

Aspirin On My Mind

2006

In anticipation of surgery, the medical profession strongly recommends at least two weeks of abstinence from the use of aspirin. Presumably, this is a preventative measure to control excessive bleeding or some other, but in my case this recommended aspirin-abstinence has generated some drug withdrawal-like symptoms, especially a feeling of insecurity. Believe it or not, I have taken two aspirin-a-night for at least 50 years, certainly since 1956, but I believe even before that. Do the numbers: 36,500 aspirin. Is it any wonder that I am experiencing the pangs of withdrawal.

Who is to blame for my addiction? That's easy! My grandfather and the Christian Brothers. During certain extended periods of my childhood, I lived with my grandparents – this would have been during the 1940's. Every evening at bedtime, my grandfather would take down a glass tumbler from the cupboard, fill it with water, and bring it to the dining room table. Into the water, he dropped two Alka-Seltzer tablets, which fizzed so loudly you could hear it, especially if you placed your ear right next to the glass. Before the tablets were completely used up, he drained the entire glass with a gulp or two. Sometimes, he would let me take a sip just before he drank it down. Why did he drink Alka-Seltzer? I have no idea, but he did so every night, as regular a ritual as that of my other grandmother who knelt down every night – and everyone in the house with her – to pray the Rosary before she went to bed. In the 1940's, adults were in charge, and children were meant to be seen and not heard, and

no explanations about these kinds of family rituals – health or religion – were ever proffered.

True, Alka-Seltzer is not aspirin, but I knew there must be some relationship between this mysterious fizzing medicine and sleeping well, and besides, aspirin was readily available to me, and Alka-Seltzer was not – the drugs are different but the principle was the same. However, the real culprit responsible for my aspirin addiction were the Christian Brothers. As a young – a very young – Christian Brother, just out of college, we were permitted to drink a glass - or two, if you hurried- of wine before the evening meal. This was the modern-day equivalent of the cocktail hour, except in our case, it was 30 minutes by the clock. The wine was sweet – a sherry, a tokay, a port – and on a growling stomach waiting for the dinner bell to sound, it packed a wallop. Looking back now, I cannot even imagine how I was able to drink it. But the nighttime effect of this sweet wine resulted in a throbbing headache; I could not sleep. I remembered my grandfather's remedy and simply substituted two aspirin. I tell you, it was a miracle cure! Two nighttime aspirin warded off all the side effects of the alcohol stupor, and I slept like a stone.