

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

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February 2017

No, you didn't miss a newsletter for January. Moving into our new home has taken longer than we expected and we have been massively busy exploring London and all it has to offer, so I have to admit I was too involved to produce one. We have been to galleries, museums, a Hindu temple, shows, exhibitions and two parades as well as walking countless miles to various destinations within a half day's march of our new home, using the London Green Chain Walk routes. The great thing is we haven't made a dent on all that we want to see and experience, and so we have years of enjoyment in London ahead of us. It is amazing just how much you can do when you are not focused on your next drink, or recovering from the last one!

MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION

Incidentally we did somehow come across the museum association www.museumassociation.org which if like us you live in the UK and enjoy exploring museums I would recommend joining. By becoming a member, you gain free or heavily discounted access to museums and paying exhibitions in about 800 museums throughout the country.

On that note:

The wonder of being sober

People write to me to share ideas about what they have decided to do with their time now they have quit alcohol, and the fact they still find certain times of the day especially hard when before they would have been drinking. This is bound to happen until you get into a new routine. One of the best things you can do of course, is use that newly found time and extra mental energy to expand your mind, especially if this involves sharing your thoughts, ideas and activities with others. Studying, learning something new such as a new language, or writing are great ways to soak up and really benefit from all that extra brainpower you will have.



The small pebble-sized 'face' stone in this picture is on show at the British Museum in London where I spent time this week with my wife and my youngest daughter (that is me pictured above in the incredible enlightenment room.) We went primarily to listen to the curator of the Africa section talk about the special exhibition of art and artefacts that is presently running, but once inside that wonderful museum it is hard to drag yourself away, and we will be re-visiting every single week this year to explore further the countless treasures and mysteries that lie within. But the stone itself proffers a wonderful story:



Three million years ago, hominids had split away from their ape cousins, and hominid evolution had started along the path to what would produce Homo Erectus one million years later, and subsequently Homo Sapiens (our own species) and the Neanderthals, some 200,000 years ago. Quite what those distant ancestors of ours from three million years ago were like we will never fully know, but fossil evidence and bones show them to be about five foot in height, that they walked upright, and that they used bones and sticks as tools as do modern-day chimpanzees in the wild. We also believe they were far too primitive to make their own tools like stone age man, that they hadn't discovered fire, and it would be

nearly a whole three million years until any hominid species would be advanced enough to produce simple cave art such as has been discovered in France dating to 40,000 years ago, (and probably another thirty thousand years before man first invented alcoholic drinks – possibly in China circa 10,000 B.C.) The picture here of what these ancient men might have looked like is from my atlas of the prehistoric world (something else I am studying.)

We also know from fossil hominid footprints of the same age elsewhere in Africa, that male and female members of this species walked together side by side, and the prints are so close to each other, the likelihood is they must have been holding hands.



Now one day, one of these early hominids came across our stone lying by a riverbank in what is now South Africa. He or she must have found the stone quite remarkable and intriguing, because they picked it up and carried it many miles to a cave where they lived, and where three million years later a modern-day explorer would find it buried alongside their well-preserved bones.

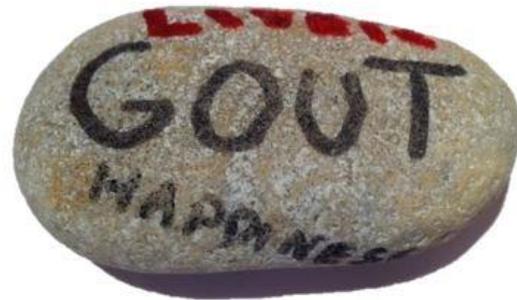
When he or she first saw it, did that early man recognise the naturally occurring markings in the stone as a face? We can only assume they must have done. Did they have a kind of language so they could talk about their find with their friends and family when they showed it to them? We will never know. Did they think it looked like someone they knew and it amused them? Did they give it to someone they loved as a likeness just as we might give a photograph on Valentine's Day, or did they even understand the concept of love back then? Or did they perhaps have a god or gods they believed in and that they thought the stone might represent or have come from as some form of divine message? Did they just find the stone curious enough to want to keep hold of for the rest of their life? There was nothing else buried alongside our little hominid's bones, so was that stone its most precious possession?

Because I am a romantic, I like to imagine the finder of that stone having been a male out walking in the sunshine with his girlfriend or wife and holding her hand. Having found the strange stone they sat by the river together and giggled at the

likeness to himself, and because she meant everything to him, he gave the stone to her as a keepsake or type of wedding ring that she treasured and held on to for the rest of her life.

When the exhibition is over, I am going to ask the curator if I can hold that stone, just for a second, just to somehow connect with that person all those millions of years ago whose DNA down the evolutionary path I now share.

As readers of my book 'I Don't Drink' will know, I also had a stone which I used as a talisman when I quit drinking. I wrote 'gout' on that stone and carried it with me as a constant companion and reminder of a very painful reason for having quit alcohol, and why I was never going to drink again. I know that many of my readers have followed my example and created a talisman with their own one word focus written upon it.



Despite my intention to throw the gout stone away when I no longer needed it, I still have it and I will probably always keep it as a memento of the day when I quit alcohol. It shows just how much giving up alcohol has meant to me.

What will someone think of that stone if they discover it alongside my own bones in three million years? If the word gout is still legible and they can understand what that word means, they might think it is some sort of stone caused by gout in what to them would be just another class of early man. As they stand looking at my bones they certainly won't be able to devise what that stone really represents. They won't know that it stands for someone having achieved something quite remarkable by making the decision to quit forever something that they were addicted to. Or that, that same person changed their life out of all recognition and lived far longer, and a far happier existence because of sticking to that decision. Or even that because of all of these things, and despite its simplicity and worthlessness, that stone became a very precious possession to that person. They won't know and couldn't know any of that, but I bet they will wish the stone could talk to them and reveal its tale.

I wish the little African stone could talk to me and tell me tales of its owner and of life in those distant times. Somewhere in my DNA that story is there. Perhaps if the

museum people **do** let me hold the stone, and I squeeze it tight enough and concentrate...

If you are wondering what to do with your newly found time, why not visit a museum near you, find one item to really think deeply about, and enjoy letting your own fresh, clear, alcohol free brain run riot. It is fantastic what you can come up with when there is no poison slushing round in your brain, and when your thoughts are completely free from concentrating on or worrying about your next alcoholic fix.

Alcohol and cooking - a word of warning

Something else I have been doing in the evenings is a diploma course with www.courses.edx.org who offer free university level courses across a broad range of subjects. The one I have been doing is 'Think 101 – the science of everyday thinking' put together by an Australian university and it is quite thought provoking.



One of the things they bizarrely covered was a session on myths and they used myths associated with cooking by way of an example. What they highlighted of especial interest to all of us is the myth that cooking burns off the alcohol added to food dishes – **apparently it doesn't**. Now I didn't know this, and

although I avoid food cooked with wine etc. especially when we eat out, I did have at the back of my mind the idea that if the chef had used alcohol it wouldn't matter as it would all have boiled off. I looked up the 'facts' on google and here is what I found:

Alcohol does not "cook out" of food in most cases. The myth that alcohol does all cook out stems from the fact that alcohol has a much lower boiling point temperature (173° F / 78.5° C) than water (212° F / 100° C). Thus, if the temperature is above 78.5° C, then the alcohol should boil off, right?

A group of researchers in 1992 at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the University of Idaho, and Washington State University decided to find out. In the end, what they discovered was that

the “alcohol cooks out” assumption didn’t turn out to be correct for the vast majority of ways most people prepare food with alcohol. In their study, they used a variety of recipes with various sources of alcohol and a variety of preparation types, including simmering, baking, flaming, refrigerating overnight, etc. What they found was that the amount of alcohol remaining after cooking was in the range of 4%-85%. The variations weren’t just dependent on how long you kept the temperature above alcohol’s boiling point either. They also found that the other ingredients made a difference in the alcohol retention rate. The size of the cooking vessel also greatly affected the alcohol retention rates. The smaller the vessel, the more alcohol will be retained given some set cooking time, due to the smaller surface area for evaporation.

In terms of preparation methods and times, their results were as follows (all of these assume the temperature is above 173° F, which is the boiling point of alcohol; also, the size of dish and contents of the food mixture affect the results, so this is just a general guideline):

- The highest rates of retention were with alcohol added to boiling liquid and then shortly after removed from heat. In this case, the alcohol retention rate was around 85%.
- The second highest alcohol retention rate came when using the flaming method of cooking, which resulted in around a 75% retention level.
- When using no heat and storing overnight, about 70% of the alcohol was retained.
- When baked for 25 minutes with the mixture not being stirred, the retention rate was 45%.
- When baked/simmered where the mixture is stirred, produced the following results:
 - 15 minutes 40%, 30 minutes 35%, 1 hour 25%, 1.5 hours 20%, 2 hours 10%

Now, you might think from this that if you cooked the thing long enough, eventually the alcohol will all get cooked out. From a practical standpoint, this is more or less true. But if you are ever cooking for or are a recovering alcoholic, you’ll want to know, it’s not *really* true. There will always be some alcohol remaining as long as there is still any kind of moisture in whatever you are cooking. The reason behind this is that the alcohol binds with water and forms an azeotrope (mixture of two or more compounds where the ratio cannot be changed by simple distillation). So, as you boil the azeotrope, the ratio of alcohol in the compound stays the same throughout the boiling process. So, you will always retain some alcohol, unless you boil off all the liquid.

Source - <http://www.todayifoundout.com/index.php/2011/11/alcohol-doesnt-really-cook-out-of-food-in-most-cases/>

So please beware, especially if like me you want to pride yourself on not consuming any alcohol at all, even inadvertently. It might also explain why I felt so terribly ill at a formal dinner two Christmases ago when I ate a pudding that I was assured had 'all the alcohol boiled out'!

Was the wine ever worth it?

Something else I knew, but the same edx course ratified in the latest session I watched and worked through, was how if we are blindfolded it is almost impossible to tell one type of wine from another. Many people can't even tell the difference between and red and white wine, especially if they are not allowed to smell the wine. Apparently even the so-called expert Sommelier's are stumped although they would be loath to admit it (or even dare be tested).

When I drank, I drank wine more than anything else, and I used to think I would be unable to survive without it. I used to dream of a nice iced glass of Sauvignon Blanc or a nice warming Merlot with Sunday lunch. Now it turns out I probably couldn't taste what I was drinking at all, so apart from the effects of the alcohol which my habit was craving, there was no point drinking wine at all, it might as well have been water.



If you have already quit alcohol I am not for one moment suggesting you try this test, but if you are still dithering like I used to, and stressing over how you will cope without wine then you might want to try it. Also, try distinguishing white wine from red wine whilst blind-folded and holding your nose.

The edx course team have kindly allowed me to make the video where they conduct the test available. I have put a copy for you to watch on my website as 'EDX - can you tell white wine from red wine' on the newsletter page www.idontdrink.net/newsletters The results are quite interesting but see if you can come up with any ideas how they could have improved the validity of the testing. I came up with one big suggestion.

You might also want to show the video to friends of yours who **do** still drink and who like to buy expensive wines thinking they will impress! They might want to think again.

(Incidentally the picture is of me the other day in the local Waitrose wine section. I estimated there to be 2,000 wine bottles in the picture given that most shelves were three to four bottles deep. This is significantly less than the amount I would have drunk had I not quit four years ago – see below.)

In case you missed the announcement on Facebook

This month I achieved the milestone of 1500 days without alcohol. I was so delighted I posted the following:



In my book 'I Don't Drink!' I talk about logging achievements at various stages and how this can be really **self-motivating**. I mention in the book what I had achieved and how I felt at one week, two weeks, one month, 50 days, 100 days and 250 days, and so I thought I would do the same for 1500 days:

- I am living the years of my life I never expected to see when I was a drunk. I seriously expected to be dead by age fifty-seven. I will be sixty in two month's time! If the extra years I have ahead of me weren't enough encouragement, I now have two wonderful Grandchildren to share them with, and had I carried on as I was I might never have met either of them.
- I have completely lost any desire to ever drink alcohol again. Just that inner knowledge gives me the thrill of knowing I will live the rest of my life unencumbered by the nagging guilt that I am wasting any of it.
- I have never been as fit as I am now – even when I was at school or in the army I still smoked (and drank). I now walk at least six kilometres every day, I also swim at least a kilometre every day, and on top of that my wife and I go ballroom dancing every week and I am about to restart karate lessons in my new town. I feel fantastic and I am a perfect BMI for my age. I have also completely self-cured the type 2 diabetes I was diagnosed with six years ago.
- Thousands of people have now read my books on quitting alcohol and from the mail I receive, I know I have been able to help many of them also quit alcohol. There is a tremendous joy to be had from helping others that I never experienced before. That is one addiction I don't want to get rid of!
- I have a tremendous relationship with my loved ones, my friends and my work colleagues. I have been able to take on some significant extra responsibilities in my life due to the trust that others can now place in me, knowing it the real me they are dealing with and not some drunken monster.
- As a very conservative estimate I have saved £15,000 by not drinking. This is money I have instead spent seeing incredible parts of the world and meeting the people who live there, and learning about other cultures and beliefs, all of which have added to my own sense of belonging on this planet.

As you may gather from the above and from the posts I place on my website, I have found an inner contentment, almost comparable to a permanent meditative state or state of wellbeing. Having the **time** for others, the **patience** to listen and the **energy** of good health has given me a sense of **peace and harmony** in life I never imagined I would find.

You can achieve the same as me and it starts by counting day one! If you take the approach I took and that I outline in my books it really is easy and painless. I can honestly state that I have never once regretted my decision to quit alcohol, or been tempted to have a drink since that first day, and that the benefits mounted up literally from day one. What I will say however, is that the decision has to be forever – nothing else works!

So, what happened to my next book and the on-line course I was putting together?

Work has started again on the book and the course. The good thing about the delay is that I am constantly learning more and more about the whole quitting alcohol process. The more I know and find out about how my mind works, the more I'm able to relate to the ease with which I was able to quit a habit I thought I could never live without, and just as importantly, remain completely void of any interest in booze whatsoever. I have also been able to test my own findings with those of some of my readers.

Both the new book and the course will benefit from this added research. It is nice to be able to write about a subject from live personal experience as opposed to being an 'expert' in the field, writing purely from an academic perspective.

As a few of you will know (from an email those few of you will have received from me), I have also been working with my friend and mind-expert David Bond on formulating a one hour face-to-face session, during which we believe we can totally change someone's attitude to alcohol. We have been looking for some initial volunteers to help us (and hopefully be cured of their desire for alcohol into the bargain), and have a few helpful people lined up already. However, unfortunately, David has suffered a minor injury and he needs to fully recuperate before we can continue with the test programme. You may well receive an email from me regarding this when we look for some further volunteers shortly. It is all exciting and interesting stuff going on here!

Until next month



Next month I will be talking to Laura at Club Soda about how they are finding things. I will also email any updates regarding the new book and the on-line course if I finally manage to complete them! I will also start more intensive training for this year's 5000 metre Swimathon in April and let you know who it is in aid of in case you would like to help the charity. Don't forget to visit a museum; I already have three new ones lined up to visit, as well as

an exhibition on map-making at the British Library, a tour round a beautiful Buddhist Temple in Wimbledon, and a return visit to Down House to learn more about Darwin and what inspired him. Oh, and the weekly ballroom dancing lessons are progressing very well thank you. Who was it that said life is boring when you don't drink? God Bless,

Julian

www.idontdrink.net

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P.S. Sorry there are so many pictures of me in this newsletter, it wasn't intentional. I used to receive a monthly free magazine when I lived in West Sussex, and my wife and daughters and I used to laugh at the number of the times the lady editor managed to get her picture into the magazine. She would turn up as a pretend customer in a company's advert, or be somewhere in a crowd scene, or be interviewing someone and hog the photograph – I think the most we saw her in one issue was twelve times and it only had about twenty pages! I have only managed five appearances unless you also count the little homanid or the face stone likenesses!