

# Alcoholism: More than a lost weekend

By Vic MacBournie

A back door opened and standing alone in the darkness on 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."

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

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

Many of the men that arrive at Mallway's back door are brought there either by the police or by friends, relatives or employers. They are brought in, given food, a place to stay and counselling. Although they may desperately need help, they find it difficult to accept because it would mean an admission to alcoholism which many of these men do not want to suffer from.

Bob Mallway sits back in his chair, his closely cropped hair and military stature gives him the appearance of an army sergeant in command of his troops.

When one of his residents steps into his office to thank him for the help he has received during his stay, and asks him 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.

Bob Mallway knows how the alcoholic feels because he, like the other eight staffers that work with him at the Detox Center, has been through it all before. But their task is great. Every case is different, with a different set of problems and a different look on life.

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

Alcoholism takes in every facet of life.

Bob Mallway explained that he sees every kind of person in the world.

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

Alcoholism is on every street corner in town ... it's the most common social disease, it wrecks homes, lives, jobs, families, more 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 practical way explaining that it is a "physical allergy coupled with a mental compulsion."

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

One way to find out if you are an alcoholic is to look back at the last 18 months of your life and if you recognize a 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 the Statistics Canada report.

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 last ten years with a decline in beer sales and on ongoing increase in wine consumption. Apparent factors such as the increase in wine drinking by women, and life-style factors such as increased drinking with meals are indicative of a faster increase of consumption for wine and spirits.

The report found that the sharpest increase in usage occurs in the lower and upper teens for both males and females, with the current rise for females being steeper than



males.

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

Therese Spogle, 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 women 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 13-15 and by the time they reach their late teens, they have already become alcoholics. Most of them are high school drop-outs she said.

Despite the growing problem of alcoholism, there are many

established organizations to assist the alcoholic. The most prominent and successful being Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

But it is the detox centers that often point the person suffering from alcoholism in the direction of these other programs.

The Hamilton Detox Center began in 1972 after the Ontario government recognized that it made sense dollar-wise to establish detox centers rather than putting alcoholics in jail or in hospitals.

Rod McEwan, assistant director of Hamilton's Detox Center said that in 1972 it cost the government approximately \$50 to keep a person in jail overnight and \$150 in the hospital, whereas a detox center could provide the service for \$13.50.

Staff sergeant Gerry Malcolmson of the Hamilton-Wentworth police force, responsible for the community services department said "It is a matter of dealing with the victim (alcoholic) as a human being. On the sidewalk they are often considered by people in the community to be repulsive, but locking them in jail accomplishes nothing.

"The detox center treats the victim," said Malcolmson.

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