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DR. SWEENEY'S MIGHTY CHORUS

In his new book, *Cries from the Abyss: Alcohol Blackouts Revealed*, Donal F. Sweeney M.D. puts a human and often frightening face on a grossly neglected and misunderstood public health problem.

He warns that alcohol, sometimes in very small amounts, can block memory formation in the brain. The persons can walk and talk, appear to function, yet be unaware of who they are, what they are doing. They are out of control. *Cries From The Abyss* gives examples galore of mindless and unremembered acts and bizarre, even brutish behavior while in blackouts--like jumping out a 16th story window or attacking one's child. Victims feel another person has taken over their bodies. Repeatedly they ask, "Who Do I Become?"

Dr. Sweeney's shocking answer is that alcohol blocks memory formation, for hours sometimes days; loss of memory brings loss of self-awareness; loss of self-awareness means loss of higher-order consciousness; leaving a zombie-like individual lacking

conscience, self-control and inhibition, a stranger to oneself. And it is believed to happen more than formerly thought.

For over a quarter century Dr. Sweeney has carried on a personal crusade to convince the medical and legal professions, along with government, that alcohol blackouts are a menace to individuals and society.

He first revealed the problem in 2004 when he wrote *The Alcohol Blackout: Walking, Talking, Unconscious & Lethal*, and invited readers to tell him their experiences. As he says, now that there was someone to write to, a "dam of stigma and silence" broke and letters began to pour in, many of them long and intimate accounts of the ruined lives and personal terrors of blackouts.

Dr. Sweeney is still warning of the dangers of blackouts and decrying the neglect of them, but now he has a mighty chorus to support him. The often-desperate voices, the Cries from the Abyss, well over 100 of them, are persuasive indeed. And blackouts affect everyone whether they drink or not.

The voices reveal blackouts to be a special peril for women and a huge problem for men, far more common than previously thought. And it may all be brought on by a couple of beers. Some people blackout every time they drink. Yet the public is never warned of the risk.

The cries from the abyss of blackouts are compelling. Time will tell if they will still be ignored.

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