

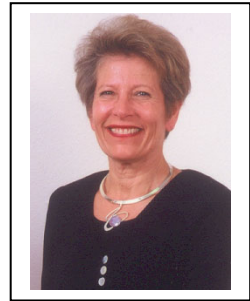
# SCENE

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**Lonne L. Sterling**  
LMHC, CEAP

Lonne Sterling and Christine Michaels, Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) and Certified Employee Assistance Professionals (CEAP) have worked in the mental health, employee assistance and substance abuse fields for over 25 years. They are in private practice in Sarasota and have founded the Center for Change of Florida, providing clients with outpatient counseling and area businesses with employee assistance services. Together they have established a reputation as dynamic professionals, each bring unique and varied experiences to the partnership. Lonne was Director of an Employee Assistance Program and Outpatient Program for one of the area's largest Mental Health Corporations, and successfully managed EAP and Managed Care product lines for 19 major firms and 20 national affiliates. As a Certified Relapse Prevention Specialist, Christine has extensive experience working in addictions with particular expertise in substance abuse assessment, early intervention and prevention. Clinically, both Lonne and Christine are highly skilled in utilizing a brief, solution-focused, therapeutic approach.



**Christine Michaels**  
LMHC, CEAP

*For further information or assistance call the Center for Change of Florida at (941) 955-5518..*

## Who Am I?

*I am more powerful than the combined armies of the world.*

*I have killed more people than all the wars in the nation.*

*I am more deadly than bullets; I have destroyed more homes than the mightiest of guns.*

*I am the world's slyest thief; I steal millions of dollars each year.*

*Widows and orphans know me well; I have no favorites, for my victims are the rich and poor, the young and old, the well and sick and the strong and weak.*

*I loom up to such proportions; I cast my shadow over every field of labor.*

*I lurk in unseen places—most of my work is done silently.*

*You are warned against me but you heed not.*

*I am relentless: I'm on your streets, in your homes, in your office. I am everywhere.*

*I bring degradation, sickness and death—yet few seek to eliminate me.*

*I destroy, I crush, I take it all-- I give nothing.*

*I am your worst enemy... I AM ALCOHOL. Anonymous*

**A**lcohol is indistinguishable from any other drug, be it caffeine, cocaine, marijuana, heroin, nicotine, valium, vicodin, and even food. All these substances are mood altering by changing brain chemistry. Thus, they are all candidates for abuse and addiction.

Alcohol is the most abused substance because it is inexpensive, readily accessible, legal and socially acceptable. Fourteen million Americans (1 in every 13) abuse or are alcoholics. Fifty-three adults have close relatives with chemical dependency problems. Drinking increases the risk for cancer, liver disease, immune disorders, brain damage and fetal alcohol syndrome. Chemical dependency increases the risk of death due to car, recreational and on the job accidents. Alcohol abuse increases the likelihood for homicide, suicide, domestic violence and divorce. Alcohol is the primary drug of abuse for youth. Alcohol related traffic accidents are the second leading cause of teen deaths. During a typical weekend, an average of one teenager dies every two hours in a car crash due to alcohol. Untreated alcohol abuse/dependence costs society an estimated \$276 Billion dollars per year.

Alcoholism is a disease and like Diabetes, for example, it is a chronic, progressive, incurable and, if untreated, fatal medical illness. However, unlike any other disease, alcoholism is characterized by compulsive use, loss of control and use despite negative consequences, it is the only disease that tells you "You don't have a disease!"

There are several factors that contribute to whether or not an individual can remain a social user of alcohol vs. becoming addicted to it. These include:

- a person with a family history of addiction will be genetically predisposed to alcoholism;
- a person whose environment includes family members and friends who frequently use and abuse alcohol;
- a person who begins using alcohol or other drugs (including cigarettes) at an early age; and
- although organizations such as MADD have had an impact, a society which continues to accept alcohol as an integral part of the culture and its' celebratory traditions, and media messages that continue to tout the glamorous, sexy and cool images associated

with drinking. There are many myths that cloud our thinking about the alcoholic and keep us from acknowledging the extent of the problem of alcoholism in our society. Some of these myths are: "**But I only drink Beer**"—Alcohol is alcohol. A can of beer equals a shot of whiskey equals a glass of wine. "**But I have a good job**"—Most alcoholics are employed, responsible people. Many are even high-level professionals and executives. "**But he is such a good person**"—Most alcoholics are good people. There is no "alcoholic personality." "**But he is not always drunk**"—Very few alcoholics are. It is what happens when they drink that counts. "**But he is too intelligent to be an alcoholic**"—There is no relationship between level of intelligence and alcoholism. "**But I never see him drunk**"—Alcoholics often drink in secret. "**But he makes it to work every day**"—Many alcoholic rarely miss work. They may be hung over but still manage to show up. "**But he is not a bum**"—Most alcoholics are ordinary, respectable people. Only 3 out of 100 are skid row bums. "**But he doesn't look like an alcoholic**"—There is no "alcoholic look." In fact many alcoholics make a point of looking especially good just to prove they aren't alcoholics. "**But he comes from such a good background**"—Alcoholism can happen to anyone regardless of family background, social or economic status.

If you suspect that you or a loved one might have a problem with drinking, we recommend taking the following 4-question self-test called the C.A.G.E. This tool provides a useful guideline for quickly assessing a person's relationship to alcohol.

- Have you ever felt that you should **Cut Down** on your drinking?
- Have you ever been **Annoyed** by people who criticize your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or **Guilty** about your drinking?
- Have you ever taken a drink first thing in the morning (called an "**Eye Opener**") to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

Answering yes to **2 or more** of these questions suggests a problem with alcohol and we encourage contacting a mental health professional for assistance. If you would like further information or a list of providers and/or resources in the community, please contact us at **Center for Change of Florida (941) 955-5518.**