

Wanting To Belong

By Jean Kirkpatrick, Ph.D., WFS Founder

There are always certain periods in our lives when the going gets rough. Any one of us can think of five or six periods when everything just looked black, when we saw no way out, when we thought life would never again be all right.

However, it is true that time does have a curative factor that eventually we do feel better and, again, we have a zest for life and activity. Sometimes we don't even know how this happens. We only know that we feel less pain and that we again want to do things, want to be involved.

One of these black periods is the time after the first glow of sobriety and health and the period when we are really on the road to recovery.

This is a dark period because we are so completely confused. We feel not exactly like a full-time sober person, nor are we drinking any longer. We really don't know exactly where we fit. In the first days, first weeks of sobriety, we actually glowed. We began to feel great and we looked different physically. There was a spark of health and a feeling of being able to take on the world. We just felt like we would burst from these new feelings and we knew they would never end, that sobriety was now ours forever, and we would begin to think about dedicating our lives to helping other alcoholics. We began to consider being an alcoholism counselor!

We couldn't imagine why we hadn't stopped drinking before. It was so easy.

And then, all of a sudden, it's not so easy anymore. We begin to feel restless and we begin to feel out of place. No longer do we feel comfortable when we are with our new alcoholic friends. There are times when we wish we weren't in this situation. We want to turn back, call the whole thing off. We don't belong. We begin to feel out of place everywhere, even with our old friends and certainly with our new friends.

We don't seem to belong anywhere. We don't fit in.

This period of time is one of the dark periods of which I spoke earlier. It is a period of time when we are in no-man's land. We don't have any real idea of who we are. We feel restless and without mooring. And, even worse, we don't know how to describe it or express it. At times, we are even afraid of admitting it to ourselves.

But how can we help ourselves through this period? What can we do to combat these feelings of not belonging in any group or anywhere?

There are several things we can do that are helpful:

- 1) Stay with our new friends, because we will again feel comfortable in their presence. Even though our first glow may be dimmed, or even gone, we will again like being with them. We should try to spend far more time with our new friends than with our old friends during this period, for our new friends

understand alcoholism and what we are going through. Very often our old friends don't and we are put on the defensive and then become resentful.

- 2) We should read, read, read. Not just anything, but we should read about other alcoholics and how they overcame. We should also consider using cassette tapes to help us through this period. Most important is to keep our minds occupied with positive thoughts about getting better and staying that way.
- 3) We must keep in mind that this is a phase and that these tearing feelings we are having will go away.
- 4) Most important is to keep our minds filled with positive thoughts. We must keep working at changing negative thoughts with positive ones. This may be the most difficult part of getting through this period.

This is probably the most difficult period of our recovery. It is far more difficult than those first weeks, because then we began to feel better bodily and that changed our entire outlook on life. It made us feel positive and it made us feel that we were once again in charge of ourselves. Little did we think we would experience this "down" period, even though we were told it might happen.

Getting through this period is often the key to a lifetime of sobriety. This is the period when we begin to realize the enormity of our disease and what is involved in managing it. We begin to see the long haul and we have doubts and questions and a nagging wish we could change all of it. We even begin to think we made a big mistake. We weren't really as sick as we thought we were.

These are the kind of thoughts we must overcome and it can be done by following the four suggestions above mentioned.

Perhaps it can help us to know that this is the most difficult period, that just because the first few weeks were a piece of cake, we are still a long way from recovery, but it can be within our grasp by our application of a few suggestions.

As the months go by, we will find our place and we will no longer wonder where we belong. We will no longer feel like an outsider who made a wrong decision. We will begin to feel at peace with our decision and our new way of life. The sense of belonging helps to ease us through this dark period.

For each of us, this period varies in length of time. How long it lasts can be controlled by us by the amount of effort we put into remaining positive as much of the time as we can. We can control its length by using every means available to us to keep us from turning back into the abyss of the dark days of drinking.

We can shorten this period and we can know we belong with our new friends who give us the support and encouragement we need.

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Comments from Irene:

I like this article because I speak over and over to all members that come in range of my voice to do the one very important and helpful thing that each of us must do. Jean states, "How can we help ourselves? What can we do..." Now that we begin to value what the "New Life" Program can do to direct us away from dark moments and free ourselves from cobweb blues, we begin to feel a new spirit. Jean emphasizes in this article that reading will further our new thinking just by saying, "read, read, read" and that, "This is probably the most difficult period of recovery." I agree. And, now that I'm some years down the road to sobriety, I still read to do more new habits for my new life.

I'll not ever be too old to learn from reading – especially Jean's writings, which I treasure dearly and I'll be 84 in this 2004-year.