

Senior Sobriety, or "It's Never Too Late"

By Jerry Braun

At age 66, after 19 days in the 'psych' ward at Marin General Hospital (14 of which were blacked out), I was released to Mike Neustadt and escorted to my first "Other Bar" meeting, and from there to the Knolls. I was not ecstatic at the prospect of spending 28 days there. Indeed, I boasted of not being a "model prisoner" and told several physicians I was incarcerated at "Stalag 17" or the Gulag Archipelago" And I thought that just because I had attained success in the legal profession and fancied myself an "intellectual," I knew just about everything there was to know about all things. It took me nearly two weeks to clear my head (I was quite ill in the hospital). Then I started to get a glimmer about alcoholism and step one-although I still thought I was different. It showed that by announcing that I was not an alcoholic but rather was "addicted to alcohol" believing that would set me apart from the ordinary drinker. It was only later that year after I had attended a good many *Other Bar* and Aftercare meetings, that I was prepared to own up to my alcoholism (and my non-uniqueness) and announce "I'm Jerry, I'm an alcoholic" I now say that at every meeting.

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While I was happy to leave the Knolls and return to "civilian life," I faced the prospect of a totally sober non-alcoholic life with great trepidation. My entire Professional and personal life for the preceding 55 years was alcohol-based. Initially a so-called "social drinker," at about age 40 I entered that twilight zone between drinking for fun and

relaxation, and dependence on alcohol, which inevitably develops into full-blown alcoholism. Incidentally there has never been a trace of this disease anywhere else in my family (I am sure of that after writing my father's biography). After more than 46 months of sobriety (as of this writing), my life has changed dramatically: I lost twenty pounds, my blood pressure and Cholesterol dropped sharply, and I threw away my cane. I play tennis regularly, work with a trainer twice a week, travel extensively and I attend meetings in every country I visit. Professionally although theoretically semi-retired - I have accomplished new things, and was recently recognized at the United States Supreme Court with one of the highest professional awards an American lawyer can receive.

Life is good, as is often said, but by no means perfect. I still struggle with some of the Steps, particularly making that elusive "conscious contact with a higher power," but I continue to search, take a regular inventory, make amends and (most important) render service in anyway I can, I turned 70 in December 1999, -restored to good health. Because I am sober, I can meet and deal with life's 'myriad problems -and help others deal with theirs.

There are many reasons why I find myself in this fortunate position.

After a near-death experience, a reluctant journey to the Knolls, and rebellious and intellectually arrogant attitude about recovery, I started listening and absorbing what I heard and finally came to grips with my powerlessness over alcohol I owe that awakening to Mike Neustadt (I shall always be in his debt), to *The Other Bar*, to all of the staff at the Knolls, to its alumni and newcomers I see and meet at aftercare in San Geromino, to the holiday meals, at the Knolls and kitchen duty under Dee on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day - for all of which I am eternally grateful.

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