

By not picking up that drink I've left the past where it belongs



Hardly anyone asks me to repeat columns on correctly hanging TP (toilet paper). Only a couple have requested columns on my Siamese cat, Henrietta. But a column that was first published in 1975, "Reasons I Don't Drink," has been gratifyingly requested often and used across the nation in alcoholism recovery. Apparently, many identify. I share it again.

"How come you don't drink anymore?" a friend asked.

"Drink?" I replied. "I drink...coffee, milk, tea, soda pop, water, fruit juices, milkshakes."

"I mean drink, you know, booze," he said.

"Oh booze. No, I don't drink booze any longer. You're right," I said. "I couldn't trust it any more. It turned on me. Once it was my friend and it became my enemy."

"Maybe you got a bad batch," he suggested.

"No, the sauce is the same, but I changed. I learned I have an illness called alcoholism. My tolerance for alcohol was high, peaked and then nose-dived. I couldn't admit I couldn't handle it. I became powerless over the stuff, my life was unmanageable, but I continued to deny it. I compared myself to other heavy drinkers until I learned that the disease of alcoholism doesn't come in bottles, it comes in people. I happen to be one of those people. I had to get honest with myself."

"Sounds pretty confusing to me," my friend commented.

"You think you're confused, you should have known me when I was drinking booze," I said. "I drank for happiness and became sad; I drank for joy and became miserable; I drank to be outgoing and became self-centered; I drank for sociability and became argumentative and lonely.

I drank for sophistication and became crude and obnoxious; I drank for friendship and made enemies; I drank to soften sorrow and wallowed in self-pity; I drank for sleep and got no rest.

"I drank for strength and felt weak; I drank to prove my masculinity and it sapped my potency; I drank medicinally and got sick; I drank because I thought my job called for it and lost my job.

"I drank for relaxation and got the shakes; I drank for confidence and became uncertain; I drank for courage and became afraid; I drank for assurance and became doubtful.

"I drank to stimulate thought and blacked out; I drank to make conversation and lost my tongue; I drank for warmth and lost my cool; I drank for coolness and lost my warmth.

"I drank to feel heavenly and came to know hell; I drank to forget and became haunted with memories; I drank for freedom and became a slave; I drank for power and became powerless; I drank to cope with life and invited death.

"I drank because I had the right to drink and everything turned out wrong."

"Gosh," said my friend, "you'd have to drink a lot to get in that shape."

"Just one," I told him. "The first one can lead me to drunkenness. All I have to do is stay away from that first drink, one day at a time. One is too many and a thousand is not enough. If I pick up that first drink my past becomes my future."

"So that's why you don't drink anymore," he said.

"Yep. I've got a new rule for myself. I don't drink while I'm sober. And it works. I've got personal proof. I haven't been drunk since I quit drinking."