17 Looking Out for Over-elation

A great many drinkers (whether alcoholics or not) change an internal state of discomfort to one of enjoyment by the single act of taking a drink. This method of fleeing from pain to pleasure has been described as "escape drinking."

But thousands and thousands of us know that often we were already in a happy frame of mind when we took a drink. In fact, when we review our drinking records carefully, large numbers of us can see that we often drank in order to intensify an already jubilant mood.

This experience gives rise to our next suggestion, which is: Be especially cautious during moments of celebration or times of just feeling extraordinarily good.

When things are going great, so well you feel almost on a nonalcoholic high—look out! At such times (even after several years of sobriety), the thought of a drink may seem quite natural, and the misery of our old drinking days temporarily dims. Just one drink begins to seem less threatening, and we start thinking that it wouldn't be fatal, or even harmful.

Sure enough, *one* would not be—for the average person. But our experience with a drinking problem shows us what that one supposedly harmless, fateful drink would do to us *un*average people. Sooner or later, it would persuade us that one more could do no damage, either. Then how about a couple more?...

Ceremonial, celebratory drinking seems particularly tempting to some of us when we have valid cause for exhilaration among jovial drinking relatives or friends who can drink safely. Their imbibing seems to exert social pressure on us to try to do likewise.

Perhaps this is because taking a shot of ethanol (ethyl alcohol) has so long been closely associated in our culture with fun and good times (as well as some mournful events). The connections in our mind can persist even long after we have learned we do not *have* to drink any more.

We know now that there are many ways we can fend off this social pressure to

drink, as described on page 67. Briefly, let us just be reminded that no situation gives us a "dispensation" from our alcoholism, the illness that is activated as soon as we start ingesting alcohol at any time, for any reason, or for no reason.

For some of us, the impulse to take a joyful drink when we are feeling particularly good is even more insidious when there is no particular event to celebrate, and no particular social pressure to drink. It can occur at the most unexpected times, and we may never understand the reasons for it.

We have learned now not to panic when the thought of a drink comes into the mind. After all, it is a natural thought for anyone to have in modern times, and especially understandable for those of us who have had extensive practice in the art.

But the *thought* of a drink is not necessarily the same thing as the desire for one, and neither need plunge us into gloom or fear. Both can be viewed simply as warning bells to remind us of the perils of alcoholism. The perils are forever, even when we feel so fine that we wonder whether it's really all right for anyone to feel as good as we do, now.