

Ways To Avoid Relapse

by Michael Jackson Smith

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Part I - The Process Of Relapse

John had been sober for 6 months and had attended daily AA meetings. Three months into his sobriety, he started dating Ann, whom he met in the program. He developed strong feelings and a dependence on her. After 3 months of dating, she told him that she needed some space and needed to stop seeing him for a time. John interpreted her words as a breakup and immediately started to think about drinking. He didn't go to a meeting or call anyone for support. All he could think about was how drinking would take away his pain. Then, he thought briefly about how much trouble drinking had caused him, but his thoughts returned to the relief that drinking would bring. This kind of circular thinking reached a crisis point when he finally muttered, "Fuck it," and went to a bar and started drinking.

John's relapse was a typical and an almost predictable result of a person who hadn't learned about the process of relapse and ways of preventing it. It is easier to maintain sobriety during calmer times. When a crisis strikes, and one doesn't know how to handle the stress, it is normal for him to think about drinking, the number one way that he's always handled stress in the past. Without any defenses against stress, the thoughts will become cravings and will usually lead to relapse. Another reason for John's relapse was that he had neither defined nor avoided the triggers that set the relapse process in motion. The number one trigger to relapse is new relationships, especially engaging with someone who is also struggling with their recovery. Alcoholics with years of drinking history have stunted their emotional growth and have to learn or relearn how to cope with their emotions.

Relapse, by definition, is a blockade to maintaining sobriety, often with dire consequences, including the risk of continuing to drink for a long period of time or permanently.

Relapse is preceded by cravings and an obsession to drink. A program of recovery should include techniques for avoiding relapse. This article will examine the process of relapse: the thought process that precedes picking up a drink, and techniques to block the relapse process. The focus of the article is on alcoholic remission and could apply to addictions in general.

Early in an alcoholic's drinking history, he discovers the sedative effects of alcohol. Gradually, the use of alcohol to relieve stress becomes habitual. The drinker doesn't learn healthy techniques for dealing with stress.

The inability of an alcoholic to effectively reduce certain stressors that are seen as overwhelming, often defined as triggers of relapse, leads to thoughts of drinking. If new coping mechanisms haven't been learned, then recurrent thoughts of using will continue and will result in craving. Craving is pervasive and can lead to relapse when an alcoholic doesn't know how to counteract those feelings. Relapse behavior is driven by the memory of past alcohol use and the expected rewards of future consumption.

The relapse process is often driven by memories of how alcohol once relieved stress at the beginning of dependence, skipping over memories of the destructive nature of the disease as it progressed. There may be a vague recollection of how destructive alcoholism is, but it is trumped by the idea that somehow drinking will be different the next time, that it can be controlled and that it will relieve the

stress that is causing the thoughts about drinking again. Einstein's definition of insanity fits this kind of thinking perfectly. He defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." This illogical train of thought has to be addressed if an alcoholic hopes to avoid relapse. First, it is imperative that he learns how to reduce stress without drinking. A daily practice of techniques such as those discussed further in this article will help. The techniques can be used to dampen strong thoughts about drinking. Second, the idea that somehow drinking can be controlled has to be stopped with thoughts and affirmations that a future drinking episode will only be worse than prior ones and will lead to serious problems.

Note: You DON'T have to drink even if your obsession is so great that you'd jump through a liquor store window for a drink. At any point before you pick up a drink, you still have a choice to refrain from drinking. Remember that once an alcoholic starts drinking, his behavior is obsession driven with little choice but to chase after his next drink. The binge will continue until something gets in the way of it, including legal problems, hospitalization, rehab, intervention, exhaustion and death.

The time-line for relapse progresses in the following manner:
Stress/Triggers > Thoughts about drinking > craving > obsession to drink > Relapse

Stress

Hans Seyle, a pioneer in stress research, defined two types of stress, distress and eustress. Distress is an aversive state in which a person is unable to adapt completely to stressors and shows maladaptive behaviors. There are biochemical changes as a result of the maladaptive behaviors. Eustress is the positive cognitive response to stress that is healthy, or gives one a feeling of fulfillment or other positive feelings. Seyle was the first person to use the word stress in a medical/psychological context and coined the word eustress.

It is how one interprets stress that will determine how an individual's biochemistry reacts to a stressor. Specifically, it is the degree of importance that an individual assigns to a stressor that determines the degree of change in a biochemical/psychological system.

An obsession that is seen as a definitive order to drink without the possibility of reversal will result in relapse. If the obsession is viewed as a challenge, a test of one's tenacity for example, then the possibility of reversal of the obsession is possible, and relapse can be avoided.

There are biochemical and genetic aspects to alcoholism and learned components including triggers.

Triggers

External Triggers - People, places and things that an alcoholic associates with drinking should be avoided: people, like drinking buddies; places, like bars; and things, like activities associated with drinking. Some external triggers are obvious, some are subtle. Examples of subtle external triggers are OTC medicines and foods that contain alcohol, and could be inadvertently used and result in relapse.

Internal triggers - include distress and eustress. Extreme highs and lows in sobriety can result in

cravings. Eustress can be a stressor in the relapse process. Recovering alcoholics struggle to balance their emotions. People have said that they've relapsed on a beautiful, sunny day when they felt great. What they failed to recognize was the trigger that set the process in motion, e.g. a past memory when they drank, loneliness or internal strife.

A recovering alcoholic would be wise to tread lightly in new relationships, which can be highly charged emotional processes that are often too much, too soon—too dependent and too needy. In early recovery, one should avoid new romantic entanglements for at least a year or more, and concentrate on his recovery. Easy does it in romance. An acronym for relationship is: Really Exciting Love Affair Turns Into Outrageous Nightmare - Sobriety Hangs In Peril! Breakups are difficult for everyone, especially recovering alcoholics who may seek relief in alcohol. When you do begin to date, take it slowly. If you're fortunate, you'll discover that relationships are filled with joy and sorrow and that you can make it through a storm without drinking.

Untreated emotional problems like anxiety and depression are defined as co-existing disorders or dual disorders and should be addressed with a mental health specialist. Many people have used alcohol to self-medicate, Psychotropic medication may be necessary, and a good therapist will teach coping mechanisms to replace the alcohol.

We live in a world where alcohol is used on different occasions for many reasons. Sometimes, exposure to those situations cannot be avoided, like at family functions, weddings and other celebrations. Although you may be exposed to alcohol use, you don't have to drink, and you can leave early when the drinking threatens your sobriety. Remember, that even if a gun is pointing at you with the trigger cocked, you still can duck to avoid the bullet. Your continuing sobriety is your responsibility.

Thoughts About Drinking

Thoughts can lead to action, but there is a brief moment between the thought and action when you can choose to ignore the thought. You can learn to ignore thoughts by watching them move by you like a train that's moving too fast to board.

Craving

Cravings are thoughts that occur in spurts. A craving is a strong desire. You may want to drink one moment, then notice that the thought is gone in the next moment. It is imperative that you learn that you don't have to act on your thoughts. Once you know that you can get passed the powerful cravings to drink, it will be easier to avoid relapse in the future.

Obsession To Drink

Where cravings can be transient, obsessions are persistent ideas, impulses that are consuming. Where cravings are strong desires, obsessions are demanding needs. Still, you can live through an obsession, aided by techniques discussed in this article, without drinking. The important fact is that obsessions are temporary and will pass.

Relapse

Relapse prevention must be an active process. Understanding the process and learning techniques to avoid relapse should be practiced on a daily basis. Simply going to meetings and/or therapy without actively pursuing techniques to avoid relapse is not enough. You must be proactive in your recovery. Sobriety has to be the number one priority in an alcoholic's life, above all else. Realize that the problem is in you, not in the bottle. Remember, you are responsible for your own sobriety. If you can't find a meeting or someone to talk with during a time of crisis, you can make it through the crisis without drinking. Tell yourself that you're strong and invincible. Make a commitment to stay sober one moment, one day at a time.

Expectations - New Year's Resolution Syndrome

Expecting too much too soon is a formula for failure. Work on change one step at a time. Mark Twain said, "Habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time." Strict dieting is a good example of doing too much too soon. People who try to follow strict diets often fail because drastic changes present a difficult adjustment. If you want to follow a more healthy diet, the best approach is to add healthy foods to your meals. Once you've added fresh fruits and vegetables to your meals, junk foods tend to disappear from your diet over time. Many people who quit drinking want to change everything at once: quit smoking, strict diets, vigorous exercise, and other life style changes. When you expect too much, you'll get too much—too much to handle. Liv in the series *Wild At Heart* said, "You know what you need when you have too many plates spinning? More plates to replace the ones you've smashed."

You may want to change one thing at a time, like getting more exercise. If you like bicycling, increase your distance and speed a step at a time. The point is that you'll want to enjoy the ride. It's the journey that matters, not the destination. Recovery works best with daily practice and persistence.

Part II - Ways To Avoid Relapse

Visualization

Visualization is sometimes referred to as guided imagery and self-hypnosis, a state of mind characterized by focused attention, heightened suggestibility and vivid fantasies. It is a technique that leads to relaxation and a shift of consciousness. Since it is impossible to be anxious and relaxed at the same time and to have two trains of thoughts simultaneously, visualization is extremely useful in reducing cravings and obsessions to drink. With practice, one can rapidly change mind sets, even in a car stopped at a red light. Visualization should be preceded by progressive relaxation, which includes deep breathing techniques to help reduce stress. See [Appendix 1](#) for more about progressive relaxation and a sample visualization.

Self-Talk: Counteracting Mistaken Beliefs With Affirmations

What we tell ourselves will sooner or later determine how we act. If you think something is impossible to achieve, then it will be impossible because you'll never attempt to do it. Henry Ford said, "If you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right!" With practice, countering negative self-talk with positive affirmations will eventually change the way you behave.

Examples of mistaken beliefs are:

One drink can't hurt me. It will take away the pain.
Life will never be worthwhile without drinking.
I can stay sober unless (fill in the blank).

Positive Affirmations for the statements above are:

(One drink can't hurt me. It will take away the pain.)
I don't want to drink and I don't need to drink. Drinking only causes more pain. I can now deal with distress in a more positive way. One drink is too many, and a thousand are not enough!

(Life will never be worthwhile without drinking.)
I will persist in my recovery because my life will get better. At some point in time, I won't even think about drinking. I know that a bright and abundant future lies ahead.

(I can stay sober unless (fill in the blank).)
Commitment doesn't contain a clause that says "unless." I will stay sober for today, regardless of what happens. How many people with other diseases would trade places with me if their treatment was to refrain from picking up one drink for one day. More about commitment in [Appendix 5](#).

Compartmentalize: Separate your addiction from your life problems. Realize that you drink because you're an alcoholic. Any other reason is just an excuse. See [Appendix 3](#).

Postponement

Cravings and obsessions cannot last forever. You have to learn techniques that reduce their impact. You have to learn to minimize their strength and wait until they have passed, and they will pass. You can handle anything that comes your way in the span of one day. That's the beauty of the concept of living one day at a time. It's not helpful to tell yourself that you'll never drink again because no program of recovery is based on forever. It's too big an order. Recovery has to be based on the concept of one day at a time. You simply make a commitment to stay sober today, then day by day, the days turn into weeks, years and decades of continuous sobriety. Cravings and obsessions are thoughts, orders, calls to action. You don't have to act on the obsession of taking the first drink by simply refusing to act on it today. Essentially, you're postponing the decision to drink until the next day. Then, the next day, the obsession is usually gone, but if it returns, you repeat the process of refusing to drink for that day. In time, the obsessions will subside. Postponement effectively lessens the impact of the obsession because you've refused to listen to your addiction calling you back.

I am including in this document some excerpts from my book, *The Road To Fort Worth*, a book about my adventures through alcoholism and panic disorder into recovery. The following passage is taken from a rehab directors speech:

“Then I thought, what if I hung in there another hour, maybe all the overwhelming cravings would pass. What if I could make it through another day, another week, another month, another year. Maybe, all of it would pass. You struggle everyday in your recovery, day by day, month after month, and nothing seems to change. Then one day, you notice something is different. You don't want a drink or a fix. That's the day you begin to find God.” For more about postponement, see [Appendix 2](#).

Caring For Mind, Body And Spirit

Every aspect of an active alcoholic's life was impacted by his drinking. A recovering alcoholic must learn how to nurture every aspect of his new life. A holistic approach will foster a more healthy individual. Get involved in activities that will replace the time that you spent drinking. Grow a garden, take a class, pursue a hobby, or join an organization related to your interests. But remember: Easy does it. Take one step at a time.

Additional Stress Reducing Techniques

Personalize the following lists by adding resources that help you maintain sobriety.

MIND

- Attend a recovery program like AA and become actively involved.
- Insight based and cognitive behavioral therapy can help you with emotional issues.
- Talk to a sponsor and/or an objective, knowledgeable person.
- Practice the steps to recovery and relapse prevention techniques daily.
- Make a list of triggers and avoid the people, places and things that could lead to relapse.
- Journaling can help you to sort out issues and serve as a log of your progress.
- Pursue further education. Learn how addictions operate and techniques of recovery.
- Actively listen to music. It will reduce stress and help you learn how to concentrate.

BODY

Maintain a healthy Diet.

Start an exercise regime.

Yoga and other Eastern disciplines help to maintain a healthy mind, body and spirit.

SPIRIT

Prayer

Worship

Meditation

Yoga and other Eastern disciplines

SOCIAL

Develop healthy relationships.

Join a club related to your interests.

Helpful Acronyms

BUD: Building Up To Drink

DETACH: Don't Even Think About Changing Him/Her

FEAR: Forget Everything and Run

HALT: Don't Get Too Hungry, Angry, Lonely Or Tired

HELP: Hope, Encouragement, Love and Patience

HOW: Honesty, Open-mindedness, Willingness (to change, to learn)

KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid

NEW: Nothing Else Worked

ODAAAT: One Day At A Time

RELATIONSHIP: Really Exciting Love Affair Turns Into Outrageous Nightmare Sobriety Hangs In Peril

SIT: Stay In Today

SLIP: Sobriety Loses Its Priority

SPONSOR: Sober Person Offering Newcomers Suggestions On Recovery

TIME: This I Must Endure

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Using Visualization To Allay The Obsession To Drink

If you're a recovering alcoholic, you know that one of the big stumbling blocks to maintaining continuous sobriety is experiencing an overwhelming obsession to drink. There are few people in recovery who miss this wonderful opportunity to test their sobriety!

When you're driven by an obsession, you're like a race horse running out of the starting gate, blinded to everything but the finishing line. All you can think about is the moment when a drink will wash away your overwhelming feelings. You usually don't think about the disastrous consequences of using, but act on your overwhelming feelings.

Two points are relevant here. 1. You don't have to act on your feelings. No matter how urgent you think your present needs are, the feelings will pass in time. 2. You have to find a way to distract yourself from your present thoughts and feelings to regain the perspective that using could be fatal. Visualization offers such a distraction.

Once you learn how to get to the other side of the obsession to drink, you know that you'll be able to stay sober a day at a time no matter what comes your way.

Although the obsession to drink may seem to be spontaneous, it is usually preceded by a highly charged emotional crisis, like a romantic breakup or the loss of a job. Your sobriety will be greatly enhanced if you learn visualization, progressive relaxation and deep breathing techniques early in your recovery. They will help you to balance different areas of your life and help you in a time of crisis. A holistic approach to recovery, which includes a recovery program, diet, exercise, and spirituality is always the best approach to take. And when you feel you're approaching a crisis situation, seek the advice of others in recovery.

Following is a visualization that can help you to work your way through the obsession to drink. Of course, you'll want to create your own visualization, and you can use this one as a guide. Have a friend record the dialogue so you'll have it as you require.

Progressive Relaxation - Learning To Relax Your Muscles

Breathing: Lay on your back in bed and begin by breathing from your diaphragm. Your stomach will rise and fall as you breathe in and exhale. Take a deep breath through your nose, hold your breath for a few seconds, then exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat the process several times. You'll learn that this exercise, paired with visualization or by itself, can be used anywhere, in any position to help you to relax.

Progressive Relaxation: Starting at your feet, tense each muscle group: feet, calves, thighs, groin, stomach, and so on. Take a deep breath, tense the first muscle group, hold for a few seconds as you hold your breath, then relax the muscle group as you exhale. Continue the exercise for each muscle group in the body.

Continue with deep, rhythmic breathing and begin to visualize. The more that you concentrate on the visualization, the better it will work in producing change.

A good way to learn how to visualize is to close your eyes and imagine a pleasant memory. In doing so, you're accessing your long-term visual memory. You can take a walk through this memory palace in your mind's eye and experience sights, sounds, smells, etc. that you thought you had forgotten. After you're finished visualizing, you'll notice that you're more relaxed and that you've diverted your thoughts to a new mind state.

An Example of A Visualization Exercise

You enter a darkly lit room with three spotlights focused on three caldrons on a table. A sign hangs over the table which reads: I Cannot Be Ignored. By thinking about an obsession as an entity, it is easier to fight than a feeling.

The first caldron is boiling over with a slimy, green liquid. It is marked: Physical Health. It has a metallic smell, and you lean over to smell the odor. The fumes burn your eyes, much like ammonia would, and make you cough. You're disgusted by the smell and the look of the liquid. You want to vomit, like you've done so many times when you were drinking. Then you think about the disease within your body caused by your addiction. You focus on the awful hangovers you've had. And you know that addiction only causes disease and death. You're beginning to feel less driven to relapse.

The second caldron contains a yellowish-gray colored mass, bubbling like thick pudding in a pot. It is marked: Mental Health. You lean over the pot to smell the liquid. It has the odor of putrid, spoiled milk. One of the bubbles splits open, spewing a stream of hot liquid on your face. In the background, you hear the sound of a locomotive approaching. It's far away, though it's getting closer. You think about the dark cloud of anxiety that has engulfed you each time you drink. You think about the blackouts you've had, the foolish statements that you've made, and the meaningless life that has brought you to this moment. You don't want to drink. You want to escape from the room, but you're unable to leave.

The third caldron is emitting a thick, black layer of smoke. It is marked: Spiritual Life. You can't breathe. You try to move away from the smoke, but it surrounds you. You feel like your feet are heavy weights holding you in place. The smoke smells like burning rubber. You think about the sins you've committed against your fellow man, and you begin to cry. You cry to God to help you.

You're released from the bondage of the three caldrons and walk down a dimly lit hallway to the door. When you open the door, the light is blinding for a moment, then you smell the fragrance of flowers, first roses, then orange blossoms. It's a beautiful morning with billowing clouds floating overhead. You're in a courtyard leading to another door. When you open the door, you find a light, airy room. There's another table in front of you marked by a sign that reads: God Is Love. Three beautiful porcelain urns sit on the table.

The first urn is emitting the odor of Jasmine. It is marked: Physical Health. You touch the clear liquid in the vase and it's the same temperature as your body. You have a feeling of awe, realizing that your body is healing, and you'll never again have to feel the agony that alcohol causes. You don't want to drink.

The second urn is marked: Mental Health. It has the odor of food baking in the oven. You feel calm and

confident. Your thinking has become clear. Most of all, you're no longer afraid. You don't think of drinking at all.

The third urn is marked: Spiritual Life. A wispy cloud rises from the vase and engulfs you. You immediately feel warm and satisfied, like the hand of God has touched you. A sweet, soft song plays in your soul, and you slowly leave the wonder of your visualization, take a deep breath and smile.

The first part of the visualization is completely negative because alcoholism is completely negative. In the second part, you're concentrating on what you've gained through your sobriety. Use all of your senses when you visualize a scene: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Remember that your primary task during a crisis is to wait until your thoughts and feelings return to normal. Don't act on negative feelings. You'll have a feeling of elation once you reach the other side of an obsession to drink. Return to [Visualization](#) summary.

Appendix 2 – Postponement

Excerpt From My Book, *The Road To Fort Worth*

Jack had been able to stay sober for a long time now, but he wondered what he'd do when he had an overpowering obsession to drink--the times when he knew that he would drink and nothing could stop him.

The day came when he was tested. He knew that he was going to drink and thought about the dire consequences that would follow. The delusion that he could somehow control his drinking had disappeared years before. When he thought about drinking, he saw train cars filled with beer and whiskey for his sole consumption. He wasn't worried about the consequences at the moment. He was still going to drink. Then it occurred to him that he could drink, but he'd wait until the next morning to start. He'd get up bright and early, and waste no time getting to the bar as soon as it opened. He knew that he could stay away from a drink until then. In the morning, the obsession to drink had released its grip, and he thought of the hangover, remorse and insanity that he'd avoided by not drinking. He hadn't denied his desire or decision to drink, only postponed it, and it worked for him time and again. God had given him one sign after another trying to get his attention, and he was starting to listen. He'd given him one more tool to stay sober. Return to [Postponement Summary](#).

Appendix 3 – Compartmentalize

Excerpt From My Book, *The Road To Fort Worth*

In rehab, they pounded the idea into our heads that the only reason that we had to drink was because we were alcoholics. In group, the therapist asked, 'Why do you drink?' When someone answered that they drank because of a death or a divorce, she'd start screaming, 'You fucking drink because you're an alcoholic. You don't drink because your dog died, or your wife cheated on you, or you lost your job, or you broke your leg. All those reasons are just bullshit. They're excuses. Because, when all is said and

done, your dog is dead; your wife is gone; your house burned down; they cut off your leg, and now you're stumbling around on one leg, broke, homeless, hopeless and clutching a fucking jug of mad dog for one reason only, because you're an alcoholic. If you don't learn how to separate your life problems from your drinking problems, I will guarantee you that you'll not be able to stay sober. You have to tell yourself twenty times a day that you drink because you're an alcoholic, for that reason and that reason alone. Anything else is an excuse. Return to [Postponement Summary](#).

Appendix 4 - Relapse Mode – HALT

Excerpt From My Book, *The Road To Fort Worth*

In March of '83, Jack received a large check from Social Security, payment for the SSI checks that he failed to pick up in Lorain. He walked through town to the Texas Commerce Bank, opened a checking account, filled out an application for a credit card and deposited the check. An hour later, he presented one of his new checks to the teller, who told him that the account had been closed because his credit report was bad, and she returned his deposit to him. He felt embarrassed, ashamed and unworthy, and stopped at another bank for travelers' checks.

On the walk home, he thought about his life in Fort Worth. Two years had passed, and he had a low paying job in a warehouse, lived in a couple of old offices and didn't have a girlfriend. He remembered the happy couples skating in the Tandy Center ice rink and felt discouraged and sad. It occurred to him that he could stay drunk for a long time with the money in his pocket, and that one small thought grew into an obsession to drink. Overwhelmed and defenseless, he was blinded to the fact that his life was a miracle. He'd been entrusted to care for an immense, landmark building, a reality that he wouldn't have dreamt to be possible in the years when he was drunk. He didn't think of the dire consequences of taking even a sip of alcohol or try to postpone taking a drink. He stood at a crossroad: Throckmorton Street led to the warehouse, and Third Street would take him to a bar. He turned on Third Street, stopped at a blinking "Don't Walk" signal on Houston Street, and looked down at the pavement, thinking of the road to ruin that lay ahead of him around the next corner: days of sick drinking, sleeping in the cold and endless trouble.

When he looked up at the traffic light, he saw another light blinking in the distance, a neon sign in the window of a diner that read, "Open." The traffic light turned green, and he walked into the diner with the idea that he could drink more on a full stomach. He ordered a steak, a baked potato, coleslaw, and a glass of milk and ate like a starving man. When he'd finished the plate, he ordered a piece of apple pie, and felt serene for a moment. And then, a few tears fell on his plate because the obsession to drink had left him. The irrefutable promise of destruction was washed out of his soul with a few tears rolling down his face. He left the restaurant, headed over to Throckmorton Street and walked home.

Note: The acronym HALT clearly applies to this excerpt. Jack was **H**ungry when he stopped to eat. He was **A**ngry at the bank for closing his account. He was **L**onely because he didn't have a girlfriend. And he was **T**ired since it was the end of the working day. His overwhelming obsession to drink disappeared after he ate.

Appendix 5 – Commitment

"Until One Is Committed, there is a hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves, too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour (sic) all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it." [Return](#) to Self-Talk Summary

W. H. Murray in *The Scottish Himalaya Expedition*, 1951

Appendix 6 – Overview of My Book

The Road To Fort Worth by Michael Jackson Smith

The author tackles the impossible when he puts words to the cacophonous symphony that defined Jack Wendell's life. The narrative begins with his alter-ego's first anxiety attack, continuing with a series of episodes that take Jack on a walk into an alternate universe of madness. Overwhelmed by terror and the urgency of leaving the tormenting hell that embraced him, he discovers the sedative, calming effects of alcohol.

Jack Wendell's rite of passage into adulthood began three hours before midnight on the eve of his twenty-first birthday. Midway on his stroll across campus, he watched one foot follow the other in a rhythmic pattern and thought about time. He realized that the present moment was so fleeting that it couldn't exist and suddenly felt dizzy, and his breathing became shallow and rapid. The student union seemed like an ocean away as feelings of horror washed through his body in spasms, like waves crashing on the shore, then retreating and returning for another blow. He endured the anguish for the next three hours, convinced that he had entered a portal into hell. When the clock struck midnight, he entered a tavern, ordered a glass of whiskey and the elixir washed away his panic with three magic bends of his elbow.

This was only the beginning of Wendell's long love affair with booze, his only relief from the anxiety attacks that haunted him in an era when little was known about his affliction. He couldn't function with the anxiety that possessed him and drank in an attempt to control his horrifying feelings, but couldn't work in a perpetual state of intoxication. On his journey, he encountered a host of unlikely companions and circumstances, including rehabs, institutions, therapists and a horde of dysfunctional people who would harbor him for a time, yet, sooner or later, he was forced onto the street again in search of another haven, where he could drink to his heart's content.

If you're an alcoholic or a victim of panic disorder, you'll understand Jack's dilemma. If you're one of the five people adversely affected by the alcoholic, you'll gain a new understanding of his plight. You'll never again look at alcoholism and panic disorder in the same light. You'll understand that a few simple principles are the key to recovery. You'll learn that it's easier to get sober than to stay sober, and that it's possible to arrive on the other side of the overwhelming obsession to drink without drinking. You'll

learn that one's internal dialogue has a large impact on panic attacks, and that a few cognitive restructuring techniques will help to ease and dissipate the episodes with practice. After reading *The Road To Fort Worth*, you'll have discovered how to avoid some of the pitfalls that enslaved Jack and how to begin to recover from two devastating diseases.

The Road To Fort Worth is a long overdue novel about a man suffering from panic disorder and alcoholism. It could be seen as a continuation of Charles R. Jackson's classic novel, *The Lost Weekend*. It's the story of a life on the rocks with a twist of lemon. It's the story of how one man learned to untie the inextricable knot binding two debilitating disorders that so many people have been unable to unravel.

**Hang Tough! and
Never give up hope. It is the guiding light of recovery.**

Please visit my website for further information.

Articles:

<http://panicdisorderandalcoholismrecovery.com/1contents.htm>

Chapter 8 – Danville – A Free Chapter About Rehab

<http://panicdisorderandalcoholismrecovery.com/excerpts.htm>

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