

# ALCOHOLISM AT DAL

## Where Do You Stand?

Now, you can try to find out where you stand with alcohol. Here are some challenging questions you can ask yourself regarding your own drinking habits.

Think carefully before you answer each of the following.

- (1) Do you drink to relax and relieve anxiety and tension?  
 YES  NO
- (2) Do you have certain patterns of drinking such as always having a drink or drinks at certain times of the day or week?  
 YES  NO
- (3) Do you find yourself making sure there is always alcohol in the house for the weekend?  
 YES  NO
- (4) Do you drink to relieve boredom?  
 YES  NO
- (5) Has drinking become a social activity in itself for you?  
 YES  NO
- (6) Do you drink more than you used to?  
 YES  NO
- (7) Do you usually drink before going to social or sports events?  
 YES  NO
- (8) Do you sometimes sneak extra drinks when entertaining in your own home?  
 YES  NO
- (9) Do you sometimes end up drinking more than you had planned to?  
 YES  NO
- (10) Do you miss alcohol when, due to some oversight, there isn't any in the house?  
 YES  NO
- (11) Have you ever neglected responsibility due to a hangover?  
 YES  NO
- (12) Do you look forward to your holidays so you can drink as much as you want without worrying about neglecting responsibilities?  
 YES  NO
- (13) If planning a camping trip, would you be sure alcohol was available?  
 YES  NO
- (14) Has your spouse or anyone else ever warned you about your drinking?  
 YES  NO
- (15) Are you uncomfortable when visiting people who do not offer you a drink?  
 YES  NO

## by Ellen Broadhead

Euphoria—it's something we could all use a little of by the end of a long day in lectures and labs, or a rough week of the pressures produced by the various elements in any student's life. By sharing a bottle of wine with friends, having a beer in the lounge, or partying all week-end, we use the most socially prevalent outlet for tension: alcohol.

Although most people have had some experience with alcohol before coming to the university, very few people have definite guidelines for their drinking. Some want to learn about it; "It's not so much pressure as I'm curious to find out what the big deal is. Also, I don't have to worry about my parents smelling it on my breath."

Like many first year students, this person is straight out of high school, living away from home for the first time, and anxious to take advantage of the opportunities that are available. For some, the freedom is enough reason in itself to explore their capacity for alcohol, while others are motivated by expectations that might not have been met, for good times and new friends. Everything, however, seems to be secondary to the primary factor of frustrations, about work, money, and sex. Alcohol is "just a great release."

The unfortunate fact is that some of the people who drink are going to abuse it and themselves. Of course most students are not going to become alcoholics, but it's important to realize that problem drinkers aren't always dirty old men and downtrodden women sleeping on the corner. In fact, most alcoholics are not falling-down drunks, but simply people who come to depend upon alcohol for their normal functioning. And there is no doubt that many students develop this dependence in some degree.

According to Dr. Johnson of Dalhousie Student Health, 12% of any given population is prone to alcoholism; the existence of a metabolic aberration makes the potential for a problem to develop much greater. Dr. Johnson also believes that susceptibility to this disease is influenced by heredity: if your parents had any drinking problems, the chances of you developing a similar condition are very strong, regardless of your environment.

## How Did You Make Out?

If you answered yes to five or more of the above you probably had best look closely at your drinking habits. Even if alcohol is not causing you a problem now, it has the potential to do so. Remember, it is usually impossible to identify the exact time that alcohol starts to cause difficulties. Social or normal drinking is an elastic term that varies from individual to individual.

Dr. Johnson says he knows of at least six people who have eight to ten beers every day, and could not do without it. Yet they can't be helped because they won't admit that they have a problem. Students have been registered at the clinic, unconscious, with 175 mg% alcohol in their blood, over twice the quantity necessary to be considered legally drunk.

John Morris, a Dalhousie student who hopes to get a degree in social work, says it is the hardest thing in the world to admit that alcohol has beaten you. John is an alcoholic and is very concerned with the whole range of problems that alcohol causes within the university environment.

Besides the physical effects which everyone has experienced "the morning after", senseless fighting and irresponsible driving are two major side issues that can be attributed to the abuse of alcohol. Car accidents are 75% alcohol-related. Simple embarrassment, suffering grades, damaged personal relationships and unwanted pregnancies are also commonly related to the original problem.

John says, "Since coming to Dalhousie, I've noticed that there is a great deal of peer pressure to drink—signs everywhere, "come out and get sloshed". He worries that people are fooling themselves into thinking that they don't have a problem. "The alcoholic is a very wily person, in that he starts to make excuses to cover up any indiscretion he may have made—and pretty soon you start to believe your own excuses."

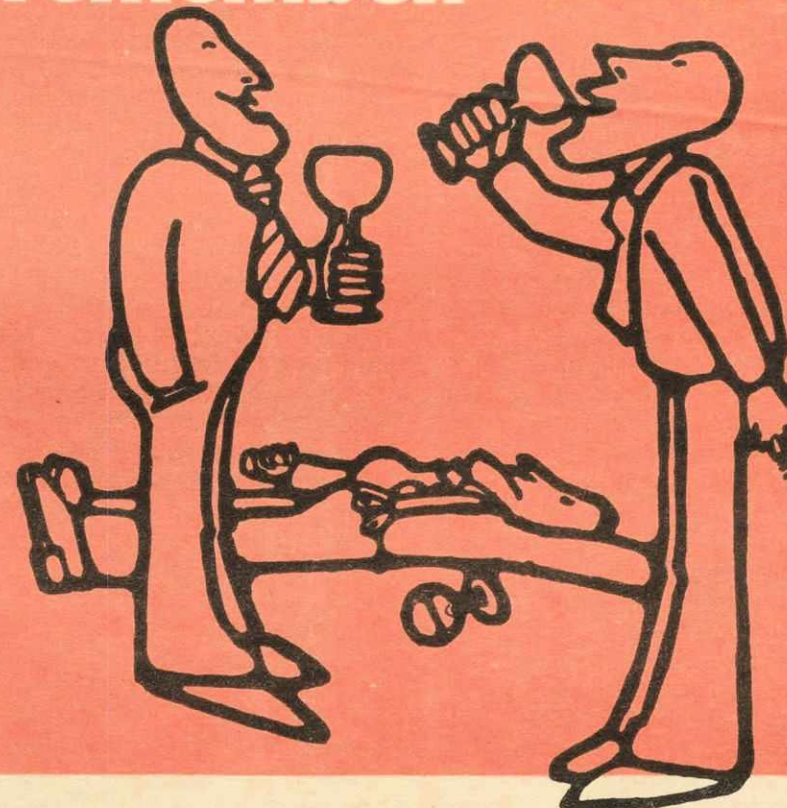
The most difficult barrier to break down is the person's defensive reaction to a label like "problem drinker." It's very easy for an alcoholic to stop drinking for a short period of time,—and John himself did this at one point—knowing that he could start again any time he needed to. But admitting that you have a serious drinking problem means never taking a drink again.

John is starting a discussion group in an attempt to make fellow students aware of the dangers and alternatives to alcohol. The group will not be a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous, and John is not officially a counsellor, but he feels that an exchange of experiences and guidance will help people to cope with situations without a dependency on alcohol. Hopefully these meetings will be held at the SUB, but until something is definitely worked out, anyone interested in talking to John, for information, or concerning themselves or a friend, can call him anytime at 424-2342.

Another student at Dal, Dan Cormier, agrees that there is certainly a need for such a group. Dan is a bartender at the Grawood Lounge, which does \$5500.00 a week in gross business, excluding the income from special events. He believes that 60% of the patrons of the Grawood could be classified as "heavy drinkers," which translates into 20-25 beers a week, by Dan's estimation. People do a great deal of their drinking in the Grawood because of the low prices and the company—and it's also very accessible.

Tim Pertus, the assistant manager of the Grawood, says that "some of the heavier drinkers we have in here are alumni." In many instances, the habits which were

Some people think the best parties are the ones they can't remember.



A lot of people who drink have been drunk at least once in their lives. They drink like a fool, so they can have the confidence to be one. It's that kind of thinking that helps cause approximately 40% of all traffic deaths in this country. It's high time we told these people they're wrong.

We believe that if enough people talk about the problems, we're that much closer to solving them.

## Dialogue on drinking

An idea from:  
Health and Welfare Canada  
and  
Nova Scotia Commission on Drug Dependency  
987 Spring Garden Road  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 1Y2

and are being formed in university will never be broken. Instead these habits usually become worse in the "real world" of career and family responsibilities, where peer pressure to drink is stronger—the "adult" way to cope.

It seems imperative that responsible education is instituted now; sheltering people can only harm them. Dr. Johnson emphasized that "it's unkind and cruel to protect these people, because until they confront the problem, the condition gets worse."

Of course everyone has a different style of drinking, and it's important to consider this. But many people feel secure because they are just "week-end drinkers," or "social drinkers"—who can find that they need to drink when it's usual for them to.

One student, originally from Quebec, expressed the belief that "it's better to grow up with alcohol, because you learn to respect it. You don't go for it to get drunk—rather, it is a pleasant addition to dinner." Most Nova Scotians seem to be less moderate, though; an attitude often encountered (among both women and men) is, "Why drink unless you're going to get drunk?" The numbness becomes an end in itself: "I want reality to cease being real."

Alcohol addiction is the most common drug problem in the world. Instructive literature is widely available, but many colleges have become actively involved in programmes of information and treatment. One man who is involved in the designing of such programmes is Brian Wilbur, Supervisor of School Services for the Nova

Scotia Commission on Drug Dependency. He has consulted with two universities in the area concerning their policy towards drug and alcohol abuse.

Mr. Wilbur says that the days of scare tactics against the "glamour drugs" are gone. Now, a system concentrates on improving awareness of the less obvious effects, so that people who do not have a drug problem will not get one, and intervention with developing problems will hopefully drastically reduce the need for treatment facilities in the future.

The most difficult challenge comes in the transfer of a person who has had treatment, back to their home environment. Here the therapy must withstand the stress which originally created the problem. Having general consciousness-raising events to lessen social pressure is a very effective support, to counter external conditioning and internal insecurities. One college in Texas had a "Drunk is Dumb Day," featuring buttons, music, literature and breathalyzer demonstrations to promote their cause. Even a simple consideration such as having non-alcoholic beverages at a party can be tremendously reassuring to non-drinkers, and drinkers alike, that they do have a choice.

This article is a demonstration of the questioning of assumptions, too often the rationalized basis of irrational behavior; it is a necessary affirmation of our vulnerability to destructive escapism. As Mr. Duke of Doonesbury fame so aptly puts it, "There's no room for amateurs in our drug culture."

# DRINKING ANALYSIS

Reprinted from: **What's Your Poison? How To Enjoy Drinking.**

by Paul Gwinner and Marcus Grant

Environmental factors which influence drinking:

- 1) Ethical and religious factors
- 2) Occupational factors
- 3) Advertising
- 4) Legal and fiscal controls.

Reasons commonly given for drinking:

- a) It's appropriate for me to have a drink.  
—reflects habit and social pressure
  - b) I need a drink.  
—comfort in handling situation, compulsion
  - c) I want a drink.  
—disregarding circumstances, gratification
  - d) It helps to kill time.  
—dulls perception of frustration, loneliness
  - e) It helps me to get along with people.  
—can often be simply conditioning
  - f) I always have a drink at this time or in this place.  
—habit is unconscious; seems spontaneous but is difficult to break
  - g) I'm thirsty.  
—alcohol no better than water, juice, soft drinks  
—reinforced by advertising, bars in athletic clubs
  - h) I enjoy a drink.  
—can be sacrifice of active control in search of pleasant effects which are elusive after toleration increases
  - i) It makes me feel better.  
—for "medicinal purposes," anesthetic; true for small amounts, but rapidly becomes a rationalization
  - j) It helps me to cope with a crisis.  
—at first comforting, calming, sedating, but dulls senses, impairs judgement
  - k) It's only hospitable.  
—variety of refreshments should be offered by considerate host.
  - l) It's expected of me.  
—social pressure, insecurity
  - m) I deserve a drink.  
—reward at the end of a bad day, on weekends  
—becomes punishment when abused
  - n) It helps me to sleep.  
—does have sedative properties, but used habitually will disrupt normal sleeping patterns—becomes a rationalization
- Excuses **not** to drink:
- a) I've had a really queasy stomach.
  - b) It was making me feel lousy.
  - c) I'm working for an exam.
  - d) I'm saving for a boat.
  - e) I've got an ulcer.
  - f) I'm in training.
  - g) I can't afford it.
  - h) It's too fattening.
  - i) I've had too much lately.