

The following article by Sunshine Brown was the first-place winner of the Excellence in Student Journalism Awards. Other winners included Kimberly Anastas, Joe Kupec and C.W. Heiser. The second-place winner will be published in the next issue of the *Capital Times*.

## Growing Up With Alcoholics

What do you remember about growing up? If you were anything like me, terror was hanging just around the edges from morning until night. I felt that nobody liked me. I didn't believe my parents really cared; they didn't even know I existed.

If you were anything like me, you grew up in a home where alcohol and lies were the rulers--not love, not open communication, and certainly not trust or safety. Life was unpredictable and chaotic. In time, chaos became almost easier to handle than calm. As a child, there were mixed messages: "I love you, but stay away." Survival became the most important thing, the only thing in fact. The only way to survive was to learn not to feel. It was easier that way. Besides, when I opened up my feelings, it either hurt so much I couldn't stand it, or it was so crazy I couldn't trust what I felt anyway.

Home life was always "pretend," wearing a face that everything was okay--never telling anyone that anything was wrong--that everything was wrong. Reality got distorted. Who cared anyway? It was easier not to care. Besides, if I cared, I had to trust, and if I trusted, there was a chance I just might have to feel. There was always that major chance--that things would go wrong again. The track record was that things usually did go wrong. If only I could have done something, things could have been different. The chaotic cycle continued.

What else could I think?

Imagine this scenario. You're 7, 8, or 11 years old. It's Thursday night, and your dad is sitting at the table, opening his third or fourth can of beer. He's in a pretty good mood, so you decide to talk to him. (Sometimes he's grumpy when he drinks--usually he is.) You make a decision to go shoot baskets Saturday morning. He promises. You dare to believe. As a child, it is so much easier to forget all the millions of times he's said he'd take you somewhere or do something with you, then didn't come through. But you forget yesterday, wanting so desperately to believe he'll come through for you this time. Excited, you skip off to play, dreaming about Saturday.

Saturday comes. You get up early, get your own breakfast--you even brush your teeth (which you usually forget to do). Your parents' door is closed. You sit in the living room and wait. The cartoons are on, but you don't see them--you just wait. The doubt has already begun to edge in on your heart. The time passes--9:00, 9:30, 10:00. Finally, at 10:30, with fear and trepidation, you knock. Your mother yells, "What? You know she hates being disturbed."

"Where's Dad?" you ask.

Your mother yells back, "What do you mean, 'Where's Dad?' He didn't come home." You know from experience there won't be any baskets today.

Or take the scenario one step further and change it just a bit. Mom and Dad got divorced when you were younger. Or else it's just that Dad left. He calls Wednesday night to ask you to go out to eat with him Sunday. Again you believe, though doubting--knowing secretly, he won't come through for you.

But you try to believe, anyway, because you so badly need him to come; need him to be there for you. Sunday morning you're up, ready and waiting. Your mom's up and bustling in the kitchen.

After a couple of hours, she comes into the room and says with her usual cheerful mask, "Oh, you know your father, he probably just forgot. Everything is okay." You both know he didn't forget--you both know it is not okay. You both know very well he got too drunk to remember. You wish that just once she'd stop protecting him--just once, both of you could tell the truth and admit how much it hurts. Instead, you both continue to pretend everything is okay when it isn't. Reality got distorted.

Maybe your story is different. Maybe, as the oldest child, you hurried home from school, never knowing what condition you'd find the house in or whether your mom would be drunk. Afraid, you'd open the door. Your mom was passed out on the floor; beer cans were everywhere and the house was a mess. You'd drag her into the bedroom and help her into bed. Next, you hurried to hide the evidence before your younger brothers and sisters got home on the later bus. You cooked dinner, helped the kids with their homework, and got them into bed. No one would have known you were only a child yourself.

Since your mom's drinking had increased, your grades had gotten worse. Your teacher suspected something was wrong, but of course you couldn't have told her. You had to keep the secret. The big Family Secret.

Or was it the fighting? All the years of fighting, lying awake night after night listening to your parents scream at each other, never knowing what was going to happen, or if one of them would come into your room and smack you. Or maybe your father, or step-father or uncle, the adults you were supposed to be able to trust, made sexual advances toward you when they were drinking. Maybe they abused you, physically or sexually. And you've never told. You just assumed it was your fault. You still think it is your fault.

Or maybe abandonment is your story, (at least that's what it felt like). Both your parents lived in the house, but it was as if they weren't home. One of them was usually drunk and didn't know you existed. The other one was always so busy taking care of the drunk parent that, even if they had noticed your existence, they wouldn't have had the time or energy to listen or care for you.

Maybe these scenarios do not fit you exactly. Of course, you have your own story. But one thing is certain. If you grew up in an alcoholic home, or any other kind of addictive, compulsive (dysfunctional) home for that matter, where feelings weren't talked about and you never knew what to expect, where denial was the name of the game, you're probably still living and playing out the same games. It's just in an adult-world setting.

Childhood is a time when life is supposed to be safe. Home is a place where you are supposed to feel loved. Instead, in an alcoholic home, life became a war zone, and you, the battlefield.

A child growing up in these circumstances learns that things are not the way they seem, they are usually much worse. But what happens when the child grows up? The difficult lessons learned so well for survival in childhood, the ones practiced to a fine art in adulthood, these are the survival skills that do not bring healthy relationships or healthy living. These counter-productive behavior patterns are as addictive as alcohol and they stick like glue. They won't disappear just because you have become an adult. They don't change without your first understanding that they're there, then confronting them and learning ways to change them.

Do you see yourself anywhere in this story? If you do, you may need to read more about changing the behavior patterns you learned as a child. It's all right to ask for help. It need not be a secret anymore.

Do you ever wonder why you get so angry about the smallest things? Or, when plans change out of your control, does it literally freak you out? Do you ever find yourself working really hard to please somebody because you want to be accepted? Do you ever feel like the success doesn't satisfy? Does your own drinking scare you? or, do you treat other things compulsively: food, schoolwork, or money?

Children who grow up in alcoholic homes are sometimes referred to as ACOA's (Adult Children of Alcoholics). In the last two or three years, several psychologists have suggested that the same kind of characteristics that fit ACOA's fit children of most addictive families.

Discovering that there are others like us helps.

## Student Leaders Attend Conference

By Michelle Sutton

"Are people born leaders or can they be trained?"

Tom Eakin, assistant vice president for Student Programs at University Park, addressed this question to a roomful of student leaders from the commonwealth campuses, including Capital, August 14 at the Commonwealth Educational System Leadership Conference held at University Park.

Eakin answered with an emphatic, "There are no born leaders, they must be trained and that is why you are here."

Through the three-day conference, students participated in discussions and role-play. They attended lectures and workshops dealing with a variety of topics.

The conference workshops were divided into two main topics, self-awareness and self-understanding and transactional skills.

Each student leader attended four of the 15 workshops, ranging in topic from time management to assertiveness to program planning and promotion.

The lectures required students to take many self-assessment tests to determine their leadership styles and their roles.

Judy Farina, Capital's Student Government Association secretary, said

she learned that, "I'm a supporter, which is good for all organizations to have."

Tom Billet, an incoming junior from the York campus said, "To be a good student leader you must learn to adapt the proper leadership style."

The lecture, led by Terrell Jones and Art Constantino of University Park, gave each campus delegation a chance to examine its values on the subject of diversity through a situational role-play.

The role-play was a scenario of diversity in SGA in which the characters acted in different ways. The delegates from each campus were to rank the appropriateness of the characters according to their action in the situation.

The Capital delegation recognized that everyone had their own set of values when it came to who acted most appropriately.

The conference not only provided lectures and workshops, but "provided Capital students a two-prong experience; the opportunity to find out more about themselves and the occasion to interact and exchange ideas with over 200 student leaders.

Overall, the self-discovery and interaction provides an energizing experience to get everyone started out in a successful direction for the year," said Janet Widoff, director of Student Programs and Services.

John Nagengast, Capital's SGA president, sums it all up, "This is where it all begins. . .the key to being a good student leader is at the leadership conference."

## Athletic Update

By Laura Karinch

### Summer Fun

This summer, the Recreation and Athletic Department at Penn State Harrisburg had the help of a recreational intern, Ron Davis, from Penn State's main campus. Along with Duane Crider, the coordinator of Recreation and Athletics, Davis organized several programs for the faculty and staff.

A walking program was held on campus in June in which 35 people took part. The main goals of the program were to increase understanding of walking as a lifetime recreational activity, increase cardiovascular activity, and to develop an aerobic conditioning program for the participants. If the Recreation/Athletic Dept. staffing allows, this program is hoped to be repeated, according to Crider.

A golf outing for faculty and staff was held in July at the Sunset Golf Course on Route 441. Another outing will take place on Aug. 26.

### Fall Activities

Aside from the regular athletic and intramural programs, several activities are planned for students for the fall semester. These include beach volleyball, a golf outing, and a foosball tournament.

A racquetball tournament is also scheduled for the end of September. Anyone interested should contact Ginny Horst at x6266.

### Aerobics

Low impact aerobic classes will be held Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. beginning Sept. 13. An instructor from the Harrisburg YMCA will lead the classes.

Any student interested in instructing an aerobics course this semester should contact Ginny Horst at x6266.