Mark’s Story: “The First Drink”

When I was 13, my world of innocence ended, not with a whisper but with a bang. Hope would wait a long time. My smile waited too. I needed to weep. I couldn't. The teacher got me drunk and raped me. It was the night of my first drink.

A woman in the rooms of Alcoholic Anonymous shared that her brother threw himself in front of a train. Killed instantly. Her brother was sexually abused. The abuse happened in the rectory. The Roman Catholic pastor abused him and the other altar boys who were around at the time.

I flashed back to that night, a year after my father died. The teacher set it up. A public school teacher. Elementary level. He knew what he was doing. I would drink.

Why do I feel broken? Why do I feel lonely? Where am I and why do I not feel clear? Where does this anxiety come from? I can't stop moving. I am crying inside. Where are my tears? There are none. Why am I afraid and alone?

I am silent. I am praying deeply and crying for God to help. I feel slaughtered, raw, defeated, ashamed, cheap, alone, so alone.

I often go back to that dark, confusing night of my first drink.

The stage was set for me to be raped, to be pierced. Booze and grooming - perfect together. I was so young, so vulnerable. It was my first drunk and the first of many.

I drank every day for thirty-five years after that night. To avoid the pain, the deep depression and anxiety, I would just drink. SELF-MEDICATING WAS MY ONLY AND BEST OPTION, SO I THOUGHT.

Bedroom. His parents bed. King Size. Forced to do things I had never done. Oral. Anal. It was painful. It was raw. Naked. Scared. Drunk. I was 13.

My drinking started this night. The evolution of not doing the right thing each day began there, in that kitchen, that room, a place full of temptation.

I was now pre-disposed to the self-medication of alcohol and I became obsessed with its taste, its

power over me. And, there was alcohol in my bloodline. I had the gene. This night, the death of my innocence left me with no chance but to drink again and again and again.

Thirty-five years after my first drink and consuming alcohol daily all those years, I had my second DWI. Three days later, I had my first INTERVENTION: I was brought to an AA meeting by a friend, a recovering alcoholic and he told me - just listen.

A month later, I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and my second INTERVENTION occurred: I was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit having been brought there by my wife and sponsor in AA and encouraged by a psychologist I was seeing on an out-patient basis at the time. This combination of family, friend and a professional was the intervention I needed. I was safe; I needed a time-out.

After my discharge from the hospital, I attended therapy, individual and family: my third INTERVENTION. My therapist and my family confronted me about my behavior: my alcoholic behavior. I had a lot a work to do.

I attended AA meetings regularly and found a sponsor to help me work the steps of the AA Program. I soon realized that men and women, persons of color & various sexual identities, etc. – came to AA meetings seeking a God of their own understanding , a Higher Power to hold on to, to lean on. I wanted what these new people in my life were striving for - to become fully human. As an "old-timer" in AA with close to 40 years of sobriety said to me: the journey is about being authentic.

We cannot run from the God of our choice and whatever shame we feel, whatever burden we carry, whatever guilt we harbor, whatever anger we hold, whatever ill thought we hide, God in His infinite wisdom and love takes us under His wing .

Marty Mann, NCADD's Founder wrote in 1950, "For in the depths of my suffering I came to believe. To believe that there was a Power greater than myself that could help me. To believe that because of that Power – God – there was hope and help for me.

My fourth INTERVENTION: I discovered a psychiatrist in NYC who understood the physical discomfort I had been feeling. He was an expert in CONVERSION DISORDER, a manifestation of deep psychological pain shown by a demonstration of physical symptoms, quite often peculiar and

bizarre. In fact, I was having an awful time walking correctly, actually had developed a pronounced limp and frequently fell over. This doctor knew what I was feeling was real and that it could be treated. He also recognized that removing alcohol from my system made me susceptible to no longer hiding my long kept secret. I hadn't had a drink for 11 months.

To grow in recovery is to need the program more and more. It took me thirty-five years to find my voice. Silence. No longer. Abuse. Pain. Truth. Freedom. The first drink. Drunk. The rooms. Humility. Healing. Most of all, HOPE.

A proud Marine, sober thirty years, broke down when he shared that his son's friend drowned in the ocean after getting drunk. This kid had the disease; this was not a one-time swim for kicks. The current of drink got him as it does for many.

My fifth INTERVENTION: Charlie, my new sponsor, sober himself about fifteen years asked me to take a walk with him. He had a technique , as he put it...to swap alcohol stories, take turns and see what happens. We walked for about twenty minutes and I was having a hard time with my limp, in quite a bit of pain.

Then Charlie turned to me and said, "When was your first drink?" I stopped dead in my tracks and began to weep. Charlie didn't realize what he had asked. No one had ever asked me this before. I told him what happened the night of my first drink. I had never shared this. Almost immediately, I could walk normally, as I had always been able to do. My sponsor in AA made this INTERVENTON.

I have come to realize that my alcoholism, fueled early on by sexual abuse and all the subsequent doubt, shame, loneliness, is not only cunning, baffling and powerful; it is crippling, stifling and defeating. My disease – alcoholic illness - was a living hell.

I could not have experienced the healing of God's embrace if I had not hit a very HARD BOTTOM. By going to this darkness, I found light. I found God and "came to believe that a power greater than (ourselves) me could restore (us) me to sanity", (from Step 2, AA).

After the abuse, my life was not the same. I had been given a jolt no words could describe. There was no serenity. I could not change what had happened. Years later, with the help of others

INTERVENING, tears finally came – tears of joy.

I FOUND RECOVERY. THE JOY OF LIVING TOOK HOLD. THE INTERVENTIONS WORKED.

SEVEN YEARS AND COUNTING OF SOBER LIVING, MY HEART IS FILLED WITH GRATITUDE.