

## Anonymouses

I called my friend, Ralph, the other night to go out to play some pool at the Castle in Manhattan Beach, California. I hadn't seen him for a long time. Nobody answered at his home, so I left a message. The phone rang at 2 AM. Groggily I picked up the receiver. It was Ralph. He wanted to come over to talk.

"Now?" I asked, incredulously, looking at my watch.

"It can't wait. I'll be right over," he said and then there was a click and dial tone.

So I got up, half dressed, poured a beer and waited. Pretty soon, sure enough, Ralph strode up the walkway shouldering a huge backpack and knocked on the door. I gave him a big hug and asked him to sit down.

"How about a beer?" I asked, heading for the fridge.

"Nah," he said morosely. "Just water."

"Geeze, Ralph," I said, astonished. "You've never passed up a draft Negra Modelo in your life. And you have gained a ton of weight. Are you okay?"

"No," he answered. "Sorry I haven't been around much. I don't have any time left anymore." And then he began to tell me his story.

It seems that when he was a boy he became addicted to puns. I'm not kidding, that's what he told me.

"Yeah," he said, shaking his head. "I would redefine words in school. Like when a teacher said something about an enigma, I would say 'enigma' was a rubber bag of warm water with a hose, inserted in a posterior orifice such as to relieve constipation. When the nurse tried to explain the causes of flatulence to the class, I suggested 'flatulence' was an emergency vehicle which picks up an individual run over by a steamroller. When the basketball coach showed us how to circumvent a full court press, I said 'circumvent' is an opening in boxer shorts worn by Jewish men."

"So?" I said, puzzled. "Those are really amusing, but why is that a big deal?"

“I couldn’t stop, I would interrupt people in mid-sentence to correct their syntax. Oh, no! I feel it coming on! ‘Syntax’ is something the Catholic Church charges for going to confession. See what I mean?”

“My God,” I gasped. “You can’t help yourself, can you?”

“Exactly. It is a disease. So I went to a psychiatrist. She suggested group therapy. The group was called **Paronomasia Abstainers** and met three times a week. One day a guy came up to me after the meeting and said he thought I was just too uptight. He pulled out a small bag of marijuana, and....”

“...And?” I asked.

“...And before you know it I was smoking around a pound a week, carrying a big bong around wherever I went, people staring at me in business meetings. I wound up in ASS.”

“ASS?” I asked, amused..

“**A**nonymous **S**\*\*t **S**mokers,” he explained seriously.

“Wow,” I said. “So you were going to two different meetings a week?”

“More. I started drinking as a substitute for the weed. Before you know it I was up to two gallons of Mogen David a day. So I went to AA. But I still did puns and grass, so I kept going to all the meetings.”

“Well, I hope they helped you, Ralph,” I said sympathetically. “I wondered why you never seemed to be at home when I called. Would you like some coffee?”

“Coffee?...the person upon whom one coughs,” he said, pulling out of his back pack a big beaker of water with hoses attached, lit up and continued. “I can’t drink coffee, but thanks anyway. CRAP says only complete abstinence will work.”

“And exactly what is CRAP?” I asked incredulously. “I’ve never heard of that one.”

“The ‘**C**affeine **R**esister’s **A**ddiction **P**rogram,’” he answered. “To go on, though, I stopped drinking for awhile, but my body craved all the sugar in the

wine so I started eating chocolate. I became addicted to Kit Kats. I had so many zits I looked like I had leprosy. People would shy away from me in the street, with my bong in one hand, the gallon of Mogen David in the other and six packs of Kit Kats sticking out of my pockets. I had to go to ChockAnon.”

“I’ve never heard of ‘ChockAnon’ either, I said. “What do they do?”

“They have a twelve step program involving Easter Bunnies,” he said. “Pretty complex stuff. Then I was able to stop the marijuana smoking for a time when someone suggested tobacco as a substitute. Only for awhile, you understand, until I could lick the grass habit. But I wound up smoking both of them 24/7. I had to get a Meerschaum pipe to go with my bong. That’s when I bought this back pack for all the paraphernalia I had to carry.”

“Oh my God,” I gasped. “I used to smoke. Giving up tobacco was the hardest thing I ever did. That guy gave you terrible advice.”

“In retrospect, you are right of course, but I was desperate. The next thing you know I was going to NURD meetings every day.

“NURD?” I asked, open mouthed.

“Yeah. **N**icotine **U**ntouchables **R**esisting **D**ope. It’s an organization started in India going after both tobacco and pot. Good group. They chant weird Hindu stuff during meetings. It seems to work for a lot of people, but I found their ‘Higher Power’ to be incomprehensible. There’s just too many of them...twenty-seven last time I counted. Prayer is a marathon. You don’t dare leave one out for fear of offending.”

“Did it work for you?” I asked naively.

“For a time,” he answered, pulling out a big bottle and a giant Kit-Kat from the back pack. “But nothing seemed to work for very long. Just when I thought I might be seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, a lady in my ASS group said my problem was I took myself too seriously. She said I should lighten up. Of course I told her in no uncertain terms ‘lightening up’ was forbidden and she should work her program harder. Since she wasn’t involved with PA, she didn’t get it, but gave me a book to read. That was the last straw. It was a book of puns. So I got myself a sponsor.”

“I guess it was about time,” I wondered. “So you got six sponsors?”

“Fourteen, actually. I haven’t told you about the other problems. My sex addiction exploits with an enormous good looking cannibal lady from Malaysia with a big bone in her nose who I met at the four ‘F’s’,,**Fat Folks Fighting Food**...will have to wait for another time. In any case, all my sponsors, every one of them, suggested working their twelve step program. I now have one hundred and sixty-eight steps I practice every day and I go to at least three meetings a week in all of the groups. At a minimum of 42 hours a week, not including travel, you can see that there just isn’t much time for anything else anymore. Anyway, thanks for listening to me. I have to go.”

“For God’s sake, Ralph. Stay for awhile. You can use the extra bedroom to sleep if you want.”

“Thanks but I have an IA meeting I’m late for.”

“IA?” I asked walking him to the door.

“**I**nsomniac **A**literationists,” he said. “It’s one of my fourteen. Aaron Aardvark, an awake and ardent anecdotist, addicted to alliterative adjectives, administers an assembly for actuarial advocates in the AM. I’m an accomplished accountant so I can’t abet avoidance.”

As Ralph sprinted down the street, staggering under the weight of his bloated backpack, I waved to him. “Always available,” I shouted after him. He waved back as he turned the corner. “Adios, amigo,” he yelled, an aliterationist to the very end. I said a silent prayer that he could be helped...or at least go to the ‘B’ section of the dictionary.