

INEBRIATION,

INTERVENTION

& INSIGHT

By
J. GARY GWILLIAM
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA



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I. INTRODUCTION

I am an old time trial lawyer. A lawyer out of the 60's who has been trying cases for over 40 years. I have tried over 180 jury trials to verdict, almost all of them have been civil cases for plaintiffs.

Almost all trial lawyers of my generation liked to drink. It was part of who we were as courtroom warriors. Tough, macho and manly (there were very few women lawyers in the early years.). Times have changed a bit. But there is still a lot of drinking and not just among trial lawyers. Many lawyers get caught up in this insidious habit.

Lawyers have among the highest rates of alcoholism, depression, and suicide of any other profession. Between 50 and 80 percent of all lawyers who have discipline problems have substance abuse problems. There is no clear answer why this is the case. Perhaps it is due to the tough conflictual nature of our profession. Maybe it's part of our social nature. It certainly is a reaction to stress.

Here is my story. As a kid I was a wild, hard drinking high school gang member who later transitioned into a hard drinking wild fraternity member. It was easy to then become a wild, hard drinking trial lawyer. However, it wasn't the social drinking that got me into trouble. No, it was drinking for a different reason. It was drinking for stress. As my career progressed, I felt I needed a drink every day to reduce the stress of a hard difficult profession. Then I headed down the long (or sometime short) road to alcoholic dependence, alcohol abuse and alcoholism.

II. GETTING A WINNING VERDICT IN MY PERSONAL LIFE

A. Chapter 1: The Verdict

In my recent book, *Getting a Winning Verdict in My Personal Life: A Trial Lawyer Finds His Soul*, I describe my descent down that long road by describing how I reacted to a case I lost in the 70's by wanting to go off and drink alone in my car.

B. Chapter 19: Burning out in the Fast Lane

However, the problem continued and by the mid-80's I describe my condition as follows:

I could still function at the office, but at this point, even my law partners were worried about the impact the alcohol was having on my life. Liz (my wife) grew increasingly concerned. Looking back now, it seems so simple: I just had to quit drinking. But at the time, I didn't want to quit drinking. Everything in my entire life that I had ever enjoyed had involved drinking: my wild times in high school, my great days in my fraternity, and the good times with my hard-drinking trial lawyer friends. Every football game I had attended as an Oakland Raiders season ticket holder involved booze. Every card game, including bridge and dominoes, all centered on drinking. Everything about my life involved drinking. I wasn't sure I could make love without being under the influence. If I didn't drink, I couldn't be happy. At least that was what I told myself.

I knew I was in trouble. But I wasn't about to pray to God. I wasn't sure that was the way to go and I didn't want to be a hypocrite. I had *never* quit drinking. Not even for one day. So going on the wagon was not an option. Maybe I just didn't want to quit. Maybe I was weak. But I was stubbornly holding on to my deteriorating lifestyle. My second marriage was failing. I was afraid of losing my daughters, whom I loved deeply, even though I wasn't sure I was being a good father to them.

I knew Liz was thinking about leaving me. I really didn't blame her. There were too many late nights with lipstick on my collar and too many of my phony, stupid lies that demeaned us both. There was too much irritability caused by too much alcohol. I was stuck. I needed help. I was literally drowning myself. I wasn't concerned about my liver. If I didn't quit drinking, I could die. I am not sure I really cared at that point. I was depressed and afraid. Afraid to lose my lifestyle. Afraid to lose my family. Afraid to lose my life. *What could I do?*

(Getting a Winning Verdict in My Personal Life: A Trial Lawyer Finds His Soul, Chapter 19, Burning Out in the Fast Lane, pg. 141)

C. Chapter 20: Intervention

Things weren't going well at the office. Things weren't going well at home. And things weren't going well for me personally. However, about that time something dramatic happened that changed my life. I describe this in Chapter 20 of my book entitled "Intervention".

The answer to my dilemma came with sudden swiftness. It is a day I will never forget: June 11, 1984. It was a Saturday night and Liz had set up a dinner with some of our friends, The Potters. I really liked them. John and I both loved drinking, and we often spent New Year's Eve together and had a lot of fun. I was looking forward to having dinner and drinks with them down at a hotel on Hegenberger Road in Oakland. It was an easy place for both of us to meet. Liz planned the dinner for 5:30 p.m. It was a bit early, but that was okay with me. That meant a little more time in the bar to drink before dinner. We walked into the hotel right on time and I turned to head into the bar.

"No, we are going this way", Liz said as she intercepted me. "They are meeting us in the coffee shop."

Coffee shop? It didn't compute for a minute. *Why are we meeting in the coffee shop?*

The coffee shop was deserted except for four men sitting at a table over in the corner. As I approached, I recognized some of them. One man was Bill Gibbs, my former law partner. He had returned from Texas and had remained a good friend. Another man was Edwin (Ed) Train Caldwell, a trial lawyer I knew from San Francisco. Burke M. Critchfield was also there. He was a lawyer in the Pleasanton-Livermore area whom I knew casually. There was also a stranger with them. I approached the table with a sense of confusion and rising concern.

Liz turned to me. She looked serious as she said "Gary these men want to talk to you about drinking." I was puzzled.

"So do you want to have a drink?" I asked.

No. They didn't want to have a drink. That wasn't what it was about. It was something that I had never heard of – *an intervention*. This was a term that I have come to learn well, since then.

With some reluctance, I sat down and heard them go around the table and tell me how serious my drinking problem was. They were honestly concerned for me. I was drinking too much and everyone knew it. I was even passing out at parties now and then and getting in trouble at work if I drank at lunch. Liz had asked them to meet with me and see if they could get me into a program to quit drinking. I sat quietly as I listened to them. I was becoming embarrassed as they berated me.

I blew up and looked at them.

“What right do you have to talk to me about drinking?” I demanded.

“Are any of you better lawyers than I am? Are you getting better verdicts than I am?”

No.

“Then what the hell right do you have to sit down and tell me that I should go into a program and quit drinking? Quite frankly, it is none of your business.”

I stood up in anger and stomped out of the room. Liz followed quietly behind me. The Potters weren't coming. She had lied to me. She set me up. I was ashamed and full of self-righteous anger. We drove home in stony silence. When we got home it was still early.

I distinctly remember turning to Liz and saying, “Well you don't expect me not to have a drink after a thing like that, do you?”

I went into the kitchen and fixed myself a stiff scotch and soda. I retreated to the front room there alone, thinking and drinking. I nursed the drink and before long, I started a second one.

But something had happened. They had hit me where it hurt – my pride. Their public humiliation of me pierced by self-inflated ego. It felt like I had been slapped across the face. Obviously I wasn't kidding anyone about how serious my drinking was. I knew Liz was ready to leave me. She was sitting in the other room, crying softly. After an hour or so, I walked in and sat down next to her on the bed.

“Liz, I don't want you to leave me,” I began. “I know that I am drinking too much and I am going to quit. Starting tomorrow, I will quit drinking.”

Although she was skeptical, she believed me and we made up. Within the next week or so, we had planned to go to Hawaii and we were able to take off and have an enjoyable vacation. This was the first vacation I had ever had without alcohol. We had a wonderful time.

(Chapter 20, Intervention, pg. 143)

III. LESSONS FROM LOSING

Quitting drinking really wasn't that easy. I did slip back into drinking a year or so later when I was President of the California Trial Lawyers Association under a lot of stress with the no fault insurance initiatives of 1988. However, I continued to have support and am now totally free of alcohol.

I have spoken to lawyer's groups for years and have honestly told my story. I recommend Alcoholics Anonymous as the best group to assist in alcohol recovery, even though I have not been anonymous in my recovery. However, most people with alcohol problems handle them privately and anonymously.

IV. CONCLUSION

Fortunately, we lawyers have something that is very helpful to those of us who have these problems. It is called The Other Bar – a confidential organization that will assist anyone who has an alcohol or substance abuse problem. If you, your friends, colleagues, or partners, are in need, please contact them. You can reach The Other Bar at hotline: 1-800-222-9767, website: www.otherbar.org