

Mindy William – Testimony on Addiction

Shopping list: vodka, orange juice, cups. Equipment needed: my college mini-fridge in my dorm.
Outcome: disaster.

In most (if not all) states the legal drinking age is twenty-one. Nothing new there. I grew up in a family and my parents never drank to my knowledge. It was an amazing heritage to give my brothers and me.

Fast forward. I'm a sophomore in college, attending a prestigious liberal arts college in Santa Barbara, California. I'm a fairly typical college student: taking a full class load, studying, trying to equate how these classes and syllabi are going to enhance my life after graduation. I was fairly sure that the formula worked: you did the work and they let you don a cap and gown. Then you landed a great job and were able to provide for yourself.

Credit card offers at that time came unsolicited in the mail. I was employed in the Admission Office as a student tour guide, giving up some of my afternoons and Saturday mornings to give campus tours to visiting interested students and their parents. I filled out a couple of credit card applications and thought: well this will be easy. Once I graduate and get a great job, I will just pay them off in full. Piece of cake.

My credit cards offered me privacy, a privacy that I craved growing up in a fairly strict family and community. They were a passport to my undoing: alcohol purchases.

It's a nice evening and the girls and the resident advisor from my suite are going to the beach East Beach to hang out and drink some wine coolers. Alcohol was not allowed on campus: heaven's no; however, legal aged drinking wasn't really addressed too openly, UNLESS you came back to campus intoxicated. That was never a good thing. Drunks are typically stealthy people anyhow.

The sun has set, the ocean's waves are crashing onto shore. It's a beautiful evening. My friends had purchased two four-packs of wine coolers in various spiffy flavors. Everyone else had one. I had three and wanted more. It was my first time drinking and I loved the way it made me feel, the way it helped me distance myself from the feelings I had inside. I was hooked.

Thus began my downward spiral that year. I used my credit cards to lure my "friends" into going out to hang out at various restaurants or at Longboard's, a restaurant/bar on the wharf in Santa Barbara. I'd offer to buy their dinner, then proceed to drink my fill of Long Island iced teas then ask for them to drive me back to campus in my car. They always did. I used people to drink. At the time I did not see that my addiction overpowered my sense of decency. I was driven to drink once I took that first sip.

Some people can casually drink, a glass of wine at dinner, a cocktail with the office folks after work. Not me. I can't have a drop. Not now. Not ever again. If I do, my house of cards will come falling down around me and I will sink into my own personal abyss.

Thanksgiving break came that year. I was unable to travel back home to Leawood, Kansas where I lived and instead stayed in the dorm, one of two students (no resident advisors or assistants) to remain in the

dorm. I settled in for a weekend of being comatose: turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and vodka and orange juice. My mini-fridge accommodated my vodka and my OJ and I drank every day that entire weekend, winding up drunk every single night. It was one of the lowest times of my life.

I had a good friend in New Dorm (it had yet to be named or have a benefactor donate to put their name on our campus's newest dorm). I had one friend who watched me. She was really laid back, easy to talk with and relate to. One day she confronted me about my drinking. We were sitting on the front lawn of our dorm, talking. She asked me point blank about my drinking and then proceeded to tell me that she herself was a recovering alcoholic. Alcoholic. I knew the word. My family had alcoholism in its background somewhere and that's why my parents chose not to have alcohol in our home growing up.

My friend talked to me and listened as I told her of how powerless I was over this very addictive thing called alcohol. She related to me some of her struggles. I mentioned that I felt like I was standing on the high dive about to jump off and she said "I'll jump off with you." She then invited me to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group with her in downtown Santa Barbara that night.

"Are there any new comers tonight" the man leading the AA meeting asked. I gathered whatever internal resources I had at the time, rose shakily to my feet and spoke out "My name is Mindy and I'm an alcoholic." With those powerful words, my world would begin to change for the better.

I began to attend AA meetings every night. When most students would enjoy the sun and surf in the afternoon, I was busy studying so that I could go off unnoticed every evening to attend an AA meeting either on campus or in Summerland, California, which was right down the road a ways. I had a little sobriety under my belt. I started working the steps. I made some progress. I was hopeful.

That following summer I worked at a camp for inner city kids in Denver, Colorado, called The Sky's the Limit. I lived on the sponsoring organization's property with some of the other counselors and each day we would pour our lives into these kids that were not much different than us. They just happened to be born in a zip code filled with neighborhood crime, violence, drugs and alcohol. It was a fantastic summer, a pivotal point in my young life to that point. I learned what it meant to be a servant leader.

Another night. My troubled other counselors and I were at the local laundromat doing our laundry, a weekly event. Next door was the neighborhood liquor store. My friends suggested that I try some malt liquor which I did. I don't remember the brand but I remembered that it got me drunk very quickly. It's pitch dark. We are on a dirt road somewhere in the suburbs of Denver. There's a bunch of us there, hanging out with the car running, stereo blazing and the air was filled with merriment. It was one of the moments where God allowed me to reach my bottom rung. I wander off down the road with friends, then the next thing I know I'm laying face down in the dirt, with vomit underneath me. I was so drunk that I barely knew who I was or what was going on around me. It scared me very much. That was the last drink.

The following fall I poured myself back into my studies and to attending AA meetings. I met a great friend who I'll call "J" (we AA members like our anonymity). After my first AA meeting on campus at our health center, he handed me a torn piece of yellow lined legal paper with his phone number on it and the words "call anytime" written below. Call I did. He and I were part of the same AA group that met twice weekly during the week. He had more sobriety than I and we were both desperate to hang onto this newly found gift, our sobriety, so we both grabbed it with both hands and hung on for dear life. We sought out the counsel of an older couple who had many years of sobriety to be our AA sponsors.

My AA sponsor, "J" would tell me that I'm the first person she's ever sponsored who had a 12-page, typed fourth step. It took us a couple of hours to go through one night I think as we sat in a McDonald's parking lot in one of our cars. It was the beginning of healing for me. I had to take a look at those who I had harmed and begin to think about making amends to them (the 5th step).

I drank because I was desperately depressed and didn't know it. I just knew that I was really unhappy and that was a way for me to mask the pain and treat it with a smooth cool drink of liquor. Drinking is such a temporary fix (if you can even call it that). During this time I missed a lot of classes. I missed two straight weeks of classes. My home was my bunkbed and my meals were delivered from various friends who would pick up food at the dining commons and bring it back to me. No one knew what was going on. One night the phone rang so I climbed down from my bed or off my thrift store gold sofa and answered the phone. It was the Dean of Students. The DEAN was calling me! She said that one of my professors was worried about me and wondered if there was anything she or her office could do to help.

To this day, I have narrowed it down to two professors who could have placed that call for help to the Dean and to them I am forever grateful. The advantage of going to a small college is that you are not just a student ID number; your classes are taught by professors and doctors themselves. You are a person, a whole person and are addressed as such. My concerned professor helped to save my life that day.

My heart and mind and faith begin to heal, learn and grown sitting in those many meetings over the next year. I learned as much about my faith through those meetings as I did by attending church that year. God used the folks at AA in my life in a powerful way. One friend and I are still friends and keep each other abreast of how our lives and family are doing to this day. I cherish his friendship like gold. He knows who he is. Someday God will give him crowns in Heaven for his help to me and countless others over the years.