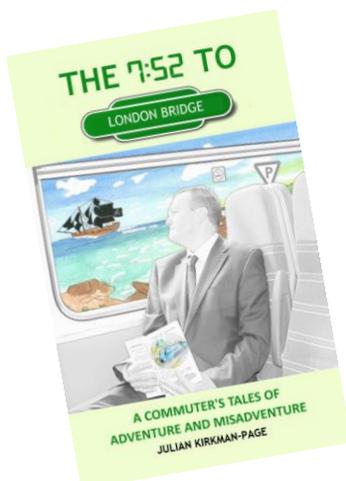


# 'I don't drink!' How to quit alcohol - a drinker's tale

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December 2016

## A FREE book for Christmas



For any of you who have yet to read it, I am giving away free copies of my book 'The 7.52 to London Bridge' as a Christmas gift to you this month. The book will be available FREE on amazon to download on **the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of December**. This is the book I authored when I first quit alcohol because I had so much new-found time on my hands, so much creative energy to spare, and I wanted to explore new ideas. The book is a comedy and contains lots of short stories highlighting amusing episodes in my life, most of which involve alcohol and associated mayhem! I hope

you enjoy the tales. In true Christmas spirit it also contains a true ghost story and an equally genuine tale of the supernatural.

## A new chapter in my own life

Those of you following my blogs will realise there **haven't been any blogs** for some weeks now. The reason for that is, in October we moved out of our home in Selsey by the sea, to live in London and the whole process and two month intervening

period was one of complete turmoil. We have in fact moved to Beckenham, the town I grew up in, and which as a consequence, features in many of the stories in the book mentioned above. Beckenham is very near to central London and my wife and I will finally be able to visit all the galleries, museums, theatres, exhibitions and other events we have always longed to enjoy but been too far and too expensive a commute away from. We will also be much nearer to my two wonderful grandchildren, and be able to see them on a regular basis instead of just a handful of times per year.

Although we have only been in situ less than two weeks, it has been interesting to recognise how difficult it would have been to make this move whilst I was still drinking, with all the temptation of restaurants, wine bars, social occasions and the like that London life has to offer and the certain knowledge that I would just have become an even worse alcoholic wreck than I was. Instead it is a delight to savour the delights of our new life completely sober and knowing I will be healthy enough to enjoy them for decades to come instead of being dead already! And on that healthy note I am delighted to mention that Beckenham has a superb swimming pool I am already enjoying on a daily basis, a karate school I am signing up to and ballroom dancing I have promised to take up again. The one pastime I thought I would have to forego moving away from the coast was kayaking. But lo and behold two days ago, the local council secured Lottery funding to redevelop Beckenham Place Park and their plan includes the addition of a large lake for open water swimming and kayaking! Somebody somewhere must be looking out for me.

## Homeless



In the intervening two months between moving out of our old home and moving into the new one we were effectively 'homeless' although I deliberately put this in inverted commas. Unlike truly homeless people, we had the good fortune to be able to afford to spend some of the time holidaying and to have family who were kind enough to find temporary space for us. But without a place to call our own; no definite home to move to for much of the time; no timeframe to work and

plan to; and no possessions as everything was in storage, we did feel like lost souls. We also had to be quiet (very difficult for me) as in one home there was my new born baby grand-daughter not to waken, and in the other a very poorly patient not to disturb. Much of our time we therefore spent walking the streets of Brighton and surrounds and it is here we came across genuine homeless people by the score. Quite what Brighton City Council is doing offering itself as a welcoming magnet for overseas refugees when it has such a problem housing its own people is beyond me. We have since decided to make The Salvation Army our charity for 2017, (last year it was the equally deserving RNLI) and I will be donating the profits from 2017 book sales of 'The 7.52 to London Bridge' to that worthy cause. I had thought of choosing Shelter as the charity to support but I subsequently discovered that the CEO of Shelter annually takes in excess of £130,000 from the charity's coffers whereas salaries at the Sally Army are what you would expect from an organisation dedicated to supporting the less fortunate. Whatever happened to the days when charities were run by people who wanted to give something back!

Moving home is supposed to be one of the most stressful events in life and for us it certainly should have been. That period of uncertainty when we had no idea if the house we had planned to buy would ever become ours was very difficult, and as the weeks wore on we were certainly feeling the strain. If ever there has been a time since I quit alcohol that I might have been tempted to have a drink I think this might have been it, but I wasn't – not once and not for a second. It really is amazing how much easier you can cope with difficult situations when you remain sober. Anyone who ever tells you alcohol helps reduce stress is talking complete crap. Being sober and completely devoid of any thoughts regarding alcohol allows you to remain focused, calm, patient and resilient, and I know for a fact that the old alcohol soaked me would have got nasty in a similar situation. We only appreciated just how much of a strain it had been when we got the news that our house purchase was finally going to go through and we both burst into tears.

One of the things we **did** do to kill the time was escape to Cyprus for a week on a last-minute budget holiday. Here is a picture of me standing outside an appropriately named bar in Paphos.



It was the end of the season when we were there so thankfully it wasn't swimming with drunken British tourists, although sadly all the bars were geared towards that crowd, with huge TV screens showing football and every waiter trying to force beer on us. I also took the following photo in the local supermarket. I am not sure if you can buy neat alcohol in the UK, I very much doubt it, but to have it so readily available in a town that caters for young tourists on low budgets is simply asking for trouble. Not only would this stuff kill you, it was less than £1.00 a bottle.



## RIP A. A. Gill

Before he sadly recently died, food critic A. A. Gill wrote about when he quit drinking having been like receiving a Willy Wonka Golden Ticket he felt so pleased to no longer be beholden to alcohol. It's not that I don't feel pleased about having



quit, I am of course delighted, it's just that I no longer think about drink at all, and it really does hold absolutely no interest for me. My life is so full and meaningful now and it obviously wasn't before or I wouldn't notice such a massive difference. With a future blog post in mind, I made a note in my diary when we were in Cyprus

about the small things I was noticing and how special they were. Things like my wife and I sharing a small tub of coffee ice cream each evening as we took a late-night stroll along the harbour front on our way back to our hotel, looking at the Moon and Venus reflected in the water, and realising how lucky we are to be alive. Something as sweet but meaningful as this would never have happened when I was a drinker because I would either already have been drunk, or have been far too busy focusing on my next alcoholic fix, and I now realise that a fix is all it was. No matter how well the alcohol was disguised within a fine wine, the oldest malt whiskey or the most expensive Champagne it was only ever a fix, a sop to the constant craving and the need to stave off or cure the downer that inevitably follows any artificial high. It is no wonder the alcohol industry is so colossal and the range of alcoholic drinks so vast, with so many people in the world sucked in to that same fictitious dream and belief that I had, that we need all these wonderful sounding and great tasting drinks to make our lives complete, whereas the reality is that all they are is a disguise for a poisonous chemical that cruelly and inevitably reaps destruction. Would we make such a fuss over all the effort that goes in to create these wonderful wines and spirits if they didn't actually have any alcohol in them? It has taken me thinking about some of the smallest pleasures in life to realise that fact, and to understand why I am so completely and utterly cured of the desire for alcohol ever again. I see it for what it is, simply a chemical that tricks our brain into thinking we need ever more of it. Dress it up as you will, it is no more than a drug.

We can all have a Willy Wonka Golden Ticket, they cost nothing, every single one is a winner, and all it really takes is for you also to recognise alcohol for what it really is, think about some of the simple but delightful things in your life, and realise how lucky you are that you still have a life to enjoy. Rest in Peace AA Gill.

## **Red Bull**

The other trip we made last month was to South Africa, mainly for a holiday but whilst in Cape Town I took the opportunity to host an evening session on quitting alcohol organised by my also ex-alcoholic friend who has a base there.

Over thirty people attended the evening which was held in the ballroom of a beautiful hotel with gardens backing onto Table Mountain, and other than us, a sea of guests enjoying the delicious South African wines being introduced at a wine-tasting session that happened to coincide with my talk! I am pleased to report that none of my attendees decamped to the wine tasting, but then none of the other chap's attendees came in to listen to me! Mind you I did sell more books than he sold bottles of wine.

It was no great surprise, but nevertheless interesting to note that the South African audience had exactly the same pressures and issues as we do in the UK as far as booze is concerned. The one significant difference is the problem of drink-driving in South Africa and the huge number of fatalities as a result. I did notice that the huge advertising hoardings for beer that used to dominate the landscape have all gone as part of a government attempt to curtail drinking but whether this alone will make much difference is debatable. The problem in South Africa is with attitude to drink driving and the sheer scale of the country with long open straight roads that lend themselves to speed.



I had to include the above photograph of a beach we were attempting to cross during a hike in Pondoland. This **red bull** wasn't having any of it and we were too scared to bypass him by walking through the ocean as it was infested with sharks that apparently do come right up to the surf edge. You can see from the trails of footprints that he had been patrolling his beach most of the morning. We thought it prudent to return to our hotel instead.

## The show did go on

For those of you who saw the pre-show advert, I did also find the time to participate in the annual Lloyd's Insurance Market charity extravaganza, this year a comedy entitled Lloyd's the Musical, at which we raised over £2,000 for good causes on the night. As always, out of a room of some 200 people I was the only person in the room sober when the event commenced, and the only person not virtually paralytic by the time the evening ended. It just goes to prove you don't have to be drunk to make a complete fool of yourself as the picture proves! By the way I am supposed to look like a smarmy broker in this picture, hence the horrific tash, although I do look a little Hitleresque despite singing a solo in true Fagin style! Later on I

appeared in drag although anyone wanting to see that episode will have to try and find the whole event for themselves on YouTube. It is not a pretty sight.



## And Finally...

As I discovered at the main archaeological site in Paphos which dates back to Roman times, drink driving has obviously been an issue for thousands of years.



These two chaps who are supposed to be guiding the wine cart are obviously too sloshed to continue on their way. I have of course 'been there and done that' too!

## Until next month



Next month I will email updates regarding the new book I am writing and the on-line course I finally hope to complete! It's nice to have my own desk back at last.

Have a great Christmas and a superb New Year and God Bless to you all,

*Julian*

[www.idontdrink.net](http://www.idontdrink.net)

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