

# **My Dad is a Pastor and ... I am an Alcoholic**

by Carey Davidson

*A preacher's kid talks about the effects of alcohol in his early life, the struggle to overcome it, and how others in pastoral life have similar family issues.*

I remember the first time I said "I am an alcoholic" out loud. I was in high school standing alone in front of a bathroom mirror making faces at myself as I repeated those four words over and over. I knew I was in love with alcohol. I had just taken a 20 question test on substance abuse and answered 10 yes, not knowing that any more than three "yes" answers indicated I had a problem.

I didn't know that I would crush and embarrass those who loved me, ruin a lucrative television advertising career, lose most things that mattered, accrue three DUI's, be hospitalized numerous times and have an armed standoff with the police and end up in jail looking at more than 20 felony charges to hit my "bottom." It was from "my bottom" that I would have to look up and find my loving God I had pushed away for so many years.

Face it. It's tough being a pastor's kid. My dad was a well respected founding pastor of one of the early megachurches. My mother started what was to become one of the largest women's ministries in the Southwest. Neither drinks. We PKs have our own set of crises and dilemmas that other kids don't have. I now can see that we have many opportunities that other kids don't have.

I committed my life to Christ at an early age. I went to camps, sang in choirs. I went on overseas mission trips and was active in the church until about midway through high school. My becoming alcoholic resulted from choices I made. At some point, regardless of any parent's personal convictions and skills, a child, even a PK, will make decisions on his own.

## **Couldn't go to father**

pastor for guidance and confidential sharing, as a PK I felt I couldn't exercise that option. I was always curious. When I would go over to friends' homes for sleepovers, I would watch my friends' parents coddle, mix and ritualistically partake of that magic liquid that was never in my home. I would watch the friends' parents change in the next few hours. They seemed to relax, laugh more easily and hold the secret to this transformation in a glass in their hand. They didn't go to church.

I began experimental drinking around 11. I stole it from my friend's parent's liquor cabinets. I quickly developed a liking for the effects of alcohol, the feelings and sensations that it gave me, never the taste. By high school, I was binge drinking on Friday and Saturday nights with "the gang." On Sundays, I would put on my "church face" and struggle through services. I always thought that I was being "bad." A practicing sinner, I was learning to lead a double life. I was new, fun, exciting and I was good at it. I relished being labeled "crazy fun." I hated it when they asked, "Your dad is a pastor and you act like that!" I knew what to expect from church: the same routine each week, Christian life was fairly predictable. On the other hand, I never knew where a night "on the town" was going to end up and a sense of adventure always called.

## **Church denies pleasure**

I felt pulled and angry, confused and enlightened. How could the "church people" deny themselves the simple pleasures provided by alcohol? Didn't Jesus turn water into wine? I knew from my experiences that booze made me feel good. All was right within me when I felt the sense of intoxication begin to wash over me. I thought that this is what living was about, and concluded

that the church's role was to deny pleasure in this life and look forward to a good heaven. Sinners just have more fun, I reasoned.

I drank to get drunk. I started having blackouts in high school, drinking on the weekends. I would wake up wondering what I had done. I was crossing the invisible line into alcoholism.

I watched the inner working of the church my father pastored. I knew that there were some people whose lives have been affected in a most negative way by alcohol: That "poor lady" who came to church alone with her kids because her husband "had a problem" with alcohol; the kids who got dropped off because the parents were having a "problem" with alcohol.

I heard about the couples that came in for counseling where one or the other had "issues" with "the bottle." I saw people lower their voices to hush tones, make quick glances around for security purposes, and then say their loved one is an alcoholic or drug addict. I thought "poor them" they just don't know how to drink successfully. It would be different for me.

My drinking really began to progress in college, where I started exhibiting many of the classic symptoms of an alcoholic, but it was fun and I was a young ski instructor and playing rugby. I was still functioning pretty well. I drank as a young man for fun and conviviality. I had a very active, even vibrant life throughout my early twenties. However very slowly, so much as to be imperceptible, I felt an emptiness in my life. I was trying to fill the God shaped hole in my soul with alcohol.

Drinking alone was my way. Shame and guilt ate at me like a cancer on steroids. I knew that God loved me, yet I didn't feel worthy of any love, let alone love from a Creator. When I would drink, I wouldn't have to think.

### **Slurred speech tip-off**

I don't think my family knew the true extent of my drinking – and neither did I. However it had become obvious that there was a problem in spite of my constant denial. I lived 700 miles away and they could still hear the slurring during phone conversations or "forgetting" things we had talked about. I would tell lies and then have to lie to cover up my lies. I couldn't keep up with them all.

I had moved to Chicago to "start over" in life – a better job, new people and a new place. In recovery this is called a geographical change. I would start over fresh and life would be better I thought. When I lost that job, my father helped me move back to Denver. In a few months, I had lost my job at the new station, didn't go to church and was headed off to my first in patient treatment for alcoholism.

Then my dad had a devastating stroke. Here was my hero, a man of God lying helplessly on a hospital table unable to move his right side or utter a word. The man I went to hospitals with growing up to give others hope, inspiration and kindness was now the one who has been stricken. If a man dedicates his entire lifework to God and this is the payback, I was angry. I hit the booze with a newfound fury.

My family tried various methods to help me. From direct questions and calling the few friends I had left, to flying out to participate in an intervention mishandled by a therapist/counselor. I know that they never stopped praying for me. I would bristle inside at the end of a conversation when they would remind me that they were praying for me, yet deep in my soul I knew God was the only one who could save me. My life revolved around a bottle of vodka. I slept with a loaded gun under my pillow.

### **Addiction is insanity**

Insane thinking seems normal to the alcoholic. I am sitting in jail facing time in prison. My parents didn't bail me out, a decision that probably saved my life. Insanity, that's what addiction is. It doesn't just go away. It requires help from God, fellowship with others in recovery and healthy actions on my part and others. That's what it took for me to recover.

I have learned people in recovery are not “bad” people that need to get “good,” they are in fact sick people who need to begin healing. The Great Physician has the power to heal. That I am not drinking is nothing short of a miracle. I am given a daily reprieve from my disease based upon my conscious contact with God, maintaining a healthy spiritual condition and continue contact with others in recovery.

Though my disease almost killed me, recovery brought me closer to God and my pastor father, my women’s ministries mother and wonderful sister. I know that they will not every understand every aspect of my disease. In fact, I think sometimes it is better they don’t.

The key point that we all agree on is that I was filling a God shaped hole in my soul with alcohol. My family accepts who I am and what I am today. I know that without their ongoing love and support, their living testaments to God’s goodness, I probably would be dead or in prison. I am given a daily reprieve from my disease.

**Carey Davidson, Prescott, AZ is now a professional interventionist.  
He is helping others and their families find their way into recovery.  
A fuller account of his testimony appears at [www.interventionasap.com](http://www.interventionasap.com).**

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