

# DELUSION

**J**ust over 70 years ago in Akron, OH, a guy named Bill Wilson found the answer to his alcoholism to be support group meetings and co-founded Alcoholics Anonymous. Later in 1965, the medical profession defined alcoholism as a disease. In 1973, the FAA began funding a substance abuse treatment program for airline pilots called HIMS: Human Intervention and Motivation Study; its coded wording tells you something about how delicate the subject was in that time. In 1976, famous astronaut “Buzz” Aldrin told an audience that he had been an alcoholic for several years before the Apollo 11 mission of 1969. Today alcoholism is treated compassionately and many of us know someone afflicted or affected by the disease.

Your board of directors made a decision at its 2007 meeting to show support for those members who attend Alcoholics Anonymous

by listing an existing AA meeting amongst our other events at the larger meetings such as P’town and Palm Springs. A couple of months after that decision, ALPA’s Airline Pilot magazine published an article about its HIMS program along with a sidebar article about “Birds of a Feather,” an AA group just for pilots (to read: go to [www.alpa.org](http://www.alpa.org) and search “hims”).

I decided to contact the group and discuss a possible synergy with NGPA. A stack of materials soon arrived including copies of their magazine, convention information and meeting format. Long story short, we are now able to offer a “Birds of a Feather” meeting at our events so long as someone volunteers to chair it. One of the nicest guys I know stepped up to the task; his story follows. - Dave Chinick



**T**he thing about delusion is “I don’t know I’m in it, when I’m in it.” And just because you and I are in agreement, doesn’t mean that you and I aren’t sharing the same delusion.

I came into the world to a couple of very young parents. My mother was twenty years old when I was born and I was her third child.

Almost all members of my family, including both of my parents, struggled with their drinking habits at some time in their lives. Those of my family who didn’t had other issues that were also compulsive in nature. The idea that alcoholism is an inherited trait seems to have some validity but I’m presuming that it has as much validity as the infamous “nature vs. nurture” theory that those of us who have struggled with our sexuality are typically extremely familiar. By posing that comparison, my intentions are to put us in a mindset of “Does it really matter?” Does it really matter how I became who I am? Wouldn’t a healthier question be “What am I going to do now?”

The question of “How I became who I am?” is of interest to the scientists who are trying to find a cure or some preventative measure. In the eighteen years that I have been abstinent from alcohol and mind/mood altering substances, I have seen about nine legitimate studies of a particular pill or therapy to treat alcoholics. The problem is their goal is to make a normal drinker out of people like me. If I could take a pill that would allow me to only drink two drinks and then stop, my initial reaction is how many can I drink if I take twenty pills?

What I would attempt to have you understand is that this condition that I deal with is three-fold: physical, mental and spiritual.

The physical is the simplest. I don’t have a physical body that processes alcohol like normal people. The solution, and here’s some rocket science, stop and stay stopped. In other words “abstinence” seems to be the only solution. There are thousands of ways to stop drinking. I



could punch a cop and I’ll stop drinking for a while. You could knock me unconscious and I’ll stop drinking for a while. The pill doesn’t work very well, because when the mental and spiritual pain becomes intolerable, I will pay whatever consequences the pill has in store for me for the mental and spiritual relief.

The mental is somewhat more complicated because there are so many substitutes for the mental condition. If I cannot drink, I will find other suitable substances to calm down the mental agony that not drinking creates for an alcoholic of my type. Addictive substances and behaviors are many—they all seem to give me some degree of relief.

The spiritual seems to be the kicker. People have so many opinions in this area—

extreme opinions and sometimes absurd opinions. When I talk about spiritual matters, please be assured that I am not talking about the bible or religion. What I mean to illustrate is that part of my total being that is undeniable, but indescribable in human intellectual terms. For instance, when I hold a baby in my arms and nurture that baby, I know that something is touching my heart. To put words together to accurately describe what his happening to my heart would be difficult, if not impossible. But I cannot deny that something is happening to my heart.

This is the place where I feel an emptiness, and a loneliness that is so disheartening that I will eventually do whatever I have to do to get relief.

The drink seems to work well to treat not only the emptiness in my soul, it calms down the craziness in my head that causes me to feel somewhat anxious in most social situations but also seems to settle down any physical issues I might be having relative to this condition. So my point is that I am not a “problem drinker”...I am an “answer” drinker. My physical, mental and spiritual condition is the problem. The drink is my answer.

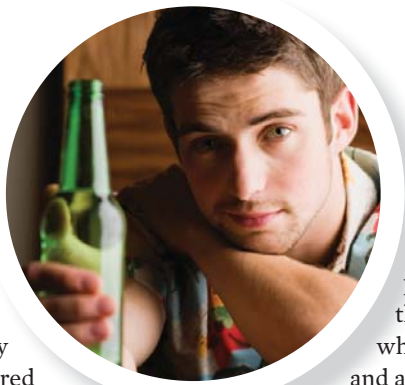
When I was 28 years old, having worked hard and long at becoming a naval aviator, flying the equipment that I have yearned to fly since I was a little kid and first had neck muscles that allowed me to look up in the sky, the United States Navy adopted a desire for me to stop drinking.

My supervisors in the military were not comfortable with my drinking habits and felt my drinking was affecting my job performance. I respected the military’s twelve hour rule of “bottle to throttle” (at least eleven hours) but the way I drank, I was still suffering with withdrawal symptoms by the time I planted myself in the pilot’s seat.

I had many warnings from both caring individuals and from uncaring people who had a job to do. I went before a military board for one insubordinate act, prepared







to defend myself, but when I got there all the questions were about my drinking. I wasn't prepared for that. I had many haunting instances late at night in dark, lonely sections of the nearest city that no one knew about except for me. I had been grounded for a week with the promise that if I didn't drink I could start flying again. I drank all week, told them I had been sober the whole time, and they let me start flying again. I showed up fifteen minutes late for a nuclear weapons exercise that I was in charge of and my supervisors had enough. They sent me to an alcohol rehabilitation six-week program as if they were sending me to the hospital to treat a broken leg. I'm not criticizing these people—I owe them my life—their desire to help me, rather than punish me, is so deep in my heart that I know I could never repay them or show them how grateful I am. However, these very caring and well-intended people have no understanding of the depths of alcoholism and what effective treatment really means. They want to understand—these are genuinely good people—they've just never had the need to really dive into the understanding in most cases. I relate it to me going into a maternity ward and telling some woman who is in the middle of childbirth that I know how she feels. I will never know how that feels. But if you stroll another woman in there, also going through childbirth, they will hold hands and bond like there's no tomorrow. Not one word will need to be spoken. This is similar to the bond between two people who have that deep spiritual emptiness in common. Particularly when they also have a common solution. I've never seen a tighter bond between two people.

While in rehab I heard that if I just stopped drinking I'd be okay. Now I have to admit eighteen years later, I am very aware that what people say and what I hear can often be two very different things. But what I heard was that drinking was my



problem. I wish that was the case. If it was, then when I stopped drinking and achieved total abstinence, the problem would have been removed. I didn't realize that this was only part of the problem. There was no doubt that drinking became a problem. When I drink it sets off a compulsion that will cause me to rationalize no good reason why I should stop. It is a physical allergy combined with a mental obsession. I stop drinking when I drop and usually not until. When I went into the military I was assigned a call-sign by my peers. My ego would have loved to have been given a call sign of "Maverick" or "Ice Man" since I saw myself eventually being a "Top Gun" navy pilot. However, since I would drink until I dropped, which I did on my first night in the squadron that I was assigned, my peers gave me the call-sign of "Sleepy." I wasn't thrilled about that.

I believe that the physical compulsion to drink or to do any other addictive substance or behavior gets removed on occasion, typically many times in the life span of a human being. This seems to happen not only when I'm not paying attention (I cannot tell you when it happened, I just know that it happened) but it also is typically not my worst day of drinking. In other words, there seems to be no logical reason why it happened when it did. Therefore, we call this the "Grace of God." Not because I know what "God" is, because I don't, but because there is no explanation for it but no denying that it happened. Whatever is the "creator and director" of everything has for reasons unknown to me, chosen to remove this compulsion to drink.

Now if this happens while I am drinking, I'm probably going to miss it. But if I truly want to have this happen, all I need to do is to keep trying to postpone picking up that first drink. Sooner or later, just by the law of averages, the compulsion will get removed at the precise time that I am not under the influence. Once the compulsion is removed, as long

as I don't pick up that first drink, I don't need to concern myself with setting off that compulsion again.

So now there is sober Steve—not drinking, not even wanting to drink. Now I'm trying to chase the worldly things that my delusional mind tells me will bring me happiness. These worldly things, false Gods (as I believe the church refers to them as), come in the form of airplanes, vehicles, significant relationships, money, prestige, power, *ad infinitum*. No matter how many of these worldly things I achieve, I am still left with the emptiness in my soul and at the very least a perception of "Is that all there is?" The casual observer would say, "does this mean I can't enjoy the things of the world?" The answer is no. It just means that I can't use these things to fill the emptiness in my soul. It's like when I'm hungry and I need food. It doesn't mean I can't have a car, for instance. It just means that I can't eat a car. I can have all the things the world has to offer, I just need to fill my soul with something bigger than human. This is where the God concept comes into play in my alcoholism.

The word "alcohol" originates from the Latin word *es spiritus*. It can be traced all the way back to the bible. The word alcohol was not coined to describe the drink until the early twentieth century. A few decades later the world began to believe that alcoholism was caused by excessive drinking. This is unfortunate for the real alcoholic that is dealing with a spiritual condition, regardless of whether or not it is accompanied by a physical allergy and/or a mental obsession.

Real alcoholism is referred to as a "spiritual malady," a malady being defined as a "separation" or a "disconnect." Logically I know I'm just another human being, with all the normal human needs and desires. Deep down inside of me I just don't feel like I fit. I can figure out why I feel different and then search out people that are dealing with that same issue, and then I don't feel like I fit in with them either. This feeling is deep down inside



of me. This feeling could be treated easily by a drink, but I can't drink. Not because I don't like to drink, but because I don't like the inevitable consequences that come along when a guy like me picks up that first drink. If I could find a way to drink without the consequences, I'd be drinking today.

So I need to find something that will fill that emptiness in my soul that has affordable prices. This is where this God concept comes back into play. This concept has to be bigger than human. An intellectual concept of God won't do it. An intellectual concept of God is a human power, but no human power is going to fill that emptiness in my soul. I need to open my mind to a concept that whatever the creator and director of everything is, it is too big for my human mind to comprehend. It's not too big for me to feel in my soul, however, just like what happened to me when I held that baby.

When I was a child, the good people in my life told me that God was like my father. Someone who thought like a man, made decisions like a man and judged like a man. This concept worked well for my childlike mind to get me to do my homework, go to bed on time and to give me comfort when I was alone and scared. As I grew older, I left that concept behind along with Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. I began to chase worldly things—whatever the next shiny object in my path happened to be. The things that I chased changed as I got older, but the common denominator was that they were always things of this world.

Eventually, sometime in my adulthood, I realized that these human things are not going to be enough. I need some kind of spiritual foundation, for personal security if for no other reason. The problem is that the only concept of God that I have to turn back to is this childlike idea of God that I abandoned so many years ago. This is a problem because I don't see things like a child anymore, I don't process information like a child anymore and I don't just believe people anymore, just because they told me something was true. I need something more adult-like to hold on to and grow with. What I believe works for someone like



me is an infinite idea of God—He's either everything or nothing. What's my choice to be? I already know the results I get when I don't care and casually chose to believe that He is nothing. Those results have one thing in common—some form of “fear” as a driving force in my life. So I open up my mind to the possibility that maybe there is something, something so big that my human mind cannot comprehend it, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

I'm now in a position to consider the possibility that me chasing human powers to rest satisfaction in my life is futile, as well as in position to keep an open mind about God, trusting that if He really exists, He will prove himself to me in my heart, not my head.


I was then presented with the theory that the reason why my life was so unfulfilling was because I was going through life seeing what I could get, rather than seeing what I could give. When I was shown how to live my life serving my brothers and sisters, merely by sharing my experience, only when they were truly interested in getting help themselves, all sorts of remarkable things followed.

Jobs fell in my lap, that I normally would never have pursued, jobs that made helping others easy. The virus that I contracted by trying to fill the emptiness in my soul with reckless sex went completely undetectable. My perception of the world around me became beautiful, rather than

a scary black and white. My life took on new meaning. I had real purpose. People were now attracted to me, rather than being repulsed by my actions. I felt the presence of something deep in my soul, which was undeniable, yet indescribable. I looked forward to sharing the genuine hope in my heart...it wasn't a burden, I love my life...and I'm even okay with my eventual death (hopefully, not too soon). My family has admiration for my lifestyle, rather than shame. My friends look to me for inspiration, rather than an example of what not to do.

And all that time, I thought it was about “not drinking.” How wrong I was?

I realize that this story may sound “delusional” to you. If it is a delusion, it's the best delusion I have ever experienced. If you're suffering in any way, my heart wants you to know one thing: it doesn't have to be that way. Obviously, it can be that way, it just doesn't have to be.

If I can help in any way, please feel free to contact me by phone at 443-255-7098 or email [steve\\_farnsworth@comcast.net](mailto:steve_farnsworth@comcast.net). It is not difficult—it's not something you have to work for or earn, it is your birth right—it is yours merely because you are part of “One,” part of the creation, part of the Creator, whatever that is. 

*Birds of a Feather will hold its annual convention in Atlanta April 24 – 27, 2008. For more information go to: [www.boaf.org](http://www.boaf.org).*