

# Alcoholism: a killer disease without a cure

By David Brown  
Of the Emerald

During the Prohibition, there was an Oklahoma whiskey so cheap that "for 50 cents you could buy a pint. And you poured the top off of it because that was the fuel oil," Bill B. insists to an attentive audience packed into a high school cafeteria.

"You forced it down and said, 'God, that's good,'" he continues through a shuddering grimace.

Alcoholism, a disease without cure, is what bonded together speakers and their audience in a warm atmosphere of laughter, smoke and camaraderie at an evening speaker's meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

And because of those feelings, Bill B. is a "grateful alcoholic."

A friend once told him 'AA was a journey, not a destination.' He adds "you ain't never going to get there, but what a fantastic journey."

Before he joined — on April Fool's Day, 1950 — "I was all front and no back," laughs Bill, another speaker. "The things I said at the time I thoroughly meant." But one drink and it all went out the window, he says.

"We all drink for different reasons but we become alcoholics for the same reason. We've got an allergy of the body that gets coupled with an obsession of the mind."

The most important fact for the public to realize is that al-

Like many other diseases, alcoholism touches all segments of society. Serenity Lane's patient list includes physicians, nurses, professors and University students.

Generally, patients come to Serenity Lane through intervention by friends or family. "To do a good intervention, it takes more than one person. It takes a body of people," well versed in what they're going to do and how they're going to do it, O'Connor says.

"You need somebody willing to take that risk. It's tough love. It's risky, stressful. It's hard work," she says.

Addicts must be helped "to create a crisis for themselves, so to speak, to get them into treatment. And then, when they make that commitment you don't let them off the hook."

"Well, I need to finish this term." Wrong! Because all you're doing is pouring money down the tube. You're not doing well in school. You're going to do worse," she says.

Although the illness is not the addict's fault, it is the addict's responsibility to get out of it, O'Connor says.

Treatment at Serenity Lane is "strictly therapy and education." The 30-day program includes two classes and two therapy sessions per day. An ongoing support system is formed following release, O'Connor says.

But the alcoholic is not necessarily the one with the



Photo by Bob Baker

This new Raleigh Hills facility, like Serenity Lane, is one of the 30 organizations in the Eugene-Springfield area offering alcoholism treatment programs.

Through Al-Anon, Diana came to grips with the fact that she doesn't like Billy when he's drinking. She learned to see him as an individual who must deal with his own life and problems, and treat him accordingly. She no longer bails him out or covers for him.

Billy still drinks after quitting high school, has been in jail a number of times, ending up in violent, drunken confrontations, she says. But he has begun to look at himself and take responsibility, she says.

Co-alcoholics live a superficial life under stress. They live with resentment, denied of the one they love, feeling hate, feeling jealous of the bottle and the money spent. They feel guilty as they lie to the addict's boss, covering for him.

"You don't feel close to (addicts) because they don't want anybody to feel close to them."

"All that needs to be dealt with when the addicted person is getting well... so that there is no garbage left over. When you are with an alcoholic, you are

not communicating," O'Connor says.

The third week of Serenity Lane's 30-day treatment plan is family week.

"You have to be able to remove the alcohol. You have to say 'here's my dad that I love and care about and there's the alcohol.' Take the alcohol away and you've still got this man,"

ternative treatment program.

O'Connor agrees. "A very very low percentage of people who are alcoholics get treatment."

If "you're not sure where you want to go with (alcohol), or what's happening with it," then Drinking Decisions attempts to provide the information needed to make a decision, Shannon-May says.

**'We all drink for different reasons but we become alcoholics for the same reason.'**

coholism is a progressive illness which kills people every day, says Lois O'Connor, patient coordinator for Serenity Lane Alcoholism Treatment Center.

"That's what we confront in treatment, recognizing that they're dealing with an illness, realizing that it's not because they're a useless weak person," O'Connor says.

problem. "A problem doesn't cause them to drink. That's a myth. A chemical imbalance causes them to drink," O'Connor says.

Al-Anon, a branch of AA, deals with the problems of co-alcoholics.

During the speaker's meeting, Diana talked of her son, Billy (not their real names).

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O'Connor says.

Serenity Lane also has an outpatient clinic for those who are too busy to stay the 30 days.

Despite the numerous treatment options in Eugene, nearly 90 percent of those needing help don't get it, estimates Jackie Shannon-May, program manager and counselor at Drinking Decisions a local al-

The program offers classes through Larè Community College for adults and youth. Classes are also offered for parents of drinking youth.

About 30 organizations in the Eugene-Springfield area offer help through a variety of approaches tailored to individuals and their special circumstances.

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