

*From the January 2003 magazine.*

## Tales Of a New Year's Eve Party

### Something very strange was going on

December 31, 1988--I was \_\_\_\_\_  
coming up on twelve years of  
sobriety and was invited to a New Year's party. Some long-term friends of my family (I went to high school with their children) hosted it. The guest list was mostly professors, scientists, engineers, and mathematicians, i.e., various Ph.D. types. Nearly everyone brought a bottle of something as a gift for the hosts. There was champagne, wine, and various liquors, including a half-gallon of an exquisite scotch.

Even though I had been sober several years, I still watched how people drank. The way these obviously normal social drinkers drank was amazing. A typical drinker would go to the kitchen, carefully measure a shot of booze, mix it with ice and mixers, then take the drink (and a coaster) with him back to his conversation. Once there, he would sip off about one sixteenth of an inch of the drink, set it down on the coffee table (on the coaster), and then forget about it. He would then continue the conversation with his companion, leaving the drink sitting there on the table until the ice melted. At some point, he would notice the drink and say something like, "Oops, my drink is ruined. Let me go pour it out and make myself another one," which he would then proceed to do. I watched several people do essentially the same thing.

I saw people say really strange things like, "Oh, no more for me, thanks. I'm starting to feel it now." I think the most I saw anyone drink that night was one man who actually drank two five-ounce glasses of wine in three or four hours. When the midnight toast was offered, the majority of the guests took sparkling cider, not champagne! I saw this with my own eyes after years of sobriety, and it still makes little sense to me.

The kicker to all this happened the next morning. I stayed the night, and when I came downstairs the next morning, I saw the half-gallon of that exquisite scotch. The seal was broken and the neck was empty--perhaps two

shots had been poured out of it. I had a flash of awareness on seeing that. I knew what I would have done had I still been drinking: that bottle of scotch (and probably as many other bottles as I could steal) would have landed in a bush outside the house and then gone home with me when I left. Yet, there sat an entire collection of bottles from the night before, many of them unopened, just sitting on the counter.

Mid-June 2002--I went over to the same friends' house and there, on a shelf in their garage, sat a half-gallon of that same scotch, covered with dust. The level of booze in the bottle was the same as I remembered it. They probably never even touched the bottle since putting it away after that New Year's party fourteen and a half years ago. If I ever need a reminder about how differently I think about booze than social drinkers, I just think about my friends and their bottle of scotch. I have remembered it for many years; they have probably forgotten they still have it.

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