

Alcoholism — the lonely disease

by Vic MacBournie of the *Silhouette*

The back door opened and standing alone in the darkness of the back porch was a man propped up against the wooden railing to keep from collapsing in a drunken stupor.

He said only three words, but it was the three words Bob Mallway, Director of Hamilton's Detox Center, wanted to hear—"I want help."

They are the three most important words an alcoholic can say on route to sobriety, and for Bob Mallway, they are the key words in the first step to rehabilitation.

The key to recovery is admitting that you do have a sickness, until this is achieved, there is little hope that the alcoholic will make a concerted effort to combat his problem.

So many of the men that arrive at Mallway's back door are brought there either by the police or by friends, relatives of employers. They are brought in, given food, a place to sleep and counselling. But so many of these men do not come on their own, and although they desperately need help, they find it difficult to accept because it would mean an admittance to alcoholism which many of these men do not believe they suffer from.

Mallway, sits back in his chair, his closely cropped hair and large stature gives him the appearance of an army sergeant watching over his troops. His army experience shows through.

But when one of his residents steps into his office to thank him for the help he has received during his stay, and asks Mallway to help him find a job, a look of understanding spreads across Mallway's face - a look and understanding that only another alcoholic could have.

Mallway knows how the alcoholic feels because he, like the other eight

staffers that work with him at the Detox Center, have been through it all before. But their task is great. Over 1800 men come through their doors each year. Every man is different, with a different set of problems and a different look on life.

As Mallway says, "they are all individuals and they have to be treated like individuals."

In 1978 alone, Canada had an estimated 635,000 addicted alcoholics. That figure represents one alcoholic for every 20 drinkers. Today Mallway estimates that one in every 13 drinkers are alcoholics.

Alcoholism takes in every facet of life. Mallway explained that he sees every kind of person in the center.

"We have everything in here; judges, doctors, lawyers, down to the lowest man on skid row."

"Alcoholism is on every street corner in town...it's the number one social disease, it wrecks more homes, lives, jobs, families, than any other single factor in the world today," he said.

In a recent report completed by Statistics Canada, a heavy drinker is defined as someone who consumes 14 or more drinks per week. Mallway defined an alcoholic person in a more practical way explaining that it is a "physical allergy coupled with a mental compulsion."

"You have to have that allergy first," said Mallway. "You see there are a lot of people walking around who never drink who could be alcoholic. They might have all the behaviour aspects of an alcoholic, but because they don't drink they are not alcoholics."

Mallway says, "one way to find out if you are an alcoholic is to look back on the last 18 months of your life and if you recognize a strong downward trend in respect to your job, family life, relationships, career goals, or education,

and these can be attributed to alcohol, then there is a good chance you are becoming an alcoholic.

Alcohol consumption is on a steady increase in Canada according to a Statistics Canada report on alcohol.

"By 1978 the average adult Canadian 15 years and older was annually consuming 2.56 gallons of absolute alcohol compared with under two gallons in 1970. This represents an increase of one third in National per capita consumption," the report said.

The type of alcohol consumption has also changed over the past ten years with a decline in beer sales an ongoing increase in wine consumption. Apparent factors such as affluence, more drinking by women, and life-style factors such as increased drinking with meals are indicative of even faster increases of consumption for wine and spirits.

The report found that the sharpest increase in usage occurs between the lower and upper teens for both males and females, with the current rise for females being steeper than males (about 60 per cent to 90 per cent for females versus 69 per cent to 88 per cent for males).

The increasing number of females into the work force, and the pressures that it brings, has contributed to the growing female alcohol consumption, but little has been done to provide women with the same rehabilitation centers as men enjoy.

Therese Spegle, Director of Catherine Brock, a halfway house for women that deals with female alcoholics in Hamilton, agrees that the facilities for women are lacking.

"We don't have enough programs for women. We need more daytime programs for the housewives," she said.

She also pointed out that female alcoholics must travel to Toronto or London for detoxification centers. She said that alcohol is affecting the younger people between the ages of 18-25 who have developed a dual addiction to both street drugs and alcohol.

Most of the young women she worked with began their drinking at an early age of 13-14 and by the time they reach their late teens, they have already become alcoholics. Most of them are high school drop-outs she said.

Both the Prairie provinces and Ontario record the greatest drinking among



Alcoholics Anonymous

"I am an alcoholic and I will remain an alcoholic until the day I die," said Bob Mallway, director of Hamilton's Detox center.

These words Mallway spoke are heard daily around the world, in 93 countries by over two million people attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

The gathering is a chance to meet people, strike up relationships, and get the alcoholics out of the house and into a friendly atmosphere.

Every meeting begins with a speaker.

"Hello my name is John and I am an alcoholic."

"When I was drinking I didn't care about anyone but myself...I fought with my family, I hated my superiors...I quit my job...I lost my wife and the love of my child...I ended up on skid row."

It's a typical story of a typical alcoholic, but it is not the end of the story.

"Since I have joined AA I have not had a drink in 12 years...my wife has returned...I have a grandchild who loves me and who I love...I have a good job...a new car...and a new life."

This is also a typical story of a typical AA member.

One of the reasons why AA is so successful is because, as Bob Mallway says, "It treats the whole person."

"If you need medical

assistance they see doctor. They give fellowship that is there are always there wherever you are and you need help."

Alcoholics people—they call it the lonely disease," said

"In eight years I have seen nothing better than Alcoholics Anonymous. It's one another with the same

Alcohol related

Although programs in the treatment of alcohol have made substantial breakthroughs to assist the alcoholic addicted population, the alcohol-related problems such as cirrhosis, alcohol poisoning, and motor vehicle accidents, still exist.

Cirrhosis of the liver is becoming the long term upward

trend in Canada. The Canada Report states that due to cirrhosis of the liver there were 2838 deaths in 1978, versus 1666 in 1970. Over this period the rate per 100,000 increased from 16.6 for males in 1970 to 16.6 deaths per 100,000 for males in 1978 (an increase of one-third in terms of 7.6).

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