

Monroe County's 28,000 Alcoholics

By BARBARA MOYNEHAN

"The word intoxication means a person has been poisoned," Robert Earle Smith, director of the national council on alcoholism pointed out.

"Alcohol taken in moderate doses acts as a tranquilizer, taken in heavier doses it becomes a sedative, and then an anaesthetic, producing anaesthetic type sleep. And then in larger doses it becomes a poison."

Smith was interviewed at his office, 973 East Ave.

He defined alcohol dependence as being both physiological and psychological, explaining that "such a true addiction responds best to group therapy and AA, the principal types used here."

It is estimated that there are 28,000 alcohol addicts in Monroe County. There are various types.

First on Smith's list is "the nibbler; bored suburban housewives and unsatisfied businessmen are usually in this category. They drink a little, and are rarely drunk at first, then suddenly, rarely sober. The nibbler doesn't get drunk as a rule, but the amount consumed is excessive over a period of time.

"The oblivion drinker, on the other hand, drinks to obliterate reality, to commit temporary suicide. This type is frequently on Skid Row, the older chronic, sick alcoholic, trying to remain as drunk as he can for as long as he can.

"Often it all begins with the

paycheck drinker. They drink heavily the day they get paid and throughout the weekend but are sure to sober up for Monday . . . for awhile. They neglect home responsibilities but the job is held, that is until alcohol dependence increases and productivity on the job is threatened.

"If employers would follow the absence record after pay day and Mondays he would be able to pick up these people on the job. The alibi-denial system is a symptom of alcoholism. The excuses for a time are very rational and elaborate."

Smith admitted that the illness concept is very important, but stressed that alcoholics need a tough, no nonsense kind of understanding. Ninety per cent of the problem drinkers are married, working and living at home. And home to 65 per cent of them is suburbia.

"The employer and the spouse hold the life of the drinker in their hands," Smith stated. "The employer needs to establish a policy at the top, stating that they will assist anyone with a problem, and also encourage anyone who won't face his problem to seek employment elsewhere. For example, the state civil service department has organized all day seminars to help an estimated seven per cent of their employees who are victims of alcoholism."

About two years ago, Bernard J. Rick, president and owner of Security Safes, 502 W. Main St., luckily happened upon the right formula when he was confronted with an employee with a drinking problem.

Now that employe is the company's supervisor.

"Our business is all emergencies," Rick explained. "I'm used to reacting quickly to urgent situations. John's attitude became an emergency situation and I luckily fell upon the right formula."

John is 28 and admits he had been drinking heavily since he was 13. He was one of the best cross-country track men to come out of East Rochester, he said, but "I always had a couple of cans of beer hidden in the woods, and now I wonder how good I could have been if I didn't stop for them. I lost two college scholarships because of drinking."

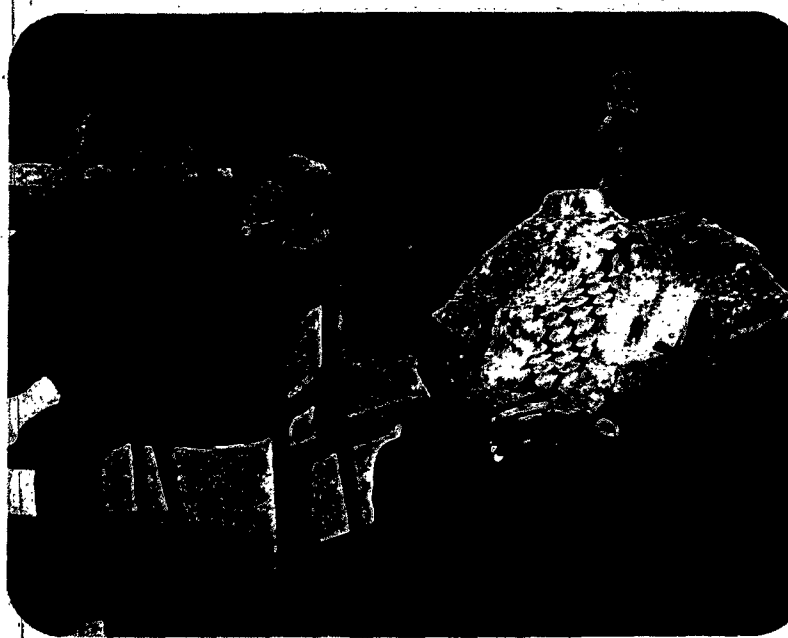
The formula Rick used was honesty: he brought the problem out in the open.

"I faced him with the consequences of what he was doing with his life," Rick explained, "and let him know his job was at stake. I pointed out that the reason he had been job hopping (he had 18 different jobs one year) was because other bosses wouldn't put up with it, and, I let him know he would have to shape up or leave and be in trouble for the rest of his life."

John said that this made him think he did have a drinking problem, and after two weeks he began looking for help.

"Bernie brought out aspects no other employer had," John related. He told me I was a good guy until I got a drink in my hand. And that got me thinking. With alcoholism it never occurs to you that you are an alcoholic. You blame your wife or boss for your problem, but never realize that your fault is that drink in front of you.

"When my wife said anything to me I just went out and got drunk and mad at her. But when my boss hit me with it,



BERNARD RICK AND JOHN

that is a different story. None of the others said it. They would chew me out for things I did, and say behind my back I was a drinker.

"It is so nice now to see colors and really notice the seasons changing. Before my mind was constantly occupied with: how can I get a drink? What could I tell my wife to avoid an argument and get to a bar? Last week I told my boss the flu, what will my excuse be this week? Alcoholics are the best con artists."

A big part of overcoming the problem is winning back the respect of others, John said. "I told everyone I quit drinking so many times, no one believed me. I always got blamed when something happened and most the time I didn't know if I did it or not. But, after I sobered up I started sticking up for myself and gave reasons why it wasn't my error, and people started listening to me."

"I had tried everything to cure myself," John said. "I tried the geographical cure: moving out of my environment thinking that would do it. Twice in one year I moved to California and the next year I moved to Detroit, but that wasn't the answer. I even gave my wife my money, but if I got to a bar a dollar would last me.

All it takes with me is one drink and I'm on my way. One shot and I'm shot. I'll lose my family, my job and my self-respect again."

"I have a lot of respect for alcohol," he continued. "I know what it can do to me. I don't want the DT's for three days again, or to run into a police station in the middle of the night and tell them a tiger was chasing me. I went cold turkey all the way."

"I can never take a drink as long as I live. If I go back now I can count on it being worse. It's a progressive disease, as you get older it gets worse."

Rick interjected, "After my experiences with John, I see I've been conned a lot in the past. But a guy can be a drunk and not be an alcoholic. A drunk is a different kind of person, he has no conscience. The drunk is out for himself, he just wants to drink. But an alcoholic has a sickness, a craving to drink until bombed and he can't help himself till he gets that first drink."

John stressed the difficulty in recognizing yourself as an alcoholic. "Both my grandfathers were alcoholics and both died from it. I tried to help one of them, and I was one too. You just don't know it."

SARAH CHILD All In The Family



It was one of those days when nobody at our house was feeling well. The head of the family was home from work, a most rare occurrence, nursing a cough and a badly stuffed up head. Two of the kids had runny noses and number three plus Mom were feeling blah. Translated that means not sick enough to go to bed and not energetic enough to do much but move from couch to chair.

It was nearing time when supper preparations should start. Unfortunately nobody was too sick to think of skipping a meal.

With a rare moment of inspiration and insight I hid myself to the grocery store and after only a moment of deliberation was standing in the check-out line with five frozen TV dinners and a frozen pie.

The line was a long one and the longer I stood the more embarrassed I became. I watched the woman ahead of me unload meat and fresh vegetables that had to be cooked and the man behind me balance five pounds of flour in one hand and a huge steak in the other.

It dawned on me then that I must be very insecure to feel so inadequate. I was not cooking a chicken from scratch to give my ailing family broth and noodles. Instead those frozen TV dinners marked me as a callous, incompetent homemaker. And there was the whole world watching.

Ridiculous? Of course. The truth is that probably not even the check-out girl really "saw" what I was buying. She was concentrating on prices.

But try to explain that to my self conscious self. It's hard to convince a healthy ego that nobody else cares one whit what you buy at a grocery store. And what's wrong with TV dinners anyway?

Absolutely nothing for super-efficient housewives. It's we malcontents who try to condense each day's chores into half an hour that look bad.

By the same token I also feel guilty watching television in broad daylight. If I want to watch and feel comfortable it has to be pitch dark out, the curtains drawn and the front door closed.

Ditto, ditto for daytime napping. Should someone phone and catch me with a just awakened foggy voice then I find it necessary to give elaborate excuses about the baby keeping us up all night.

Slightly paranoid? Perhaps. But I've a couple of friends who react in the same way — guilty — in other areas. Both have the same bugaboo — being caught talking on the phone by their husbands. Though they are both spectacular housekeepers, they are afraid of being charged with loafing on the job.

Women's Lib would say we were all victims of male chauvinists. And maybe we are.

Nurses' Congress To Be in Madrid

Miss Patricia McIntyre, past president of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Nurses, announced this week an international meeting scheduled for April 3-8 in Madrid.

Because there will be no North American convention, U.S. nurses have been invited to the fifth European congress of the International Council of Catholic Nurses, Miss McIntyre said. She has details of two tentative travel plans, one of which includes Prague and Moscow, and she asked for early reservations so that group fare tours can be arranged.

Miss McIntyre's address is Shortsville, N.Y., 14548.

Drug Lectures At McQuaid

Drugs on the Rochester Scene is the title of a twopart lecture series sponsored by the McQuaid Parents Club.

Speaker for the first program Sept. 28 is Dr. Clifford Reifler, professor of health services, University of Rochester. Dr. Christopher Hodgman, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, at the university, will speak Oct. 5. Both events will begin at 8 p.m. at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

NEWS DEADLINE

A reminder that Courier-Journal news deadline is noon Thursday for the following Wednesday's newspaper.

Wednesday, September 29, 1971

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