

Alcohol Abuse

How Is It Touching This Community?

The man awoke. It was slow at first, but reality began to gradually filter into his mind. An awful taste in his mouth began to open his awareness to vague pictures of the night before. He was now conscious of a headache which was at migraine intensity.

For at least fifteen full minutes he didn't move. He knew almost by instinct that something was drastically wrong. With a start he realized that the cot he was lying on was totally unfamiliar and the uneasiness as to his whereabouts seemed to add to the headache.

A bolt of fear swept through him as he realized that the light coming from the hallway displayed shadows of bars across the concrete floor. Slowly and painfully he moved himself to a sitting position on the cot. It didn't take long before he realized where he was, and he buried his face in his hands.

It had all started out as a fun evening at the home of some friends after a long week at work. There were many friends at the party and he remembered that each couple had brought more than enough liquor. He vaguely recalled a fight between two friends.

Then he remembered police, his wrists being cuffed, and being shoved into the back seat of a squad car. There was no recollection of anything after that.

His mind swept over the whole thing again, and this time a vivid picture came into focus. Three men were holding him as he saw his wife lying face down in the snow, face battered and bleeding. Trying to move, she finally rolled over on her back....

A surge of agony went through him as he uttered over and over again, "Oh my God, Oh my God." He rolled his head from side to side as if trying to erase the whole thing from his mind.

He lay there in deep remorse and self-condemnation for about an hour before getting up and shakily walking toward the door. Feeling sick to his stomach, he held onto the bars to steady himself. He remembered how much he loved his wife and tears began to stream from his eyes. A hoarse agonized moan came from deep within as he turned back to the cot.

This was not the first time he had beaten his wife in a drunken, jealous rage. When sober he treated her gently but never talked about deep feelings. Instead he would go into long periods of brooding silence. Oh, how he knew what hurt and misery were because he often lived them. But he and his wife had shared times of happiness.

It seemed she was content not to go to parties where there was drinking involved. Maybe she knew there would usually be trouble. But he enjoyed the freedom from inhibitions that alcohol gave him. It helped him forget unpleasant things.

With his shirt sleeve he wiped his tear-stained face and tried hard to clear his mind. He experienced another fear, now. How badly is she hurt? Is she alive? He knew he would soon be told and he dreaded what he might hear.

It she's alive he vowed never to touch another drop of booze. He vowed he would leave her for her sake, so he wouldn't hurt her again. She was a pretty woman, but how does she look now? Fleeting glimpses of the penitentiary played through his mind.

Tragic story? It's happening all the time. Each alcoholic or problem drinker goes through a hell at one time or another. Some not as bad as the story, some worse.

The man in the story will drink again when he gets out of jail. Maybe not for a month or two. Then he will convince his



wife that he will be able to control his drinking, that he will not drink to get drunk. But he will, sooner or later. Both he and his wife will go through tragic times again and there is a good chance it will end in divorce.

Could this story have happened in Warm Springs? And if so, does this sort of thing happen very often?

Statistics indicate that it does, and on a larger scale than in non-Indian communities. Through sheer observation it is apparent that the abuse of alcohol is wide-spread here and that drunken behavior is generally tolerated by the community.

Sadly, alcohol is one of the few legal and addictive drugs which is easily available and condoned by society. Yet the abuse of alcohol is highly destructive in terms of the individual, the family, relationships within the community, and morale.

And on a widespread scale, it threatens the very fiber that binds a society or culture. It creates a breakdown in the perpetuation of a way of life, destroying it from within. The most important function of a society, if it is to survive, is the proper instruction and care of new members — the youth.

So one must ask, "What are our children learning from the adults?" Are they learning values which will instill in them a sense of worth and self-esteem? Are their parents and other adult members of the community setting examples that the youth can respect, admire, and relate to?

Alcohol abuse takes its toll most visibly in less subtle ways. Injuries resulting from drunken rages and falls, automobile accidents, beatings and fights, are the most common. And last year half the deaths among tribal members were related to alcohol abuse. (See chart)

The average life span among American Indians is forty-four years, and the number one reason is alcoholism and alcohol abuse.

Eighty-five percent of convicted American Indians in penitentiaries across the nation have committed their crimes while under the influence of alcohol. In Warm Springs alone, 53 percent of the arrests in 1977 were alcohol related.

Violence is so common among people while intoxicated because emotions come out drug-affected and exaggerated. Reason goes out the window.

Alcohol abuse touches almost everybody in one sad way or another here on the Warm Springs Reservation. But why is abuse of alcohol and other drugs such a prevalent phenomenon here?

What are the underlying causes and how can one sort out the truths from the myths on this unhappy subject?

These questions as well as how you can tell if you might have an alcohol problem will be discussed in Part-Two of this series in the next issue of Spilyay Tymoo.

Next: The Whys and Hows of alcoholism.

ALCOHOL RELATED DEATHS WARM SPRINGS RESERVATION 1970 TO PRESENT

YEAR	TOTAL DEATHS	ALCOHOL RELATED DEATHS	PERCENTAGE
1970	29	13	45
1971	20	8	40
1972	17	8	47
1973	29	11	38
1974	25	7	28
1975	28	16	57
1976	22	7	32
1977	28	14	50
1978	7 (To Date)	4	57

Self Help Groups

For Alcohol and Drug Problems

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Meetings
Tuesday evening, 7:30 p.m.
Friday evening, 7:30 p.m.
At Treatment Center (Old Girls Dorm)

Women's AA Group
Monday evenings, 7:30 p.m.
At VFW Hall

Men's AA Group
Call Walter Quinn 553-1161, Ext 205

Alateen Group
Wednesday evenings, 7:00 p.m.
For more information call Anita Davis or Art McConville at 553-1161, Ext. 205

Alanon Group
Tuesday evenings, 7:30 p.m.
At Treatment Center

(Note: Alateen is for children and teenagers who live in a situation where there are alcohol or drug problems. They can come together to share and learn ways to cope with the problem. It is a fellowship for those who share common problems.)

Alanon is for spouses, both men and women, of alcoholics and alcohol abusers to learn to cope with the problem drinker.)