



# Wasted

TALES OF A YOUNG DRUNK

Mark Judge

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To my parents and Alice Mitchell Hurley



# Acknowledgments

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# Chapter 1

## A Potential Alcoholic

"GO MAN, GO!" RONNIE SHOUTED. "YOU GOT IT! YOU'RE SWINGIN'!"

The bartender didn't know how to dance very well so I gave her a strong lead, twirling her under my arm and pulling her back to my side. I lowered her into a dip right as the song - "One O'clock Jump" by Count Basie - came to a close.

"Man, that was amazing!" Shane, my best friend, said as I sat back down at our table. "That deserves a shot." He waved for the waiter.

"No," I said, catching his arm. "I'm off the sauce."

He looked confused and lowered his arm. "You're not becoming a recovery junkie on me, are you?"

"Let's just say that I'm not having any today," I said, glancing at Ronnie. He smiled and winked at me.

"Wonderful," Shane said. "Next thing you know you'll be telling me about how your dysfunctional childhood turned you into a drunk."

"Dysfunctional childhood doesn't cause alcoholism," I said. "Biology does."

After ten years of drinking and a lifetime of misinformation about alcohol, I was ready to face the truth of my addiction. And the truth was that while my childhood and community may have increased my exposure to the drug alcohol, a genetic disposition to alcoholism was what had triggered my addiction.

My childhood, in fact, had been fairly normal. I was raised in Potomac, Maryland, a small town about twenty miles outside of Washington, DC. My father worked in Washington for the Labor Department under President Eisenhower, but being a nature lover, he wanted to live in the country. In the late fifties, when my family moved there, Potomac was mostly hills, horses, and trees.

The son of Joe Judge, a famous first-baseman for the Washington Senators, my father, also named Joe, was the antithesis of the typical jock. Quiet, fiercely intellectual, highly educated and

artistic, he had excelled aesthetically and academically where his father had athletically.

My mother, Phyllis, was a pretty Irish-Catholic brunette from Massachusetts. She had lost her own mother to cancer when she was sixteen and had grown up with a hard-drinking father. The oldest of three, she had worked to support her family since she was a teenager. She had been a telephone operator, a teacher, and a nurse in the Korean war, and was teaching in Washington when she met my father in a bar in Chevy Chase.

After getting married, she and my father shunned the city in favor of the small town of Potomac. There they had four kids - Joe, Michael, Alyson, and, in 1964, me. All of us were two years apart. We lived in a pseudo-colonial house surrounded by dirt roads, trees, and very few other houses. Indeed, we were so isolated that when my sister was a toddler, she accidentally got out of the house during a snowstorm, crawled across the street, and appeared, unharmed, at our neighbor's front porch. There were no streetlights, and we could let our dog, Christopher Robin, out unleashed and unfenced for hours - even days - at a time.

For most of my adolescence, Potomac was a small town rather than the sprawling, anonymous, congested suburb it has since become. Our few neighbors and the collection of stores a few miles away in "the village" were like characters out of mythic small-town America. George, the local owner of the District General Store, was a bald, skinny old man who personified the rural atmosphere of old Potomac. He delivered groceries to my mother when she was pregnant, and had a sense of humor full of biting sarcasm. One of my mother's favorite stories about George was the time a wealthy woman who had just moved to Potomac came into the DGS with a friend and claimed to be appalled at the high price of lettuce. "Ninety-nine cents for a head of lettuce," she sniveled to her friend. "The owner can take that and shove it up his ass."

As it happened, George was just a few feet away pricing some fruit. "I'd love to lady," he rejoined, "but I've already got a 79-cent cucumber up there."