

ONE WOMAN'S STORY OF ALCOHOL ADDICTION (PRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF FAMILY)



For twelve years, Leah had always been a drinker, she just never realized that she had become a heavy drinker and dependant on alcohol. She never thought of herself as an alcoholic, because her drinking occurred within the confines of the 'middle class' home where she lived with her husband and three young children. She had a bunch of cars, her children were in private schools, and she looked 'all right'. Problem was, she was slowly but surely dying.

Looking So Fine on the Outside

For a long time, Leah denied she had an addiction. She never drank in the morning or at lunch. After all, her kids never came home from school to find her drunk. Despite a slight hangover from the previous evening, she would get out of bed each morning, get her children off to school, have a morning coffee with her girlfriends at the local hangout joint for Mums, followed by a lunch date again with girlfriends, sometimes even get involved in community activities, and as always, shop at the supermarket. She was a 'normal homemaker'. No-one could have guessed that she had become dependent on alcohol. She wasn't bleary-eyed, her teeth looked fine, and her clothes were so fine.

Leah went to a lot of effort to wear the 'mask' so that she could look 'the part'. This was very important to her, because if she looked okay on the outside, then maybe she would be okay on the inside. But she wasn't. In twelve years there wasn't a day that went by in which she didn't drink alcohol. She always had to have a drink.

Leah's drinking pattern was not that of the stereotypical 'alcoholic'. She didn't go out and have affairs, have one night stands, ask men for a drink in bars, or come stumbling home late in the night, drunk. She drank at home, a pattern common to women who are dependent on alcohol. Normally her drinking started around seven o'clock each night. But once she started, she would drink until she went to bed, and, the next day, she would be amazed at how much she imbibed — often nearly a half gallon of wine. She couldn't open a bottle of wine and not finish it. She didn't have to worry about preparing the children for school in the In the mornings, because her nanny always prepared the children for school, while she lay in bed feeling lethargic, dizzy and worn out.

She tried to quit, but her vows of abstinence were always short-lived. Every morning she would wake up and say 'that's it, I'm not going to drink anymore.' But by four o'clock she knew she would have to take a drink that night. Then she'd tell herself 'well, I'm going to stop at two, or stop at three,'. She went to church every Sunday, attended her home group and would often pray that she stop at three drinks, which in fact she did, but the glasses got bigger and bigger.

Wanting to Belong

Like many alcoholics, Leah at first drank to take away the unhappiness she had to cope with in her marriage. The drink gave her courage to wear the 'mask' so as to keep smiling at all the abuse she experienced with her husband. The drink also helped her boost her self esteem, especially when she was around her girlfriends, who saw her as having a good happy life. She began drinking at 23, after she married. Painfully shy, Leah learned that if she had a few drinks it would 'loosen' her up and would feel as good as everybody else.

Leah eventually confined her drinking to her home, to avoid trouble. Nor did she 'booze it up' on hard liquor. She drank mostly wine and sometimes an aperitif out of a stem glass. However, she drank very large quantities. You don't have to be drinking vodka out of a bottle, she once said, "My drug of choice is wine, and I am a full-blown alcoholic."

Sadly, Leah was found dead, one early morning. She had drowned in her vomit.



In memory of Leah (not real name and printed with permission)

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