

# When the Laughter Stopped

*Comedian Jeff Allen says there's no such thing as a 'fun drunk.'*

My wife is always trying to get me to exercise. First of all, I hate exercise. I tried jogging about a year ago. I wasn't very good at it. I'd run about a mile, buy a half dozen doughnuts and walk back. I ran every day for six months and gained 41 pounds. If you ask me, running really packs on the flab!

Jeff Allen knows how to get a laugh. With more than 18 years on the comedy circuit and 5,000 performances under his belt, Allen has perfected the art of twisting everyday situations into comedy. But don't let the facade fool you. Behind this blue-sports-coat-toting, khaki-pant-wearing all-American dad who can make hundreds roll by recounting the early days of his marriage is a man who will tell you he's learned life's lessons the hard way.

When you get past the witty commentary on potty training his child, Allen reveals a faith developed through a series of struggles with alcohol and anger that almost destroyed his family.

The tragic trail began when he accepted his first drink at a family member's wedding at the age of 15. "What alcohol did for me was break down walls," he recalls. "I was a round peg in a square hole and alcohol gave me the illusion that I fit in."

As cynicism and unhappiness set in, alcohol took its toll on Allen's marriage and career. "There was this anger that permeated my being," he remembers. "I had this anxiety, and it took everything within me just to make it through the day and be civil."

Allen says he became so bitter, cynical and jaded that he resorted to apathy to defend himself. "I was so aware that I could fly off the handle at any moment, I just shut down. I didn't have any emotions left, and I couldn't find joy in anything—my wife, children and certainly not my career."

One night, Allen became so enraged under the influence of alcohol, he beat his crying six-month-old. "I'll never forget his eyes and the way he looked at me in his mother's arms. I don't ever want to forget that. Three days later, I enrolled myself in Alcoholics Anonymous [AA]."

At the AA meeting, Allen was told to pray to God—a God that he didn't believe in. But there was no place else to go. Allen says he started noticing that prayer worked, and even before he was saved he began cleaning up his act—both at home and on stage. "I started noticing that I didn't like the way I talked. I paid my kids a quarter for every bad word I said during a show. They wrote 15 down during a 30-minute routine. I remember the first time I worked when my sons didn't get a quarter. We just hugged."

But it was a multimillionaire who joined the comedy circuit as a hobby that finally tipped the scales for Allen. "I met this guy on the road who was a Christian," Allen recalls. "We worked together in Florida and spent some time on the golf course. Before we parted, he asked if he could send me a Bible and some Bible study tapes. I said 'sure.'"

The tapes were actually a subscription to teachings from a church in Denton, Texas. For the next year and a half, Allen faithfully collected the regularly mailed envelopes but never opened a single one. Finally, he decided to rip open a random package. The tape was on Ecclesiastes, and the moment he heard the words, "Meaningless, meaningless, life is meaningless," Allen was hooked.

"Solomon had everything I needed to hear," Allen says. "He

tried hedonism and materialism. None of it worked. When he was at his wisest and wealthiest, he knew that the best thing he could do was serve God. A light went on in me.”

Over the next three months, Allen listened to 1-1/2 years worth of tapes. During a subsequent visit with his Christian comedian friend, he was confronted with the question, “If you died tonight and God asked you why He should let you into heaven, what would you say?” Allen answered with the common “Because I’m a good person” reply, but found himself in need of forgiveness. He accepted the invitation to pray the sinner’s prayer. Two year’s later, his wife accepted Christ.

“Prior to [our] Christian walk, my wife and I tolerated each other,” Allen says. “We had gotten to a point where we didn’t care for each other, and that’s a terrible place to be. But now there’s a peace and purpose in our relationship.”

In the last few years, Allen has nearly eliminated secular comedy clubs and trimmed his travel schedule to spend more time with his two sons and wife Tami, who was diagnosed with breast cancer. Today, she’s cancer-free.

“It made us lean on Him all the more,” Allen says. “People looked at us and said, ‘I don’t know how you believe in a God that would allow that?’” to which I respond, ‘How could you not believe?’ We couldn’t make it without faith.”

On the eve of the millennium’s New Year Allen performed a show in a church in Florida. “Afterwards, the pastor came up and told me that four people gave their lives to Christ,” Allen recalls. “Now there’s four more people who know Jesus. Do you know how many lives that could touch? All of a sudden, telling a joke has a deeper meaning.”

Personal Info:

NAME: Jeff Allen

BORN: June 5, 1956

CALLING: Christian comedian. Has performed with Jerry Seinfeld and the Smothers Brothers.

STORY: Alcoholism was taking its toll on his marriage and his promising career, until one day, he came to the breaking point.

KEY VERSE: Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (NIV).