

As long as you 'need help' . . .

THE TROUBLE with life in the fast lane is that you get to the other end in an awful hurry," said **John Jensen**.

They don't bother to say, "Go to jail! Go directly to jail! Do not pass Go. Do not collect \$200." Not anymore. Now they say, "Go to rehab! Go directly to rehab! Then meet the approving press."

Yes — 'fessing up that you need help and have taken steps to get it and have paid the price in public humiliation are what it takes nowadays to put a bad patch of press into the discard pile. Nobody knows if some of these stars even actually "needed" to go to rehab. Just going and admitting it seems to be the ticket.

It's a way of saying you're sorry, and more than that, you can place some of the blame on your own helplessness. For instance, you had your reasons for uncontrollable drinking, drugging and bad behavior. In **Mel Gibson's** case, I thought his wiggly appearance with **Diane Sawyer** just made it seem as if the devil made him do it! — it's not up to *him* whether he drinks and misbehaves or not.

Robin Williams is a good example of someone who did need help, reached out, got it and came clean about it all. Now he is on a career rise again with a movie that looks moderately successful — "Man of the Year." It would be hard not to wish the terrific and trenchantly funny Robin well.

But for all that, what's with the Robin and **Marsha Williams** marriage? She is off to Africa without him for a full month, and this is causing insiders to say she just isn't up to "taking care" of him all the time anymore. And Robin is a full-time job.

Liz Smith



TONIGHT IN D.C., those descendants of the American patriots who broke with the Crown of Great Britain back in 1776 will be enjoying a showing of Dame **Helen Mirren** in "The Queen." Host for this Washington event is none other than the formidable tell-all queen herself, **Kitty Kelley**.

It is so fitting, since Kitty wrote the No. 1 best seller "The Royals," which was published in 32 foreign languages. Back in 1997, Kitty opined that people will soon tire of the monarchy because the Royals have lost touch with the people. "The Queen" makes it seem that Kitty was prescient.

But, of course, Kitty remains persona non grata at more places than just Buckingham Palace. She isn't too welcome at the **Bush White House** and has fallen out with such as **Elizabeth Taylor**, Frank Sinatra's and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' heirs and **Nancy Reagan**.

THE UPPER room of La Grenouille isn't much like the upper room where they celebrated the Last Supper, but it continues to come into its own for tiny private parties with **Charles Masson's** fabled flowers and food. **Andre Leon Talley**, the last of the gallant fashion eccentrics, was given a birthday gala there by his pals **Damon Dash** and **Rachel Roy** the other eve.

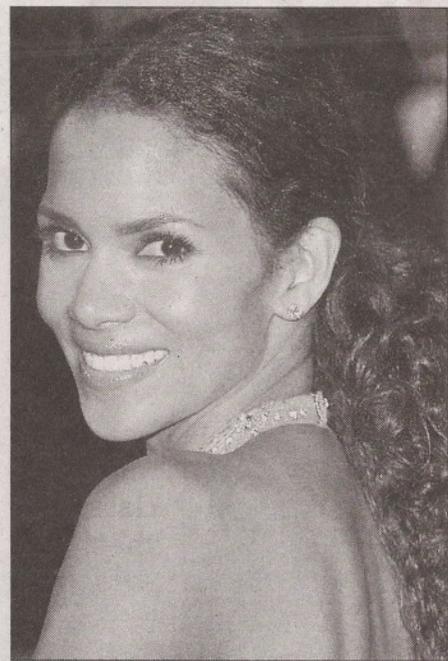
Mr. Dash is a hip-hop music success addicted now to classical violinists. (His latest discovery, **Sharon Rossman**, played for us at this party.) The producer wears a wristwatch that would bankrupt the diamond mines of South Africa. But he has charm to spare and is married to a true beauty — Ms. Roy — who shows her designs at Bergdorf Goodman. I delighted the statuesque Rachel by asking if she were French? "No," said she, "but I often pretend I am."

Mr. Dash owns pro-Ked sneakers for one thing, has presented such talents as **Jay-Z** and **Beyoncé**, and also was an unquestioning generous backer of independent films such as "The Woodsman." That movie won in Cannes for its producer **Lee Daniels**.

I had an enjoyable time with Mr. Daniels, too. He produced "Monster's Ball," which won an Oscar for star **Halle Berry**, as well as the Helen Mirren-**Cuba Gooding Jr.** film "Shadowboxer." He was endearing, pondering "selling out" and "maintaining integrity" and matters of that ilk. He praised Paramount's now-gone chief **Sherry Lansing** as his benefactor.

This was a wonderful get-together with **Diane von Furstenberg** there to urge on her longtime friend Andre and a Prada-clad **Anna Wintour** saluting her favorite employee.

Gayle King showed to give things a touch of **Oprah**. **Vera Wang** spoke, and **Donald** and **Melania Trump** were their spectacular selves. The Manolo owner **George Malkemus III** made a cute speech. Those bastions of the upper crust, **Donald** and **Catie Marron**, showed. The birthday boy was splendid in "the king's colors" — a vintage scarlet **Karl Lagerfeld** jacket and Manolo shoes



HALLE BERRY
Star of Lee Daniels' "Monster's Ball."

designed with red heels from a painting of Louis XIV in Versailles.

How can one fault a party where a Gucci-clad **Mary J. Blige** sings a blood-curdling and fabulous "Happy Birthday!" (Mary's husband, **Kendu Isaacs**, is "my balance" she says.)

Andre and Mary then spoke of their poor rural Southern childhoods, which were nowhere in evidence for this — Andre's big night!