

# 'I don't drink!' How to quit alcohol - a drinker's tale

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## April 2017

The more observant amongst you may note that I have changed the title from 'monthly newsletter' to newsletter. This is because once again I have missed a month through being too busy since having moved to London. It is also build up time to my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April so I have had much to contemplate about my own life, and my own expectations for the next decade or so. I wouldn't say hitting 60 is necessarily a turning point but it is a good time to take stock.

## So, any regrets?



Regular readers will know I never expected reach this age when I was a drinker so in effect I am living time I have won for myself. In the past, this has encouraged me to focus solely on the future and what I hope to achieve moving forward, which is nice and positive. With my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday approaching however, I have become a little philosophical and have given some thought to my past actions and what I really feel I have achieved in my life, and more to the point, what I could have achieved had I never been so beholden to alcohol. Perhaps reaching an age where

eventual retirement increasingly comes to mind, and how I will cope monetarily in my latter years promotes such thoughts. So, to answer the title to this section, do I have any regrets?

If I could go back and meet a young teenage me (that nonchalant looking chap in the picture) I know what I would say. I would encourage that young me to wake up to life, and instead of walking around clueless, to aim at a career that would achieve something worthwhile, but at the same time offer travel, adventure and excitement. Engineering is increasingly something I think I would like to have been involved in. Being in charge of building dams or other major construction projects in remote parts of the World is something I think I would have enjoyed. It would have paid well too and have allowed me to retire on a nice healthy pension knowing I had built things that would be appreciated long after I had passed on.

But to do that, that young me would have to work hard at school, aim at going to university and perhaps approach likely employers for sponsorship. Unfortunately, I know the young me wouldn't have listened to this advice, or at least I don't think he would (I was never given any), and he would have had to swap an interest in girls, booze and fags that was already well entrenched even by age fifteen.

However, if I could go back in time and somehow impart the **wisdom** I have now into that young version of me then things might be very different, but of course we can't do that. Instead all we can do is use our own mistakes as examples to those we now might be able to influence, for example my grandchildren.

So, I certainly wish I had never been an alcoholic, I have missed far too many opportunities to think otherwise; but I don't regret the life I have had, I am far too happy for that now that I am able to appreciate every waking moment of it.

If you're still drinking and wishing you weren't, why not think what you might say if you could go back and meet a young version of yourself. If one of the snippets of wisdom you would impart is don't get into drinking alcohol, maybe this might help to make it easier for you to realise you should quit now. There is nothing more sensible than to make good use of the wisdom that time gives us, no matter how old you are.

## The Crawley workshop



I gave a talk entitled 'life after alcohol' at Crawley library this month and had a great audience. Not only was my talk well received with some very kind feedback, there were some interesting questions and discussion that followed. Here are some questions that stood

out and are worth relating to you in this newsletter. **How would you answer them?**

**A young chap mentioned how difficult he would find it to give up that first glass of the evening after a stressful day at work.**

I asked him what it was he looked forward to having when he got home. Was it the actual alcohol or was it the scenario of sitting and relaxing with a drink. If it was a lift in his spirits he was after then caffeine works just as well. I also suggested he make a ritual out of having tea or coffee by using a special type of coffee or tea, making a pot instead of just a mug and so making the whole experience more relaxing, calming, and something to look forward to.

**The stress theme was picked up further by a lady who felt that alcohol helped deal with stress and what would I recommend instead.**

We talked about the happiness chemicals that alcohol stimulates and which can have a calming effect. I mentioned how these same chemicals can be stimulated in countless other ways such as going for a walk in the woods to help unwind and by using the time to think through whatever it is that is causing the stress. Quite a number of the audience members agreed that they had tried going for a walk as a way of relieving stress, and to good effect.

**One lady said she wanted to quit both drinking and smoking and should she do both at the same time.**

My own view is that trying to achieve both in one go is too much. When I quit smoking some twenty years ago I was a nightmare to be with for a few weeks until

the craving finally died away. I did cut down my alcohol intake purely because drinking just stimulated the desire for a cigarette, but had I been trying to quit alcohol completely at the same time it would have been too much. Quitting alcohol is actually so much easier than quitting smoking, I believe you should quit the booze first and then quit smoking some considerable time later. The fact that your social habits are likely to have changed by quitting alcohol, as well as your feeling fitter and healthier is likely to stimulate more of a desire to quit smoking in any event.

**My somewhat controversial slide discussing ‘myths’ (see below) stimulated much discussion and a question based on the final bullet as to what my opinion was about Alcoholics Anonymous.**

### Myths surrounding alcohol

- ▶ Alcoholism is a disease
- ▶ Alcoholism is genetic
- ▶ Alcohol is addictive
- ▶ I haven't got the willpower
- ▶ Life is no fun without alcohol
- ▶ A glass of wine per day is good for you
- ▶ An alcoholic is an alcoholic for life!

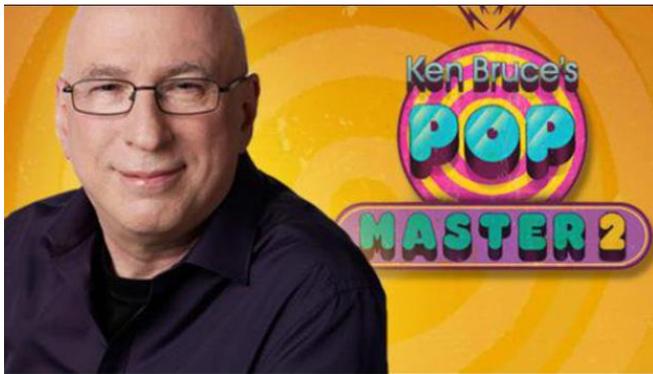
Well I have never been to AA or any similar meeting so I can only base any opinion I have on what others have told me. I do know that being told I will always be an alcoholic is complete nonsense because I freely admit I used to be an alcoholic and now I most certainly am not. I also know that my brother was given the same message when he went to rehab before he died, and he actually found that message so depressing he developed the opinion that what was the point of quitting if you had to carry the burden of being an alcoholic with you forever.

Having said this however, if the organisation helps people quit alcohol and change their lives then that is great. I won't knock any organisation that helps people to

quit, but hopefully people will be sensible enough to develop their own view as to the 'an alcoholic being a for life' thing. It isn't!

**Incidentally, I talk more about all the 'myths' in the new book I am completing and I will expand on the theme in the next newsletter.**

## **The Drinking Habit; Wellbeing; and Popmaster!**



One of the 'little' things I enjoy, is listening to the Popmaster competition on BBC radio 2. The quiz is part of the Ken Bruce show, takes place each weekday morning at about 10.30 and lasts fifteen minutes or so. I usually stop what I am doing when this quiz is on, make myself a

nice cup of Latte and relax and enjoy listening to the contestants battle it out to win either a bluetooth speaker or a 'one year out' t-shirt. It has become quite a routine for me, and I firmly and assuredly recognise the sense of wellbeing that routine gives me. My sense of wellbeing commences just prior to the quiz, lasts for the duration and for a short while afterwards until I return to whatever it was I was doing.

I now know that this wellbeing is provided by a dose of happiness chemicals being stimulated in my brain by the whole experience, from my expectation through to the calm after-feeling having had the coffee, the momentary change of focus and having hopefully enjoyed the quiz that day.

I thought about this little ritual of mine this morning, and tried to relate it to some of the drinking routines I used to have. For many years, I would stop off at the railway station buffet on the way home from work for a pint of beer. This was when I was much younger and the stopping off relaxed me and put me in the right frame of mind for the evening. Sometimes I would be with my brother who caught the same train as me, but often I would be on my own and I would stand at the bar and down my pint. I remember looking forward to that pint, not necessarily from a position of particularly wanting to taste it, as it was the experience I looked forward

to. I enjoyed the ambience of the station bar, the change from the day's working drudge, and of course the beer did leave a nice taste in my mouth and relax me – as a limited dose of alcohol does. There would also be the cider routine I adopted whereby I would stop and have a glass of cider half way through mowing my father's lawns on a Saturday morning. I would enjoy the smell of the new mown grass, the fit feeling from having exercised for an hour (Dad had a big garden), and the cold liquid refreshing me in the warm sunshine. I later developed a first glass of wine of the day routine (which of course never stopped there), making the excuse that the Sun was over the yardarm somewhere in the world, and I would look forward to holding and caressing that glass and savouring the liquid inside as I took those first sips.

All these things I used to look forward to as part of an enjoyable routine that unbeknown to me triggered the release of happiness chemicals in me, but with the alcohol inducing yet a further guaranteed dose which is where complications start to arise. To put it simply and briefly, the brain recognises alcohol as being a ready trigger for these chemicals, enjoys the sensation the chemicals give, and so primarily associates the whole experience solely or mainly with the alcohol. To maintain the sensation the brain encourages you to have more alcohol and all of this reinforces what becomes a habit.

**But let's return to Popmaster and the big question. Is it the quiz I so enjoy or is it the little ritual I have created that includes the quiz?**

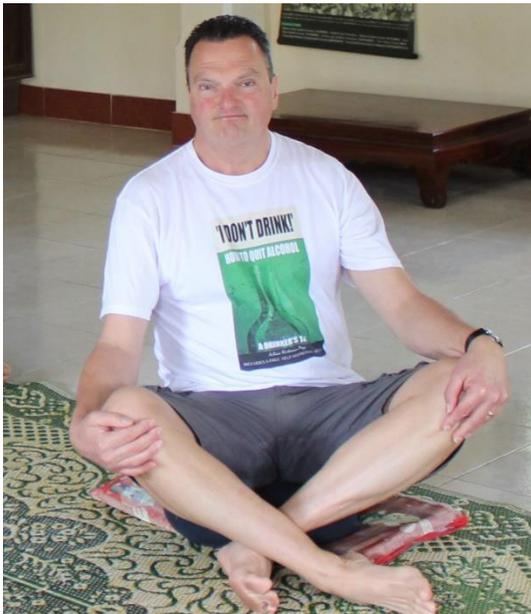
Well, sometimes I have other things to do at the time when the quiz is on, or people call round to visit and it would be rude to be listening to the radio instead of giving them my full attention, and so I miss the quiz entirely. Just once I made the effort to listen to the quiz later in the day on the BBC iplayer and surprisingly it didn't do anything for me. Separated from the routine of the quiz happening at a certain time outside of my control, the accompanying latte and it causing a break from the norm, the quiz was simply a quiz. I have never bothered to listen on the iplayer again.

This morning I also missed the quiz hence my musing. This time I had to be elsewhere at the time the quiz would have been airing. I thought about the fact I was missing it for a brief moment and then moved on. So, I don't crave the quiz, I am not addicted to listening to it, it doesn't hurt me or depress me to miss it, and I

don't get a 'downer' because I have had to forgo the quiz. But it is nevertheless a routine I enjoy and will continue with when I have the chance. The act of having a break and a coffee at that time of day, prompted by the quiz being on is something I want to continue with. I realise that looking forward to the quiz helps me to work well beforehand as I can anticipate the break, and work well afterwards having had the break.

### **So how does this relate to my drinking routines of old?**

I now realise that the drinking routines I mention above were also something I wanted to continue with. Certainly, the beer on the way home and the cider whilst mowing the lawn routines weren't ones that resulted in my getting paralytic but they did involve alcohol. How they came about I don't now recall but there is no reason why they couldn't have involved a cup of tea or coffee instead or perhaps a chocolate biscuit, but for me somehow alcohol became involved and that became part of the routine. The routine became a habit (not that there is much if any difference between routine and habit) and because a drug called alcohol was



involved the habit spread. I mistakenly associated the pleasant experience of having a cider during mowing the lawn and the calm feeling this induced with the cider only, and not with the experience itself. Therefore, why not have a cider at other times to induce the same state of mind? And so on. Before long I was drinking cider at every opportunity that presented itself. This wouldn't have happened had I been drinking tea instead, as tea does not induce the happiness chemicals in the way that alcohol does.

That is why alcohol is a powerful drug and why it is so easy to lose control. Once you start to associate a pleasant experience that involves alcohol with the alcohol alone, it becomes addictive. It becomes a substance you start to rely on and crave. I remember often getting to the stage where I couldn't function properly unless I had a glass in my hand, simply because my mind had associated life being pleasant with having alcohol. I would never have

recognised that fact at the time as I was blinkered to the reality of what was happening to me. It really is only now I can look back and analyse rationally what was going on and why I felt so dependent upon alcohol.

But as far as Popmaster goes, I certainly don't know enough about music to try and win on Ken's show so you won't hear me phoning in, but then I already have a t-shirt of my own and I'm never one year out, on the contrary, every year that goes by I'm one year up!

## Club Soda

As planned, I did get to meet up with Laura and Jussi since the last newsletter. The picture Laura took even managed to find itself part of an article in the Sun newspaper (although they got my name wrong)!



I am delighted to say that Club Soda continues to go from strength to strength and I have offered to host a meetup in my local area this summer. I have also offered to do a Sunday live seminar so check out the Club Soda site and **joinclubsoda** Facebook page for more about this great group.

## The birthday and a free gift.

For some mad reason, I have decided to spend my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday weekend camping on the Kent coast.

The last time I went camping was years ago when I was still drinking and I got wrecked. Quite early on in the evening I was so pissed I climbed into our tent and went to sleep only to snore incredibly loudly. To my wife and daughter's embarrassment there was a group of campers having a sing-a-long evening nearby round their camp fire, and I was so loud they had to stop!

This time I am hoping that a. it doesn't rain and b. there is no one staying there like I used to be. What a bloody bore drunks are when you no longer drink yourself.

In early May I will also make my book 'The naughtiest boy in school' available for free on amazon by way of a birthday gift from me. This is the book that tells the amusing tales of me as a student teacher just before I stopped drinking. It goes to prove that alcohol and teaching kids definitely do not a happy mixture make! To make sure you know when the free book dates are I will email all newsletter subscribers in the next two weeks or so.



## Until next time



By the way, the **Swimathon** went extremely well and I finished the 5000 metres in 1 hour 52 minutes which is four minutes faster than last year and one of my fastest times ever. Swimming is fantastic exercise and a sport I would thoroughly recommend if you are looking for something to replace that time that you used to spend drinking. Not only is it one of the best all round sports from a fitness perspective, it leaves you feeling fulfilled, happy and on top of the world. Next time you are wondering how to replace that evening spent in the pub, go for a swim instead.

God Bless,

*Julian*

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