

OLD DEMON ALCOHOL

by

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All news media today—TV, radio, magazines and newspapers—stress the deleterious effects of the use of drugs. Usually the rhetorical question is posed: Is it more or less harmful than alcohol? I have no first hand knowledge about drugs but I was brought up by parents who were strict and literal teetotalers. They even denied shelf-space for a small bottle of liquor for “medicinal purposes.” As far as they were concerned, drinking alcohol in any form (even medicine) was morally wrong as well as physically debilitating.

There was a difference between my parents in their attitude toward liquor. My father strongly disliked the taste of it. My mother liked the taste of it but staunchly abstained because of a life-long loyalty to the White Ribbon of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. (At one time she was National Publicity Chairman for the W.C.T.U.) Two illustrations will make this difference clear.

One New Year’s Day, the entire family gathered at our house for dinner. For dessert, we had a “Yule Log” made of ice cream. Father and I took one bite and put down our spoons. Everybody else lapped it up with gusto in spite of the fact it was heavily laced with rum. When it was time for “seconds”, I had the invitation barely out of my mouth, when Father dampened hopes around the table by saying in his very firm voice, “Anyone who has eaten ONE slice, has eaten too much.”

Mother, on the other hand, startled all of us in Italy one time, when she ordered, “Pudding with Rum Sauce.” It said so, very clearly on the menu. Charles and Miriam (who had married the year before), Grace and I were being introduced to the beauties and wonders of Europe by Father who used to supplement a school teacher’s salary by taking parties to Europe during his younger years in Wausau. So when Mother ordered the “Pudding with Rum Sauce”, the shocked expletive of, “Mother!” rang through the restaurant. Mother, in her dignified, unperturbed way, said, “There’s no rum in it. It’s only in the name.”

Later, on a trip to Havana, Cuba, Grace had a real problem of tact with Mother. It was a hot day and they had stepped into a restaurant to

cool off with an iced pineapple drink called, "pina fria." We had had them before—but this one was different. It was well-fortified with liquor. Grace did not know what to do after she had tasted it, but Mother was so obviously enjoying it that she decided to say nothing—until Mother finished her drink and remarked enthusiastically, "That was the best pina fria I ever drank. Let's have a second." Grace was never quite sure just how she got Mother out of there.

Childhood values are difficult to leave behind. To this day, Howard and I are strict and literal teetotalers. We, like both of our parents, have no liquor even for "medicinal purposes." In our retirement home at Meadow Lakes, we run a New Year's Eve Party for 75 or more which depends upon a lot of music, good fellowship and natural gaiety of spirit, rather than upon alcohol. There are several simultaneous parties at Meadow Lakes but ours is by far the largest—and the ONLY "dry" one. Perhaps that says something about our generation.