

Addiction by Prescription

Chapter 7

A Dangerous Mix

Over the course of a one-year sabbatical, I found a new job, since I needed a good salary to care for my girls and me. Ironically, I landed a job as director of planning and development of the B.C. Liquor Distribution Branch. Free time had not been my friend, so I now worked long hours getting oriented, traveling, visiting potential store sites and attending store openings. I was often asked to give speeches at such functions and struggled with the ethical issues. I realized that alcohol had been my enemy for years and all I could say now was "Please drink responsibly". The attitude about drinking had changed drastically in the last ten years and it was no longer smiled on as had been done a decade ago.

This new job kept me focused on my own 'getting ahead' scheme and I worked hard to maintain my independence. Our marriage was now finished and I fought for custody of the girls. We now spent time together and even managed to take a ten day holiday to Florida. I loved my new independence and was happy not to be asking for advice on such things as funding for college for the girls, and where we spent our time. There was a lot of pressure on me and I thrived under it. I was determined to succeed and keep my life on track. Some-where along the line, however, I lost my resolve regarding alcohol, and started having the odd drink socially, albeit very, very carefully. At the same time Dr. MacGillivry took me off the Valium and began prescribing Librium again. I don't know why, but I trusted him and I took my pills every day.

I worked hard through the summer of 1977 and to reward myself, planned a cruise with my sister Pat. We met in Sicily and toured Israel and its surroundings for two weeks. Although the Champaign flowed freely, I rarely touched any alcohol. I missed my daughters and called home every night. Though Pat and I had a beautiful, memorable time together, I was again feeling distant and removed from it all, somehow not really present. It was good for me to see what I had read of in the Bible, and it affected me powerfully. I struggled to let go of the grief I still felt with the loss of Derek.

Upon our return, I again felt frustrated and disheartened, although I should have felt rested and renewed. I was easily distracted, unable to concentrate for sustained periods of time, and had a terrible time getting to sleep at night. I no longer trusted my own judgment and checked and rechecked everything I did. My frustration was endless. Then in October of 1978, Dr. MacGillivray stopped issuing me Librium and started me on Serax, another tranquilizer. He assured me that the tranquilizers were necessary to *minimize* my ongoing symptoms, and keep me calm and focused. I do not recall that he ever suggested that my long term exposure to benzodiazepines might have been *increasing* my anxiety, though I now truly believe that was the case. Within two weeks of the switch to Serax,

I was back in his office, as anxious as ever, complaining that I could no longer unwind at night. I just couldn't stop my mind from running in a frantic overdrive. I felt overwhelmed and wound up. His recommendation was to continue the Serax and add Dalmine (a sleeping pill) regularly before bed. I was now medicated day and night, and looking back, I can say without hesitation that my mental functioning, temperament, memory and general awareness became

progressively worse during this period. Much later, when I was off all pills, I came across a review of information from a psychiatric study on memory and mood impairment caused by benzodiazepines where it was shown that chronic users were found to be significantly impaired, yet unaware of experiencing such problems.

With my increased intake of tranquilizers, I became generally less aware of my surroundings. I missed subtle signs of trouble, and was no longer my savvy self. My inability to feel and identify emotions was even more pronounced when it came to the emotions of others.

I lived my life on autopilot, working hard, but oblivious to much around and within me. I was easily enraged and very impulsive; I could flip from one emotional extreme to another. One night, when my girls were to spend the night with their father, I raced over to pick them up and insist that they spend the night with me. However, though Allan lived only a few minutes away, I got hopelessly lost. I got out of my car and wandered around frightened and disoriented, without a clue where I was.

Things went from bad to worse, and I regularly experienced unbearable anguish and agitation. At times, in desperation, I had a drink or two to try to alleviate this, but it only added to the dangerous mix and I became unruly and abusive. Because of this abusive behavior, Alan insisted the girls be taken from me, whereupon my Dr. wrote in my defense, that "Mrs. Gads-by has brief periods of lack of control due to her inability to metabolize alcohol. Her behavior is not linked to her use of medication, nor is it due to excessive use of alcohol." With these words, Dr. Hirt denied the enormous significance of the interaction between alcohol and tranquilizers. I later read in a book about substance abuse where the author warned "when a physician writes an alcoholic a prescription for a tranquilizer or sedative, he may in effect be signing the patient's death warrant."

As I found out much later, the two different types of benzodiazepines I had been prescribed, and faithfully took every day, affected my central nervous system in much the same way as mixing one of them with alcohol would have. There is no de-bate about this; it is an established medical fact. Yet the medical establishment consistently attributed all of my problems to emotional instability and alcohol.

Dr. Hirt insisted that I was the better parent for our daughters and Alan's request to have custody only showed that he was manipulative and uncaring. I saw Dr. Hirt as an ally and was pleased that someone saw my side of the argument. However, looking back, I find it troubling that Dr. Hirt dismissed Alan's justified concern for our children as unwarranted. He was fully aware of my deteriorating state and frequent rages.

Deb finally wearied of my behavior and moved out when she went to college, leaving Carrie alone with me. Alan moved to Vancouver, thus Carrie lost the only consistently stable influence in her day-to-day life. When in a fit of rage, I often threw things, or broke things in the house, while Carrie tried desperately to calm me and make me see what I was doing. When in fits like this, I often threatened to put her cat to sleep, or take away treasured possessions as punishment. My judgment was simply awry and I didn't see it. Later, Carrie admitted that she lived in a house of "physical and verbal abuse" and was terrified of me as a child. She hated week-ends and holidays because "there was nowhere to escape"

I had my next run-in with the police, jail and the emergency room. The police called it a "hysterical rage" but the hospital personnel called it an "overdose". Dr. MacGillivray wrote that I was intoxicated, and three days later he described it as an "acute anxiety state". After years of treatment with what was considered to be *anti-anxiety* medication, my anxiety had become "acute". Just eight days prior to that visit, I had been prescribed thirty Dalmane pills, and I had overdosed on them. The recommendation that day was Rx Dalmane. Although I knew things were

out of control for me, yet I was sure that without the pills they would be much worse. If I was distraught and unpredictable while on my tranquilizers, imagine how I would be without them. Finally in December 1982, I again overdosed. This time I took 24 Serax, washing them down with beer. On that dark December night, I have no memory of wanting to die and yet I swallowed the pills, and barely escaped with my life.