

Beth

Beth was an outstanding sprinter in track and held several school records. She was a good student and was well-liked by many different groups on campus. One afternoon, she stopped by to check in and invite me to her next track competition. In the middle of the information, she suddenly stopped, closed the door and said, "I might as well get this over with." She plopped down in a chair and unzipped her backpack.

Beth held up her water bottle. "It's gin," she said.

"I've been drinking since fourth grade." She shrugged. "It's a 'norm' in my home. My family is kind of a mess. I mean, they act like everything is perfect. My dad makes lots of money and if you saw my mom, you'd think that she was my sister. The problem is that she has never grown up. I guess neither of them have."

"My dad is always the life of any party. My uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, you name it, all drink a lot on every occasion. No one cares who's getting drunk because they all are. In fact, drinking is considered 'a rite of passage' even when you're underage. As soon as you want to join in, you're welcome. The family's motto is 'better to drink at home than at a friend's house'. They say it's part of their heritage. Whatever."

"My dad used to brag how I would watch MMA with him and put down a few beers. I was in fourth grade! He would brag to his friends about how he bonded with his daughter. To be honest, I didn't even know that other kids didn't drink with their families until I was in high school. Everyone thinks that it's so cool to go to parties and get wasted. It means nothing to me. It's like being at home."

"Being the only child in my family means that my parents think of me as one of their friends, not their daughter. I know that they're good people, but I don't want two best friends. Sometimes, I feel like I'm the parent in the house, worried about whether they're going to make it home alive. Both have several DUI's. Their only regrets are the fines that they have to pay and the humiliation of spending time in jail. I find them both totally embarrassing. Yet, here I am with gin in my water bottle. Obviously, they're not the only ones who have a problem." She continued.

"My friends love to hang out at our house because there aren't any rules. They think that my parents are so cool. One time my mom spilled her glass of wine on the pool table when she joined our game. Everyone cracked up, except for me. For the most part, I really try to avoid having anyone over if they're home. And, by the way, you need to know that my parents are completely against drugs. What a joke."

"We are alcoholics in my family which means we have serious problems in our house, but everyone pretends that there is nothing wrong. They party; they argue and fight and then they pretend like none of it happened. 'Every day is a new day' is their motto,

complete with a hangover. I need to find a way out of this. I drink to forget what a mess my family is. I don't want to end up like them even though they consider themselves functional drinkers whatever that is."

I asked her if we should talk to her parents together.

"I've tried to talk to them about their drinking, but they don't take me seriously. They actually feel bad for me. How many times have they told me that I'm such a good kid but I need to lighten up. Really? I bet there's not another teen on this planet who feels like they are the real parent in the house. Does that even make sense? I don't know, maybe there are a lot of us. It's just that I don't share my family's problems with anyone, so I guess I'll never know."

So, I'm here to say that I just needed to talk to someone, and I don't know where to go from here. Don't bother calling them in. They'll deny everything and then they'll discuss this issue over a few drinks when they get home unless they choose to stop for a drink somewhere on the way."

"But something tells me that I need to stop drinking now before I can't stop. I don't seem to have any choice. I thought maybe I should sign up for MPOWRD. My friend in track goes to the group meetings. He says that they just make you feel better about life. I think that would be a good start. I need to begin somewhere."

Beth didn't share any of her family's issues in group. It wasn't important. She really just liked connecting with other teens whose lives weren't perfect either. She focused on her own challenges and worked hard to find personal empowerment for change. Her drinking stopped, her stats actually improved in track and she created time away from family social events.

What she didn't expect was how her family reacted to her commitment toward sobriety.

At first, her parents assumed it was some phase Beth was going through. But when she persisted to remain sober, her parents agreed to be open to discussions with her. They finally began to acknowledge their problem. It was a first for both of them. Their daughter was actually setting the boundaries instead of her parents.

At the end of the semester, Beth admitted that things were better at home. Her mom agreed that she had been looking for a way to change for a long time. She told Beth that she really admired her daughter and felt that it was time for her to get some help.

When any teen chooses to make better life-decisions, it impacts the world that surrounds them. MPOWRD meetings create the opportunity to process personal challenges, discuss decision-making with peers and admit our mistakes. Friends, families and teachers take note of the positive changes and the sense of confidence in MPOWRD teens. They become leaders and advocates for their peers. Teens supporting teens create a better world.

Your thoughts: (no names or places)

Do you feel that most people accept drinking as an acceptable part of growing up for teens and their friends?

Do you believe that a teen could really impact his/her family and/or friends by making a positive change in life? Give an example.

Perfect families aren't really perfect at all. All families must face challenges on a daily basis. One teen in an MPOWRD meeting described his family as being simply "average". Another teen said that average was good enough. What do you think he meant?

Why did Beth's choice to change her drinking habit create a far greater impact on her family?

Statistics report that binge drinking (3 or more drinks at a time) is the second leading cause of death for teens. Do you find that statistic believable? Why?

One of the seniors in MPOWRD decided to have a drug and alcohol-free Halloween party in his backyard. He got one of the pizza parlors to donate food for the crowd and found a local radio station DJ to offer his time and sound equipment. Other teens stood at the gate entrance so they could monitor the crowd.

The crowd respected the "rules of the party" and it was a definite success, described by one teen as "the best party I've been to". Teens can often solve their own issues when given the chance.

Teens often complain that they are not given a voice when it comes to high school management and discipline codes. Select an issue that occurs in high schools that you believe teens could solve if given the authority.