life with her husband in Manchester. He had dropped dead at her feet half-way through decorating the sitting room some fourteen years before we met her. The contrast between his last added roll of wall paper and the stripped wall remained. She had been broken hearted but resolved that for her remaining years "I should do the things I like doing and leave the rest to look after itself." There were a number of monstrous understatements of philosophy in rationalising all this. Among the best was: "I've never really liked doing housework."

From the minute she recovered her strength she undertook to enchant us. A case conference with the professor of psychiatry returned her to a stage she had missed for many a year, and she was as sad as any attending when the curtain had to fall on her performance.

* * *

Returning to life outside she kept in touch with us by visits, and we would see her felt hat at various places about the town. She knew where to find glamour and activity at little cost. A regular frequenter of the airport lounges, she received special dispensation when they became crammed with hordes of delayed travellers in the strikes of last summer. The cinema retained its central place in her calendar, while Woollie's snack

bar overlooking the centre of Manchester gave an elevated view of life and a place to meet others. It was here among friends and no doubt fantasies unfulfilled that she died, one victim of a savage modern fire, sharing her death with many in their prime with lives and prospects unfulfilled. Described as "in her sixties" and notable for her "seventeen rings" it was a death I guess she would have chosen,

"not a clean and inbetween
the sheets holywater death"

And she leaves us with a grief unusual for professionals used to contact with old people and never far from death. For she had never left her youth, there remained excitement and possibility in every new day rather than achievement and reflection on the past. No winding up, no taking stock, no expectation of disappointment but a twinkling appetite for all the future would surely offer: we grieve for her as for a child, despite her 86 years.

Reference

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Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic

PAULA WYE*

One day about 21 years ago I stood at the drinks cupboard pouring myself a stiff whisky and realised that something must be wrong about my dependence on alcohol. Six months before that my husband and I with our two children had returned from nine years in Malaya, and my third child was born soon afterwards. She was born with a faulty valve in her heart and we were told that she might need an operation when she was 4. In the meantime, she must not cry or get overexcited. At that time I was very spoilt, was used to a high standard of living abroad with plenty of help, and found myself up against it. I had never coped with domestic chores and the house was large. With the drink in my hand, I knew I was heading for trouble but reasoned with myself that if I could keep going until my child was 4, I could then go into hospital for a short time to restore myself to normal. Pride prevented me from confessing to my husband that I couldn't cope.

The way down

With such thoughts in mind, I felt justified in taking odd drinks during the day to keep myself going. Fears that my baby might die at any moment abated, and I had more energy and confidence. I convinced myself that my drunken state was not obvious. My GP was giving me drugs for anxiety, exhaustion, tummy trouble, and so on, but he didn't know about my drinking. My child was pronounced fit when she was 4, whereupon I collapsed and was admitted to the manic-depressive ward of a psychiatric hospital in Oxford. There, they said that my breakdown was probably due to stress rather than alcohol, treated me with ECT 12 times, and returned me to my family full of the horrors of what I had seen. By now I understood the impli-

cations of alcoholism, but was sure that my own drinking was under control. Even so, in Malaya most people drank heavily without apparently suffering the same effects; the odd hangover, maybe, but not the fear and anxiety. I was confused as to why this should be so. Only later did it become clear that it is not how much you drink but how and why that turns someone into an alcoholic.

By allaying my fears and anxieties with antidepressants, tranquillisers, and sleeping pills the doctors hoped that my drinking would become controllable; instead, I began the downward spiral to chemical addiction, resorted to drink when the pills ran out, and sometimes took both at once. I collapsed again and was admitted to a hospital for nervous diseases in Surrey, where I first experienced psychoanalysis—20 minutes a day with a man I disliked intensely. The other patients were drunk most of the time and I was confused about how the hospital could help. This time my problem was correctly diagnosed, and without psychoanalysis, they said, I would "die the death of an alcoholic"—an ominous and frightening thought. Physically, I was in poor shape—underweight with an enlarged liver—but fear of death is not enough to stop an alcoholic drinking.

On my discharge home, I was told that an analyst would be found for me, but when one did not materialise I was soon back on the bottle. Then an analyst saw me several times a week for two years and prescribed a mixture of Stelazine and Dexedrine; when he was there all was well, but if either of us was away I resorted to alcohol. He blamed my drinking on insecurity and fear in childhood when my mother had left me in a home at a critical time in my development. So now, she was to blame and that gave me another excuse for drinking.

By this time my body was gross, my arms and legs thin, I was very hairy, and my eyes looked heavy-lidded and dead. My husband arranged for me to see a doctor in London, who advised me to leave my analyst and stop taking Dexedrine—I had developed pseudo-Cushing's syndrome because of the drug. My analyst had helped me, but not cured me, and I left him

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with sadness. In those days a cure seemed possible. My husband enjoyed seeing people and going to heavy drinking parties and was unable to understand my preference for staying at home rather than stay sober at these parties. Going in two cars didn't solve the difficulty. Without a drink to support me, parties at home made me feel nervous and inadequate. Gradually, my husband's remarkable patience evaporated and he turned elsewhere for relaxation and, I suspected, sex. Once again alcohol took over. Drunken periods alternated with drying-out sessions at an expensive London hospital, where drugs ensured a comfortable withdrawal, then two batches of ECT, and a return home, physically well but none the wiser (apart from learning how to make a basket).

At about this time I attended my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, was impressed with their work, but could not identify with any of the members. It didn't last long. Some important things then happened that eventually led to my recovery. Despite my suspicions, it was a great shock—on opening one of his letters—to find that my husband was having an affair. I had two strong whiskies and some sleeping pills, passed out for four hours, and had lost the use of my legs when I woke up. My husband had arrived back and, for the first time, told me that I was a total failure as a wife and mother, had damaged his career and his social life. His fault, I thought, but nevertheless decided to make another effort to stop drinking and save my marriage. With the help of the local AA I stopped drinking for nine months, but I was still on pills. One day, my husband returned and told me that he had heard I was better without him and he was leaving me. I felt utterly defeated and dejected and returned to the bottle and the cushy psychiatric hospital while the divorce went through. I never drank while in hospital.

I moved to Sussex, where my children visited me at weekends. My husband remarried, but it didn't last long and I kept bumping into him, always with some attractive woman or other. I took more alcohol and drugs and found more and more excuses. I was filled with resentment, jealousy, and self-pity. Alarming accidents became common: I drove into the side of a lorry, after taking valium and two large brandies (the car was a write-off, but I merely had a stiff neck); I fell down a whole flight of stairs (and stubbed my toe); my daughter stopped me shooting myself. I didn't care whether I lived or died. Finally, after more treatment and money down the drain, I ended up in a small flat on my own. The children never wanted to see me again, I had lost my job, my marriage, my money, and my friends, and had reached rock bottom. All the symptoms of this terrible disease were there: blackouts; "dry heaves" in the early morning; 4 am terrors; shakes and sweats that were cured only with a drink; and a total preoccupation with finding and hiding supplies of alcohol.

The way ahead

Eventually, 18 years after this story began, I went to the Broadway Lodge Treatment Centre for Alcoholism, in Weston-super-Mare, Avon. The centre was founded in 1974 and has 37 inpatients, and is based on treatment developed at the Hazelden Foundation in Minnesota. By the time I arrived there I was full of self-loathing and guilt. Any patient found drinking on or off the premises or taking unprescribed drugs was discharged; first came detoxification and a full medical check-up. The philosophy of this centre is much the same as that of Alcoholics Anonymous, and the aim is long-term abstinence from alcohol and drugs. I had to share a room, which I hated, but it helped me to overcome my self-imposed withdrawal from society.

No one is sure why the treatment at Broadway works—but, with 78% of patients, it does. The course is tough, and you get what you need rather than what you want. Referrals to the centre come from doctors, social workers, Alcoholics Anonymous, and, in particular, from ex-patients (many of whom work

for AA after leaving). The treatment is designed to treat the "whole" person by covering the physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects of the illness. Here, everything is explained: the effect of drugs and alcohol; why certain steps are taken in the treatment; and how a patient is progressing. I learnt that no alcoholic can keep away from the bottle without help; I learnt to change by using the first five steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous programme. Assisted by the staff, a multidisciplinary team consisting of physicians, psychologists, social workers, therapists, and nurses trained in alcoholism, I came to accept the reality of my illness and the possibility of recovery. Going back over my past life and ridding myself of guilt, remorse, and so on, I learnt that there is no cure for alcoholism except abstinence, and change of attitude; that I had only myself to blame, and there are no excuses; and that I was responsible for myself, but that there is a higher power in charge (it doesn't matter what religion you have, or how you choose to recognise this higher power). I learnt, too, to cope with my feelings and negative emotions such as fear, anger, jealousy, self-pity, and dishonest thinking. I understood, then, that psychiatrists and psychoanalysts had merely given me excuses for continuing the downward spiral that I was travelling.

A day at Broadway Lodge starts at 7.30 with meditation before breakfast, then chores, lectures, reading and writing assignments, and painful group therapy sessions. Each patient has to write her (for simplicity, I will refer to "her") life history which is given to the group, who then each write a letter to the patient telling her what they think of her, and she then has to write one to herself. There are questionnaires for the group to complete to assess the progress of each patient. A group session might start off something like this. I was asked what sort of things had started me drinking and cited one incident when my husband was leaving for a holiday in France with our 15-year-old daughter and an attractive young woman. I was not drinking at that time and said that I thought it was bad for the child. One of the group immediately said, "I see, so you think your husband's screwing is doing more damage to your family than your drinking." The wording gave me a terrible shock, but it was very effective because it was the first time it had entered my head that my behaviour was doing more damage to the family than his. My thinking started to change, egged on by the group telling me that I had to change if I was to cope with my problems.

Broadway Lodge work with families too, and my son and younger daughter came down and had to tell me (in front of my counsellor) exactly what I had been like when I was drinking. This was a distressing experience for all three of us, but I'm glad to say that it did nothing but good and I have now regained the love and respect of my children.

After five weeks (the minimum stay) I was allowed to go to an outside AA meeting and from then on, and since I left, I have attended about three meetings a week. AA is responsible for all aftercare and one can always telephone an AA member to talk if a crisis arises; there are branches all over the world, whose addresses are available at the London headquarters, so going away for a holiday is no problem. I had been taking sleeping pills for 20 years before I went to the centre and it took me six months to establish a proper sleep pattern, but now I take no drugs and for 3½ years have taken no alcohol. I am happier than I have ever been and, for the first time, can face up to myself. I am on call for AA and love the work (the views I have expressed, however, are my own) and often drive alcoholics who need treatment down to Broadway, so I am in touch with the people there. At £175 a week the treatment is expensive (they make no profit), but patients who cannot afford to pay at the time invariably get good jobs when they leave and pay back after that. Broadway Lodge is the only place in Europe run on these lines (their methods, however, are used all over America), and I was lucky to hear of it. Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic, and I am very aware that I could lapse again, but I am comforted to know that there is always a friend on the other end of the telephone should I need help.