

MOOD CHANGES OBSERVED

Depression, booze don't mix

By DEBORAH PEARCE
Victoria Times-Colonist
VICTORIA (CP) — People prone to depression should steer clear of beer, dine without wine, and pass up the grass, says Victoria doctor Douglas Graham.

The former medical adviser to the British Columbia alcohol and drug program advises abstinence from even small amounts of alcohol, and other non-prescription mood altering drugs for people with any kind of mental illness.

"Substance use can cause almost any psychiatric syndrome you want to name," Graham says. "Probably the commonest one is depression."

Graham says people are too quick to attribute depression to external events, forgetting that drugs "alter our internal environment — it's why people use them."

"But what most people don't understand is that alcohol and other drugs cause long-term mood changes — even with moderate use."

"You don't need much alcohol to do it," said Graham, who calls alcohol "the Preparation H of the mind."

"It gives prompt, temporary relief," he said. "But the long-term outlook is bleak indeed."

He cites a study by University of California psychology researcher Isabel Birnbaum, which involved nearly 200 women, all classed as social drinkers. None was dependent on any drugs.

"She examined their mood state and asked one group to continue using alcohol as they had before, and to make a note of how much they drank," Graham said.

The second group was asked to abstain for two months.

At the end of the two months, Birnbaum re-evaluated the mood states of the two groups — and discovered that the women who continued to drink scored significantly higher in depression and anger than those who abstained.

"We're talking social use — small amounts," Graham emphasized.

Graham says it's impossible to diagnose a primary depression without ensuring the patient has been drug-free for some time.

"Psychiatrists, on the other hand, will tell you they can tell a primary depression right away," he said. "That's a fundamental difference between the two fields."

A person who is drug or alcohol dependent is feeding the depression two ways, Graham said.

First, the chemicals cause depression directly; second, there's the state of being dependent — "the illness itself."

Graham says almost every patient he's encountered with a drug dependency problem is also depressed.

And nearly always they have some unresolved grief — for example, the death of a father or mother.

Some warning signs of latent depression

VICTORIA (CP) — The following list describes some of the more noticeable signs of depression. If you answer "yes" to four or more of these, you may be vulnerable to depression. You should get help if any combination of these symptoms persists for more than a couple of weeks, or if you have been considering suicide.

1. I've been having trouble falling asleep.

2. I wake up early in the morning before it's time to get up.

3. I'm very self critical and blame myself when things go wrong.

4. I have no energy or enthusiasm even for things I want to do, such as social activities, hobbies, or sex.

5. I can't concentrate; my thinking seems really slow.

6. I have lost weight recently; I have little interest in food.

7. I feel restless and irritable much of the time.

8. I have recurring pain or headaches I can't explain.

9. I think about death a lot.

10. I have considered suicide.

(From Understanding Depression, a pamphlet published by the Canadian Mental Health Association)



Researchers say drugs and alcohol accelerate depression.

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Cameron says she formed the choir seven years ago "because there was so much beautiful music

going to waste, that we weren't hearing — the music of Scotland and Cape Breton."

"We sing a lot of the music that was composed here in pioneer days."

Cameron says Cape Breton is in danger of losing the little-used language. While choir membership has increased, many of the singers don't even speak Gaelic.

A record released by the choir in 1988 received a warm reception around the world, said Cameron.

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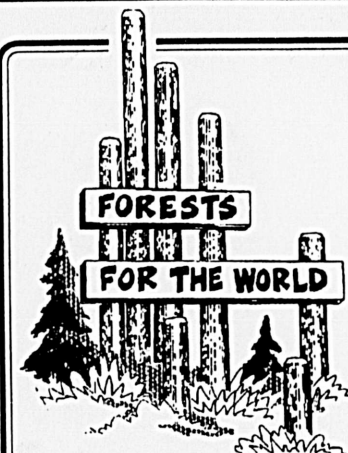
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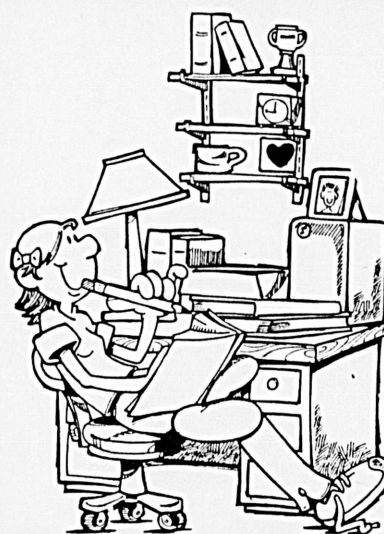
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2. What will the recently announced University of Northern British Columbia mean to the young people of Prince George.
3. A topic with a "Northern Flavor" or storyline that interests you.

FICTION

1. Short Stories, Poems, Short Plays, Dialogues, Satires etc., with a general theme of Life in Prince George or any other Northern Community of your choosing.
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CONTEST RULES:

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5. Entries will be reviewed and winners chosen by the Friends of the Prince George Public Library, which reserves the right to make all editorial changes they may deem necessary.
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