonplace. The stage was set for Roger to become a card carrying alcoholic. His drinking career began in earnest.

For most of his drinking life, Roger's dearest friends never suspected that their dear friend had any issue handling his drink. In her heart, his wife knew that her beloved and devoted Roger had a problem with alcohol. But enabling is part of

the family rhythm and life moves along. Most families contribute to the denial and cover up and

make excuses for their alcoholic husband, wife, brother, sister, child. Roger's family tried an amateur intervention ten years before he entered in-patient treatment, but to no avail. A few days off from drinking resulted but then Roger took a glass of wine and he was right back where he had been before - drinking alcoholically. Hiding bottles of vodka in tree stumps where only he could find them was just part of the insanity. Denial, lying and self-centeredness ruled. Work and booze captured his full attention. Roger continued to deceive himself and everyone around him. Roger, unwittingly, was hurting both his family and friends. Alcoholism had gotten him. The slow and progressive disease of alcoholism was alive and well within Roger. He was desperate. His bottom was near. He couldn't fake it any longer. No more lies. He was dying and deep down, he knew it. Finally, the time came to be willing to do something about his abusive drinking.

When Roger entered Betty Ford at the age of 61, he was a broken man. He had run out of options. Painfully anxious, Roger felt that he had lost all hope. He was dying a slow death. In the twilight of his life, Roger – literally - drank vodka around the clock. It didn't matter if he had to drink the booze straight out of the bottle. What mattered: Alcohol came first for Roger, everything else was a distant second.

He was powerless over alcohol and his life had become unmanageable, (AA's First Step). Roger had to admit that he was an alcoholic. The only road left to take was the sober one. Alone, afraid, helpless, Roger had to make a choice: to no longer live a lie. The truth would soon set him free. Roger went on and completed the '28 day stay' his friend and counselor Tom had encouraged. Roger followed all the directions he had been given; he stuck to his post treatment program. Roger even found a Men's Group to complement AA. This group, full of men suffering all kinds of addictions, like gambling and drugs, became very important to his recovery. To this day, Roger attends this Men's Group. Early on, Roger felt at home with these men and started to understand that he no longer was in control. He had to turn over his life and let the Program manage him.

Roger soon became a poster boy for AA. He got a sponsor, worked the steps, spoke at meetings, promoted the benefits gained from AA to anybody who would listen. After all, Roger was the gifted communicator. People always took in what Roger had to say. Now he was living a life free from the bondage of alcohol and people liked what they saw in the new Roger. He was better than ever in people's eyes. However, something else became apparent. Roger got cocky and started to feel superior. He gave his program of recovery an outstanding grade.

Then, about two years sober, Roger was diagnosed with prostate cancer. His father had died an awful and painful death from this same cancer. Roger was shocked; he was scared and felt devastated; he didn't want to die. Especially now that he was sober and feeling so good and connected to his family, friends and business colleagues. He had sold his business, used his talents by consulting and simply found so much joy being around his grandchildren. Roger was now experiencing what he had heard over and over again in meetings from other fellow alcoholics: life without booze was better. Roger was terrified by the diagnosis. He imagined himself curled up like his father, a shrunken skeleton – skin and bones left to die. Having a drink would ease the terror.

Roger's relapse was not pretty. Alone, he woke up wrapped in a blanket, a pillow under his head, with his pants down around his ankles, sprawled out on the bedroom floor. A half-empty vodka bottle rested next to him. The car keys were gone so he couldn't drive and risk killing someone or himself. His wife, who had attended The Betty Ford Center Family Week and had become active in Al-Anon, took action. With all the guidelines she had learned from these treatment experiences for family members, she knew that it was imperative to take care of herself. Therefore, she exited the scene of Roger's last drink and went to stay with a friend. This was the first time that Roger was left to clean up his own drinking mess. Humiliated, Roger had never experienced shame as strong as this felt.

Shaken to the core and feeling exceedingly isolated, like so many times before, when he drank excessively and was out of control, Roger felt terrible. A strong guilt ensued. Deeply embarrassed, he asked himself, "How could I do this again?" He now believed he was an alcoholic, that he had a chronic condition which affected his brain and his entire central nervous system. Prostate cancer was no longer his primary concern; he had to do something about his addiction to alcohol. Drinking vodka straight out of the bottle again had knocked him down. Flat out! Unconscious for a time, reality set in. Roger no longer had the tolerance for alcohol he once had.

Roger was smart enough to know that alcohol was poison and that taking that first drink again after a brief period of sobriety sent him right back into the darkness of his disease. His wife left him to fend for himself. This time, Roger had hit rock bottom...and He called his sponsor.

Roger went to an AA meeting. He was welcomed back with open arms. A year after that, he joined the Board of Directors of NCADD and has been a valuable contributor ever since. Roger had finally

discovered the gift of recovery. He now knew that to stay sober one day at a time, he had to carry his own recovery to others struggling with their addiction. He beat all the odds thrown at him from his family history and conquered prostate cancer. He did so sober, no longer broken.

The handsome communicator, Roger, became proactive, decided to use his newly found humility and his God given skills to help others face their addiction and seek

a better way of life. NCADD was a huge gift and remains an essential part of Roger's recovery. Like NCADD's founder, Marty Mann, Roger was another alcoholic from a privileged Chicago background who learned that the most important thing in life was life itself.

Roger has never been happier. He describes his life of sobriety as euphoric. Recovery for him is about the grace of being Connected, to be Present to all, and to participate in the joy of others around him, especially his family. Roger has never felt more grateful for what he truly has: the hope and peace to enjoy today and to live another day and to be connected to the ones he loves and committed to the causes he believes in.

At 78, Roger B. is just getting started.