



Darren's story: Overcoming Alcohol Through Understanding Emotion and Circumstance

An Iceberg has most of its mass (up to 90%) under the surface whilst the part above shines (or not). But as many a seafaring goer will tell you, it's the underneath that the captain needs to understand if they should avoid catastrophe. This is me, and after a 4 and ½ year whirlwind and the realisation that I had a problem long before that, I kicked alcohol out of my life for good, by finally understanding my emotions beneath the façade of my everyday life. Here is a summary of my story:

My relationship with booze started at the age of 14 / 15 but the influences were there even before then as I had 2 older brothers, and growing up, I saw drinking alcohol as normal. My dad went to the pub on a Saturday without fail and I can remember feeling relief when he was home on schedule and dread when he wasn't as it would inevitably lead to arguments with my mum, who didn't like the drinking culture.

In 2006, when I was 28, Cancer took my mum when she was only 60. Diagnosed in February, she died in the April. I also had final exams for the Open University in the Summer, I got married to my wife in the September and she also became pregnant. It was an emotional rollercoaster of a year and my drinking persisted onward. It was involved all the time.

Prior to 2014 I would have been classified as border line in drinking terms, but my job, with an all-expenses paid lifestyle was playing with my ego like a cheap violin and with the demon pulling strings behind the scenes, I was out of control. Burning the candle at both ends, and often in the middle, I was neglecting my family and I was on the road to a breakdown.

I tell you this not for sympathy, because bad things happen in everyone's life, but these are the fundamental circumstances that I did not deal with under the surface and I learnt the hard way that this was key to my sobriety. For the next 4 ½ years I struggled to deal with increasing anxieties and emotions, and booze, once my friend (or so I thought) became my foe.

My wife is the best thing to ever happen to me and to save my marriage I resigned from my job, starting my tour of counsellors, taking antidepressants, and the secret drinking started. I did land another job with limited travel, but the frustration at missing the all-expenses paid lifestyle that had pushed me to breaking point, and the guilt of neglecting my family was too much for me to take and my secret drinking got worse until a culmination of incidents led to a make or break situation. It took me over 3 hours to write down a summary timeline of all the binges that led to arguments, that in turn led to more guilt and me to cut down or stop before another bender, and off we go again.....Remorse and guilt inside me which made my anxiety and mental health get even worse.

I finally admitted I needed help in 2017, and after one such incident I went to a local addiction help centre called Step Forward and had a couple of meetings with a “Specialist”, but it was clear that it was no use to me. I also remember visiting a counsellor about my anxiety and drinking a bottle of wine immediately after leaving the house, obviously that also failed.

By the end of 2017, I had met a Lady trained in NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) techniques and soon discovered that my brain probably needed re-programming, and so with her help, I began to try to change my thinking and it worked to an extent. It made me feel better about myself and helped me come to terms with the loss of my mum, but I still had the occasional binges, followed by regret, confrontation and upset, and then bouts of abstinence feeling guilty for letting my family down again.

Fast forward through a few other binges and events to Christmas 2018 and I was sober the whole time. Yes, it was hard, but the feeling of a happy family was beautiful, and contentment crept back in my life, yet on New Year’s Eve, after being given Vodka at a neighbour’s party I ended up paralytic. The next day this tore me apart and it was like a thunderbolt hit me, I was devastated because I had made good progress and I had proved that I could abstain from alcohol.

After a few days of feeling sorry for myself, and guilt for letting my family down again, I contacted an on-line AA group and began attending Skype meetings. This was a whole mindset change for me because I had tried alone many times to quit but never succeeded. As it turns out, I learnt that we need to understand our triggers and emotions if we are to succeed. I found a sponsor, a lovely man, but he was also very religious, which I am not, yet I persisted because I was determined and thought this was the only way. I even took a flight to Denmark to do some of the in-depth steps (an experience to tell another time... WOW!) and it was here that I realised AA was not for me. I will never forget what I learnt during those Months and I began to put this experience to use in my own way and realised that by owning sobriety and avoiding the triggers it gave me a sense of positivity.

My guard came down for the final time in March 2019. At a work stakeholder event I got so drunk before arriving that I got turned away and could easily have lost my job. However, the next day, although full of remorse, I saw it differently and remember going over the triggers thinking, oh well that’s the test over then sunbeam, you will never drink again whatever it takes and that means owning it and stopping my own way.

It is hard to explain but I felt I had a guardian angel (maybe my Mum) watching over me and over the following days it just felt different and I knew, I mean really knew, I wanted Sobriety.

I drifted away from AA and although in early Sobriety, with my rollercoaster journey I wanted to help others in some way and ended up buying the domain name for my website, www.theunioflife.com. I had no idea what I wanted to do with it, but I enjoy writing to express myself and sharing my experiences so thought it would keep me accountable for my Sobriety.

That first 30 days was the toughest ever, bearing in mind I had stopped for 2 Months before and during Christmas, but this time I knew I didn’t want to drink again (Not upset because I couldn’t drink, I actually didn’t want to), it was like I had an inner voice pushing me on, “no way was this going to beat me again” and I now owned the fact that I was to stop drinking. I treated it like I would a business plan and reviewed and wrote down all my lessons learnt over the past few years. I had momentum and the following is a snapshot of the main steps and others duly followed:

- Continued to understand the “real” reason I wanted to stop, my family, and dealt with the emotions of my past through Inventory, NLP techniques and Writing.

- Told people I was stopping drinking for good and would likely avoid trigger situations for a while. If this offended them then so be it.
- Started using the health club I was a member of as a place to vent when I wanted to holler at the demon for messing with my Feng Shui (or Cravings). Mainly swimming for me.
- Substituted alcohol with Tonic Water (bizarrely I never used to like it) and other fizzy (diet) drinks. I found that it helped with cravings.
- Ensured I had pictures of my family all around me as a reminder why I wanted to quit.
- Limited my time away from home as far as possible. This was extremely important and a major trigger to avoid, although it has got easier.
- Dabbled with Instagram and started following people on the Sober Train.
- Rewarded myself after 30 days with an Espresso Machine to give me a boost, in more ways than one. The rewards from Sobriety now don't necessarily need planning, they just come.

During the Summer of 2019, I found the community on Instagram extremely supportive, just by reading comments and looking at pictures was a massive help. After a while I called myself Variety_n_Sobriety and started posting about my Sobriety, and now, some lighter hearted posts keep with the Variety n Sobriety theme.

Since that day in March my everyday life has improved amazingly and this is why I eventually called my website The University Of Everyday Life: www.theunioflife.com and I now write on there so will see how it goes. I learned the hard way, but I know I have the knowledge, experience and the desire to rock Sobriety for the rest of my days.

If anyone can take anything from my story, then it's this; Do not give up! My passion to encourage others and any advice I can give is driven from personal experience and the issues and mental stresses that are around us every day. I consider myself extremely fortunate and I have accepted that people like me do make their own mistakes, but with core values, determination, hope and humour we can get back on track. I spent most of my adult life looking for something, blinded by alcohol, but through sobriety I found it right under my nose.

I found contentment, so can you!

Love to all.... Darren T

I would love to hear from you so feel free to make contact. You can find me at:

The University of Everyday Life: www.theunioflife.com

Instagram: www.instagram.com/variety_n_sobriety