



Four Lawyers Share Their LCL Experience



“My spirit, my personality, slowly ebbed away each day.” —Lawyer 1

I DRANK, EVER MORE PRODIGIOUSLY, for 40 years. In the later years my health began to falter, but I avoided the unwanted judgment of medical professionals. Retching was as much a part of the morning routine as tooth brushing. My car, my clothing, and my body smelled of alcohol, but I took no notice.

I am a lawyer. Over the years my beleaguered spouse slipped me painful notes and letters, and books about “moderate drinking.” I folded up the letters after the first sentence and never cracked a binding. Alcoholics have little interest in moderate anything. The “problem” seeped into every aspect of my life. The HR guy gave me two business cards of lawyers who were part of some drunk lawyer group. I tucked the cards away, eventually losing them amongst my collection of useless papers.

I never had a DUI. Never had more than minor self-inflicted vehicle damage (that I know of). I surmised—if I gave it any thought—that I was a “functional” alcoholic. My spirit, my personality, slowly ebbed away each day and somehow I still presented to the world the shell, the façade, the empty vessel of who

I thought I should be—or so I convinced myself. Could a slow descent into alcoholic death be any worse than the life I was living?

Then, for reasons that are still a little murky, I was desperate enough to make one phone call to Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL). I was invited to a meeting without pressure. I was scared and resistant when I crossed the threshold. Maybe lawyers, men and women who were “smart” like me, could help me out. In that first meeting a grizzled veteran declared, “I’m just another Bozo on the Bus.” I found, over time, immense comfort in that; no judging, no recriminations, no angst. Just men and women helping each other with honest thoughts and stories, and honest laughter. I forgot what honest laughter sounded like.

My last drink, after a few months with “these people,” was at the end of July, 2016. I now attend an AA meeting in my community, and I rarely miss the Wednesday night LCL meeting. I don’t know if LCL, the program, the fellowship, saved my life. It brought me back to life. I would like to keep it that way—one day at a time.

“Never in a million years did I think I would be an alcoholic. Never.”

—Lawyer 2

NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS did I think I would be an alcoholic. Never.

In college, I was kidded often by my friends for being such a light drinker. For years during young adulthood—attending a prestigious university and law school, working as an associate at a large firm, becoming a partner—I never had any problem with alcohol. That changed at some point. Quickly. I was able to hide it for a while, as I was a reclusive, solitary drinker. Each night would be spent sitting in a well-appointed, large home with a bottle of vodka. Each day was spent feeling horrible, experiencing withdrawal or a hangover. The time, effort, and mental energy spent hiding this at home and at work was absolutely enormous. For a while I believed I would think my way out of this problem. Over time, I realized that was impossible. My world became smaller and smaller: wake up, try to sober up, struggle through the work day, go home and drink to oblivion. Then repeat over and over and over. My situation was not sustainable.

After unsuccessfully trying to help me in several different ways over an extended period, I gave my firm no choice but to ask for my resignation. I became unemployed.

“... alcohol, which had been a constant support ... had somehow become an ever increasing problem.” —Lawyer 3

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, I have been attending a Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL) meeting most every Wednesday evening. The primary reason that I do so is because it is vital to my continued sobriety and recovery from alcoholism, but, at some point, the meetings became an enjoyable part of my life that I look forward to every week.

My path to alcoholism and to LCL was somewhat unique in that I did not have to reach my “rock bottom” or suffer the very worst possible consequences of my problem drinking before I sought and received help from LCL. I thank the employee support system at my job for that, as a person there suggested that I contact LCL for assistance. Beyond that, the basics of my alcohol abuse were surprisingly quite common—alcohol, which had been a constant support, helping me through life’s stress and difficulties, had somehow become an ever increasing problem that was contributing to disrupting and ruining the most important things in my life, including my relationships with my family and friends and my professional legal career.

My experience and participation in LCL has helped me to realize that alcoholism in general, and my alcoholism in particular, is a disease of isolation that in time invariably leads to profound feelings of aloneness and helplessness, and a sense of not being able to manage the many responsibilities of one’s life properly. The trap of alcoholism is that it is a vicious cycle that is often endured in painful silence by the alcoholic and the people who love him or her the most. At LCL, I have found a fellowship of like-minded people, who also happen to be attorneys. We are like-minded in that we all are committed to assisting each other in turning our common struggle with alcoholism into a positive force that can better ourselves, our profession, and our society.

I am sure that every day I encounter many attorneys who, like myself, could benefit from the support and services that LCL freely provides. It is my hope that more attorneys can find the courage to take the first step as I did and seek the help that they need and deserve. Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers—it’s as simple as that.

By this point, I had dabbled with the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, often counting the minutes during an AA meeting until I could go home to the bottle I had hidden. I was convinced that AA simply did not work for me. I was too smart; I could not accept parts of the program; the stigma of attending meetings was too great—what if I ran into someone I know? A million excuses. I was attempting to think my way out of the problem, and it didn't work.

Shortly after I found myself unemployed for the first time since I was 12 years old, I called Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL). My head was too clouded and fogged from vodka to remember much of that conversation, but I did agree to attend the weekly LCL lawyers-only 12-step meeting in Rocky Hill.

I can still recall driving to my first LCL meeting. I was absolutely at the lowest point of my life. Yet my ego still had me concerned I would see someone I knew at the meeting. How silly that concern was. It didn't matter. At the meeting, I found a group of attorneys who cared deeply, knew precisely what I was going through, what I was up against, and what I needed.

The empathy, kindness, acceptance, and compassion shared with me at that meeting was extraordinary. Seeing that many of those at the meeting had overcome the same problem I had gave me hope that I could recover and participate in life again. People I did not know gave me their phone numbers and told me to call them day or night if I felt the urge to drink—amazing. They did not want anything except to help me stay sober.

I began attending LCL meetings regularly as well as many outside AA meetings. I maintained and nurtured my sobriety at those meetings and eventually I returned to the practice of law. Life continues to get better as I remain sober through the AA program and the connection I made with colleagues through LCL.

If you are concerned that you have a problem with alcohol, please do not try to think your way out of your problem. Alcoholism is stronger and smarter than you alone. Give sobriety a try—I would love to see you at a meeting.

“For me, LCL was the only port in the storm I could find when I started this journey.”—Lawyer 4

I KNEW FOR AT LEAST A FEW YEARS that my drinking was an issue. Although there were days and even sometimes weeks when I felt I had it under control, as time went by, my drinking became progressively worse and the episodes more acute and problematic. At the risk of sounding cliché, for a number of years I was a “functional” alcoholic. Back then I knew (if I was being honest with myself and not in denial) that sooner or later something would cause my drinking to come to a head, and surprise, surprise, it did. Relative to so many others I've heard about in recovery (including other lawyers), the details of “my story” are not that remarkable, but thinking introspectively, living those details and coming out the other side is by far the most significant experience of my life.

I knew I needed help. But for so long I could not fathom how I was going to involve anyone outside of close family and/or friends without completely blowing the lid off the whole situation. I thought there was no way out and as such I continued to do what I was doing until the proverbial poop hit the fan. Again, the details are not overly gory, but suffice it to say that there was a situation that culminated in me reaching out and seeking help whether I wanted to or not.

Cue the sunshine and soothing music; there was a way out, there was an outsider (or should I say outsiders) I could talk to: Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL). I did my research, and on the most basic level I was at least comforted by the fact LCL was shrouded in confidentiality and nothing I said could be used against me. As difficult and traumatic as I thought it would be to even attempt to “get the monkey off my back,” not only was my first encounter with LCL not that bad, dare I say that it was almost pleasant.

I have now been sober for a number of years. For me, LCL was the only port in the storm I could find when I started this journey. To this day not only does LCL continue to be an integral part of my sobriety, but it is like a second home where I can relax, take a deep breath, and be myself with no strings or judgments attached.

My journey is my journey and I am incredibly grateful to be where I am and for what LCL has done for me and my family. If I had to do it all over again, the only thing I would change is that I would contact LCL sooner. ■