



## **Sober, Stable, and Sane**

By Diane Mintz

I learned that I had a problem with addiction in a mental hospital. I finally agreed to commit myself after two months of battling a debilitating depression. I simply saw myself as a fun-loving woman who enjoyed a good party. Besides, I was twenty-two and legal to drink. I ignored the fact that it had been a big part of my life since I was sixteen. Ultimately, it was painful broken marriage engagement that landed me in the hospital. It

was actually the second time we had called off the wedding. Well, the third time if you count when the church burnt down.

Suicidal thoughts weighed heavily on my tortured mind. It got worse in the hospital because I felt like I would forever have “mental patient” branded on my forehead. A mental patient with a secondary serious problem without a solution! You see, they didn’t provide treatment for addiction on the psych ward. They left me to figure that one out on my own.

My solution was to end my life. I stole my dad’s pain pills and went to a hotel room. If the combination of capsules and Coors didn’t kill me, they would get me numb enough to carry out my main plan – to slash my wrist. It was a genuine miracle that I survived.

It was no surprise that I returned to the temporary fix of illicit substances and alcohol. But this time I had other chemicals on board. The antidepressants together with the drug potpourri sent me soaring into my first manic episode.

The tornado ride went on for ten relentless years. I still wasn’t sure if I was a real alcoholic because I was able to control my drinking when my moods weren’t running amok. Fortunately, the only requirement for Alcoholics Anonymous was a desire to stop drinking. So I attended meetings. Then I encountered twelve-steppers who tried to convince me not to take my mood stabilizing psychotropic medications. They believed, “A drug is a drug.”

I was in and out of AA, skipping steps, missing steps, side-stepping, and half-stepping on a rapidly revolving dance floor that spun me round and round. I was alternately drinking, using, depressed or manic. I inevitably wound up back where I started. Dual diagnosis treatment was what I needed, but it was unheard of at the time.

If wish I had realized that I needed to be sober *whether or not* I was an alcoholic because drinking was dangerous with my brain chemistry. I simply could not balance my

moods when I drank and did drugs. An AA member helped me to say that I had a kind of allergy to alcohol and drugs before I could say I was an alcoholic. That helped me stay away from friends who didn't respect my allergy. Everyone knows to be careful around someone with peanut allergies because bad things happen to them when they come in direct contact. It was the same with me and alcohol.

The other significant key sounded simple, but it was hard! Honesty. It may seem hopeless to suffer from an incurable mental disorder and the disease of addiction, but the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous told me I could recover *if I could be rigorously honest*. It was true.

After many failed attempts, I got sober in AA in 1991. I have taken my medication faithfully and have stayed within a manageable mood zone ever since. No more hospitals or life-disrupting chaos.

For the first six months of sobriety, invitations to drink bombarded me daily. Billboards, commercials, and waiters beckoned me to join in the all-American past-time. Everyday life as a sober, sane person took some getting used to after ten years of being in an altered state of mind from drugs, alcohol, or exploding brain chemistry. It was a terribly uncomfortable awakening to real life.

When my compulsion to drink finally lifted and the stink of monkey's breath got out of my face, I felt liberated. But my struggles weren't over. Two years sane and sober, I met Greg in a twelve-step program. Greg had a 'mysterious' mental illness that was not correctly diagnosed until after we were married. But, that's another story. One so unique I had commit to full disclosure so I could publish our story, "[In Sickness and in Mental Health](#)."\* I am now proud to share what was once shameful.

Today Greg and I have a ridiculously good life together despite our history with dual diagnoses. We have overcome many challenges. We have two awesome kids, a beautiful home, many close friends and a loving family. We own and operate an IT company, which we started in 2005. We are very active in our community and our church.

Our wellness is all about balance. Greg and I both require medicine and therapy along with spiritual development and growth to remain sober and sane. Recovery from these very complex illnesses requires full commitment to every aspect of treatment because there is no cure.

We are always grateful for our sobriety. Some people can't fathom the notion of living without alcohol. They ask, "Surely you can have a little celebratory champagne at a wedding, right?" Nope. For me, "One is too many and a thousand is never enough." It is the way my brain is wired. They make it very clear in AA that once we become a pickle, we can never go back to being a cucumber. I'm not embarrassed to be a pickle.

Today I am active with various mental health organizations and on three national speaker's bureaus. I am committed to saying proudly there is no shame in having my conditions. Mine is not a dreary life sentence. There is hope. Recovery does happen. With the right treatment and support, even pickles with mental illness like me can live full abundant lives.

\*Diane Mintz's book "[In Sickness and in Mental Health](#)" is available on Amazon.com.