

Survived  
to  
Love  
by Ed H.



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## Dedication



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## Foreword

This is a collection of first person accounts in short stories, fictional short stories, letters, emails and poems. Each work is a separate effort but at the same time they are related to one another. There's a chronological flow of sorts, some flashbacks, some references to past and future events and possibly some overlap. But reasons beyond my understanding I have survived alcoholism being clean and sober over thirty-two years at the time of writing this foreword, a survivor of cancer of the larynx for over six years, and a survivor of Katrina for four years. Either or all should and could have caused my death like so many you will read about in these pages. The haunting question of why I survived could not be answered but what I was supposed to do while surviving became very clear. To love, not only the many groups I've had a chance to speak to about recovery, but the guys and gals I've tried to help being their sponsor or just their friend, but also the personal chances of loving another person that have come my way before and after each event I've survived. You'll learn I've done none of this to perfection, not even close, but have tried to be honest and recalling each story as accurately as possible. May you enjoy this manuscript and the

author remains eternally grateful for the opportunity to share his experiences with you.

By grace beyond my understanding, I have survived alcoholism (being clean and sober over thirty-two years), cancer of the larynx (over six years) and Katrina (four years). Any one of these tragedies, and certainly all of them, should and could have caused by death. Certainly I've lived beside and with many others who did succumb to these, and many people the pages of this book.

The haunting question of how I was different – why I survived – could not be answered. Yet, what I was supposed to do while surviving became very clear: to love, not only the many groups I've had a chance to speak to about recovery, but also the guys and gals I've tried to help, whether by being their sponsor or just as a friend, and the personal chances of loving another person I have chanced to cross paths with before and after each of these battles.

This is a collection of first-person accounts in vignettes, short stories, letters, emails and poems. Each is a separate effort, but at the same time they relate to one another. You'll find a chronological flow of sorts, some flashbacks, some references to past and future events and, inevitably, some overlap. You'll learn I've done none of this to perfection – not even – but have tried to be honest, recalling each event as accurately as possible. May you enjoy this manuscript. I remain eternally grateful for the opportunity to share my experiences with you.

Ed H

PART I

ON THE WAY

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## First Time

It was my birthday. I was sixteen years old. Mom sang lead with a quite successful Sweet Adeline quartet, and shows frequently took them out of town on weekends. Dad would accompany them as often as possible, leaving my sister Karen and me at home supervised loosely by our neighbors, the Sprinkles. That happened the Saturday I turned sixteen. Mom made my favorite birthday cake – angel food cake with green frosting – before leaving town. I planned on having a couple of buddies over and spending the weekend at home.

It was my sixteenth birthday, and my parents were gone. Mom sang lead with a successful Sweet Adeline quartet, and this weekend, like many others, a show took them out of town. Dad accompanied the women as often as possible, leaving my sister Karen and me at home supervised loosely by our neighbors, the Sprinkles.

Mom had made my favorite birthday cake – angel food cake with green frosting – before leaving town. I planned on having a couple of buddies over and spending the weekend at home.

Al came over to the house. He had an older brother Anthony and an abusive father, both

alcoholics, and Al was taking after the family tradition in good fashion. He talked me into to driving my parents second car over to a liquor store in Arlington Heights. They had a display near the entrance, and we did the in-and-out shuffle escaping cleanly with two twelve-packs of Budweiser sixteen once cans. Back to my house we went.

Al came over to the house. With an older brother and an abusive father, both alcoholics, Al was taking after the family tradition in good fashion. He talked me into to driving my parents second car from our Palatine, Illinois, home to a liquor store in Arlington Heights. Utilizing a convenient Budweiser display near the entrance, we did the in-and-out shuffle, escaping cleanly with two twelve-packs of Budweiser sixteen-ounce cans.

I called Bob Stayner to come over and join the party. Karen was in the house somewhere, probably her bedroom. Al and I started playing and drinking the beer in the future family room, a breezeway with lawn chairs and a ping-pong table.

Back home, I called Bob Stayner to come over and join the party. Before Bob got there, Al and I moved to a breezeway which eventually would become our family room but at that time was a breezeway with lawn chairs and a ping-pong table. There we settled in with beer and ping-pong paddles. My sister Karen was in the house somewhere, probably her bedroom.

What occurred you can hear over and over again in the halls of recovery the reaction to the

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first drink, the first drunk. I magically went from an insecure scared adolescent to an unknown super hero in the matter of two cans. The world was no longer something to fear but to be conquered. I was no longer a short thin pimply faced teenager but someone that could not only compete with James Dean but take him on single handedly and win hands down. I was not only handsome and debonair but also strong and fearless. And proceeded to barf all over the top of the ping-pong table. Al and I kept drinking.

How many other people have I heard in the halls of recovery describe as their own experience what I encountered there that afternoon? The first drink, the first drunk. Two cans magically transformed me from an insecure, scared adolescent to an unknown superhero. Fear of the world evolved into a determination to conquer it. No longer a pimply-faced teenager, I became someone who could not only compete with James Dean, but take him on single handedly and win hands down. Handsome and debonair, strong and fearless, I proceeded to barf all over the top of the ping-pong table. Al and I kept drinking.

Bob banged on the back door. On the kitchen counter next to the sink sat the green-frosted angel food cake. As I opened the door, I swiped my cupped hand across the top of the cake and slapped the side of Bob's face with frosting. His startled expression lingers in my favorite memories. Al and Karen laughed. We were drunk and stupid.

Bob banged on the back door. I lurched toward the kitchen to let him in, before Karen came from another room. On the counter next to the sink sat the green-frosted angel food cake. As I opened the door, I swiped my cupped hand across the cake top and slapped the side of Bob's face with frosting. His startled expression lingers in my favorite memories. Al and Karen laughed. Al and I were drunk and stupid.

I barfed another couple of times – in the toilet – only to eat and drink some more until the stolen beer was completely gone. I don't remember how the party ended. My sister – the perfect enabler – cleaned up the mess.

I had experienced the allusive high I would chase for the next fifteen years, though it is never as good as the first one. Ever. What instantly became my best friend would turn on me – like it always does – and become my worst enemy. I had taken my first step to becoming an alcoholic.

I had experienced the allusive high I would chase for the next fifteen years, though it is never as good as the first one. Ever. What instantly became my best friend would turn on me – like it always does – and become my worst enemy. I had taken my first step toward becoming an alcoholic.



## Officer Lamb

My first all-consuming love developed my senior year in high school. Penney W. from Charlotte, North Carolina – so pretty, with short blond hair – was a little taller than I, which wasn't hard. We were in love. We'd park my dad's white Ford Galaxy, talk, do what teenagers do, then go to Mac's or Dunkin' Donuts or just drive around.

One Friday night we drove north on Wilkie Road. The car in front of us wove all over the road, so I backed off instead of trying to pass him. Penney, right next to me, moved even closer. A car approached from the opposite direction. The weaving vehicle suddenly swerved left, head-on into the other car. Reeling, I pulled to the side of the road. From a phone booth on the corner of an industrial park I called for help, then Penney called her parents. I left her there and walked toward the wreck.

The driver of the weaving car lay smashed into the steering wheel, his head against it. As I reached the vehicle, he came to and raised his head, pouring blood from a gash across his forehead. His eyes telegraphed he already knew the carnage he had caused. Both cars front ends were entangled, blending into a single mass of wreckage. I moved to the other car. The woman passenger was obviously dead. The driver,

impaled on the steering wheel, could have been either dead or alive. In the back seat two kids, not wearing seatbelts, lay unconscious. Police and emergency vehicles converged.

At the request of Penny's parents, on record I was the only witness. I told a State Trooper named Lamb what I saw, my voice shaking with anger. I knew the driver was drunk. Officer Lamb got all my contact information and said he'd be in touch. Penney and I drove away, still in shock.

A month later Officer Lamb picked me up at home one morning to take me to the inquest at the Cook County Courthouse in downtown Chicago. He explained the inquest would be to determine if a crime had been committed or if it was only an accident. No Breathalyzer test had been performed on the badly injured driver; the decision would be based on my testimony.

We arrived at the courthouse early. I've since wondered if that was intentional, if the officer had taken me on as a project, sensing I was an alcoholic in the making. I don't know. We went to the county morgue in lower floors of the building where he and a technician took me for a tour.

The smell of formaldehyde overpowered me. Through glass I watched people working around tables and along the wall. We moved on to the first of a group of immense coolers. The tech opened the door. Narrow slabs four high lined three walls. On them lay naked bodies. The tech said they were unidentified. The first was a woman, her skin a dull blotching white. I was ashamed to look at her nakedness. Thank God

her face was turned towards the wall. Except for my breathing, I was as still as the bodies.

The bodies in the next cooler had suffered accidents that left them, well, not all together – legs at the end of the slab no longer attached to the torso, a partial body burned beyond recognition, another crushed so badly it was difficult to tell age, weight, height, even gender. The tech explained they'd be held for a month then disposed of. The nearby University of Chicago Medical School would utilize the spare parts in the next cooler for the students' studies. I saw bags of livers, hearts, stomachs – while I didn't see any heads, I'm sure they were there.

Officer Lamb said it was time for court.

We sat outside of the courtroom until a clerk came for me. Officer Lamb stood in the back of the room to give me support. He had told me just to tell the truth. I looked at the long tables on each side of the court as the clerk swung open the gate and led me to the witness stand. The man who caused the accident looked at me with the same eyes I'd seen that night when I stood next to his car door. A bright scar across his forehead was the only telltale sign of the accident. At the other table the other driver sat in a wheel chair.

The guy in the wheelchair's lawyer approached me and asked his questions. Officer Lamb had warned me the lawyer for the other fellow was very confrontational and would try to turn my story around making it the others guy's fault. His tactics worked, and I got confused and visually upset. Finally the judge thanked me for

my testimony. We waited to learn what happened, and it didn't take long. The jury quickly decided there wasn't enough evidence to hold the defendant, and the judge ruled the case as an accident. Officer Lamb and I watched the room empty. I told the man in the wheelchair to take it easy. He pointed to his legs and shook his head. His wife had died, but the kids survived. The other fellow looked at me again. I know he was relieved, but I saw guilt for sure. I didn't know then what I know now, but he was probably heading for the nearest bar for a drink.

It was a short ride back to Palatine. Officer Lamb was quiet most of the way, and I just looked out the window. Thirteen years later I would be stopped for a DWI. Two years after that I would come to from a blackout driving with two flat tires, going the wrong way down Palatine Road, the sun coming up in my face. To this day I don't have any idea what I hit. I can only hope it wasn't another vehicle with people in it. The lesson Officer Lamb tried to teach me didn't stop me from going down the alcoholic path. Probably though, it raised my bottom a few notches.

## Sloe Gin Fizz

High school behind me, I was going nowhere – but leaving where I was. I enrolled at Northern Illinois University because I couldn't continue my lifestyle of drinking and partying at home. Just