

IWNHTM Syndrome

(Or Self Delusion)

By G. Raymond McCullough

“Only a fool or a person who is delusional believes they are immune from the consequences of their self-destructive tendencies.”

It appears that the IWNHTM syndrome is prevalent. This became clear to me many years ago and has been repeatedly re-enforced in my work as a chemical dependency counselor. The story that follows may give some credence to my contention that the IWNHTM syndrome is prevalent in many segments of our society.

Several years ago, a mature and responsible friend of mine had been drinking and decided to get behind the wheel of a car. Luckily for him and everyone else on the road, he made it from point A to B without incident. Yes, I said this time because he exhibits early signs of suffering from IWNHTM syndrome. In sharp contrast, I would like to share with you a fictitious story, which could easily be true, that highlights the hazards of IWNHTM syndrome.

Zacharias (Zach) is a young man in his mid 20s. He is a graduate of a prestigious university. He graduated at the top of his class. During his college years, he often drank heavily at fraternity parties. The only major consequence of his drinking was a hangover the next day. Zach lived on campus at his fraternity house and didn't own a car. This fact of his life was a blessing in disguise.

Shortly after graduation, Zach secured a job with a company that did work in his field of study (biochemistry) in college. He rented a small apartment in a cozy neighborhood, not far from his job. During the months that followed his hiring, Zach drank with co-workers after work at a bar that was conveniently situated between his work and a short ten-minute walk to his apartment. Zach routinely walked from work to the bar and then home at least two to three times a week. Eventually it was four to five days a week, and now he was stumbling on the short journey to his apartment. One evening, in a drunken stupor, he lost his way and stumbled around the neighborhood for an hour. A neighbor who recognized him sensed he was not doing well and assisted him home. Zach enjoyed his life because in many ways it was reminiscent of his relatively carefree college and fraternity life.

Fortuitously, Zach met a young lady at the bar he frequented. He was immediately smitten by her charm, beauty, and her enjoyment of drinking. They, at least, had the latter in common. Drinking was fun for them, and it served as a major stress reliever.



The young lady, we'll call her Twyla, did not live in the neighborhood, nor did she work at the same company as Zach. Twyla lived outside the city and met Zach only by chance because she was visiting a friend in the city. It was after this meeting that Zach decided he needed to buy a car if he was going to be able to see Twyla on a frequent basis, taking into account the geography between them.

By the time Zach decided to buy a car, he had evolved into a heavy drinker, having six to seven frosty mugs of beer at a sitting; the frost never completely disappeared because he was now a fast drinker at his neighborhood watering hole. His beer drinking was sometimes capped off with a couple of bowls of his friend's medicinal herb (marijuana). Ironically, during these drinking episodes, Zach and his friends often joked and laughed about other peoples' mishaps and misfortunes resulting from their use of alcohol and other drugs. These unfortunate individuals were usually referred to as idiots, dweebs, and morons because in their infinite wisdom they would never experience such bad luck.

On a Friday in late July, Zach bought his car and Twyla was with him. After the purchase, they decided to drive to the bar where they met to celebrate the acquisition that would allow them to spend more time together. They both had several drinks that evening as was their custom. Zach always believed he was okay to drive Twyla to her home outside the city. Staying over at each other's place during the week was never an option. It was not feasible because of their work schedules and the morning commute.

Several months later after a night of heavy drinking and smoking, Zach and Twyla decided to call it a night. Of course, as had been the case for months, Zach decided to drive Twyla home. Despite drinking more than he ever had in the months preceding, he felt he was okay to drive. Zach got Twyla home safely. It was after he dropped her off that things took a tragic turn. Following is Zach's account of the events that evening:

I did not think I had that much to drink and the pot just made me feel energized. Twyla seemed okay with me driving. Although when I think back, she was pretty wasted. I remember looking over at her in the passenger seat and she was drooling. I mentioned it to her, and we laughed about it. After dropping Twyla off, I headed back into the city. As I drove home, I had no idea that my blood alcohol level was over 0.2%. Yeah, I guess many would say I was really crocked. I wasn't speeding because I had enough sense not to draw any unnecessary attention to myself at 1:00 AM. As I approached my exit and the off ramp that would in 5 five minutes deliver me safely home, I overshot the exit, tried to correct, and steered the car into one of those concrete dividers broadside at about 50 miles an hour. The police report estimated my speed at 60+ miles per hour. Nonetheless, my small sports car bounced off the concrete divider and spun like a top. The front left tire blew out and when the rim caught the asphalt, it pitched my car over onto its side—the driver's side.



Unfortunately for me, I had my window down and I was not wearing my seat belt. From this point on, I do not remember very much, but I do remember my face hitting the asphalt. I distinctly remember the car sliding on the pavement and the utter terror I experienced as I felt my cheek and eye being round off as the car slid forward. The car eventually came to a stop after what felt like an eternity. I had this sensation that my skull had been shattered like an egg and there was a sense of a warm liquid, probably blood, on my face and in my mouth. Then, there was this eerie silence and I thought I might be dead. Suddenly, there was the flood of lights, sirens, and other activity. It was at this point that I lost consciousness or went into shock. I don't know which. My nightmare had just begun.

Reading the accident and initial emergency response report, it is my understanding that the fire and rescue team extricated me from the twisted debris, and paramedics positioned me so I would not drown in my own blood. My jaw was snapped in three places and a full inch of bone was protruding from the beneath what used to be my chin. My upper palate was shattered, and both of my cheek bones were broken and mangled beyond recognition. My nose and sinuses were destroyed as well. One-half of my upper lip had been torn off and

my left eye was exposed and hanging from my eye socket. Two-thirds of my upper eyelid and a large part of my lower lids were no longer a part of me, but had been torn away by the asphalt. Miraculously, I suffered no broken bones or mangled flesh from the neck down. I wondered, fleetingly, if this was my punishment for my past vanity.

When, I arrived at the trauma center, I was given little chance of survival because, at this point, I was in severe shock. Over the next 24 hours, I was in and out of consciousness. I preferred being unconscious because I didn't have to think about what I had done to myself. I spent two days in the trauma center.

I was transferred to a major trauma surgical center where it took a team of surgeons 13 hours to put my skull and face back together, of course not in its original form. I now have two stainless steel straps, two steel plates, many inches of wire, and 14 screws just to hold my face together. Even though I may end up looking close to what I looked like before, I will forever live with the memory of the pain I endured from that one evening. Every day since the accident, there is some reminder that this was not a bad dream that I could wake up from and walk away unscathed. This accident was a part of my reality. Many nights I wake up in a panic because I have a nightmare that I am about to die in that accident. I arise from my bed to look in the mirror to reassure myself that I am alive and, with that, my reflection reminds me that my nightmare is far from over. I must admit I am guilty of thinking and believing "It Would Never Happen to Me."

Months later, Zach got a citation in the mail for driving under the influence of alcohol and other intoxicants. The police were with him at the emergency room, and Zach consented to a blood draw for analysis. The official blood alcohol level was .267%.

The monetary costs were high for Zach. He would pay over \$18,000 in legal, court, and treatment fees during the next two years.

This is a graphic and serious account of someone who wishes he could relive that entire evening, and maybe the many months that preceded that evening. It was not just the choice Zach made on the evening of the accident but on many evenings that preceded the event.

The IWNHTM syndrome, which in many ways is a mindset, requires an integral element: the introduction of mood-altering substances that distort our awareness, impair our judgment, and over time feed self delusion.