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HOW TO GIVE UP DRINKING FAST AND STAY SOBER

AN EX-ALCOHOLIC'S GUIDE TO
OVERCOMING ALCOHOL ADDICTION

AJAY AHUJA

by Ajay Ahuja

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This book is dedicated to my wife, Hana.

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Chapter 1:

My marriage and eventual divorce with alcohol

I was not an alcoholic. I never was. I only ever considered myself an alcoholic in the last 3 years of my addiction to alcohol when I researched what the term “alcoholic” meant.

An alcoholic is defined as someone who has a problem with drink. Did I have a problem? Not sure if you could call it a problem. I drank every day. However, I would drink no more than other people I knew and I would still be able to do everything that was expected of me and more. So no problem as far as I could see.

The term alcoholic to me seemed to be too defining. If you were an alcoholic, then you needed help. If you were not, then everything was okay and you did not need help. So as long as you did not define yourself as an alcoholic then everything is okay.

I wanted to move away from this labelling. Who cares if you think you are an alcoholic or not! There are people who drink 40+ units a day who consider themselves alcoholics and others who do not. The key point is they drink 40+ units a day!

In my situation I was drinking more than I wanted to. This was the crux of my problem. Not whether I thought I was an alcoholic or the fact that my partner labelled me an alcoholic or that I was heading towards becoming an alcoholic.

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My problem that I faced every morning when I woke up after an evening of drinking was that I wished I had not drunk the night before. Other than that I felt fine. I would not really have a hang over, I could do pretty much everything I perceived I wanted to do it was just I wish I did not drink what I did the night before. But for some reason I wanted to stop drinking the way I was drinking.

My quandary back then was:

Get blasted for £1 or go to the cinema for £5?

Easy answer for me. Get blasted! At the start one can of special brew (4.5 units) was enough for me and I had the most fun. You could delve in to the depths of trying to work out what you would like to do to relax other than drinking or.....drink! 2 mins to the local shop, hand over £1, let the fun begin!

At the time I was earning £80 per day. I reckoned because I only spent 1/80th of my daily wages on alcohol I could not have a problem. I had worked out that if you had a problem you would need to be spending all your wages on alcohol. So I had a long way to go before I deemed to myself that I have a problem as I still had 79/80ths of my wages left! The foolery we tell ourselves when we want to justify something can be quite astounding.

Over 20+ years I had a great relationship with alcohol. My alcohol intake went up over the years and I cannot lie I had a lot of fun however all great things had to come to an end. I knew that and you probably know that as well. I just had to bring it to an end.

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It was like a relationship you are in with a girl that you once loved but loved no more. It had to end and it was either going to go out with a bang or wither away. The withering was not happening so I had to “create” the bang. It was time to file for divorce! This lover of mine, who loved me so dearly, was actually deceiving me and actually killing me. I only know this because I went to the doctor.

So, my fellow drinker let me tell you about me and my relationship with alcohol, from the very, very start.....



Chapter 2

Ages 0-15

I'm alcohol free

I was born in 1971. I grew up in a new town in Essex. I was one of the few ethnics in a predominately white working class town. My parents were of Asian descent and were both hard working who wanted for a better life.

I was quite a shy boy growing up. I think it was due to having an older sister who did the talking for both of us because she was the one who could talk first! So when an adult asked us a question to us both I would look at my sister to come up with the answer which she always did.

My mum sent me to nursery and I remember the feeling I used to get every morning when I got up. Dread. I used to have an upset tummy every morning because I used to dread nursery. Now I realise I was not feeling ill it was just an emotional reaction to going somewhere where I did not like. Now I have no reason why I did not like nursery. It may have been due to the fact that I did not want to be away from my mother, I did not like the teachers or the other kids or something else. I have absolutely no idea. All I knew was I used to get that sickly nervous feeling in my tummy which made me think I was ill. If I knew that alcohol could have taken that sickly feeling away at that age I am sure I would have drank it!

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Even though I claimed I was ill I was still carted off to nursery. My mother always recounts this story of how the teachers observed me looking at the kids playing and then I went over to the group, snatched the toy from them and showed them how to play with it. It was if I looked upon these kids as they were not as smart as me. How arrogant! But hey I was just a kid and they could not see how it worked like I did. I don't remember this scene that my mother recounts however as time progressed I realised early on I was academically smarter than my peers by quite a margin.

When I joined school it was pretty much like nursery. I remember my first day as I imagine you do too. I remember that sick feeling again and my mum chatting to the female teacher and metaphorically giving her the keys and instruction manual on me.

Then it was time for mum to go and I remember the door shutting, me left with all the other kids I didn't know and then my eyes filling up with water, everything going blurry and starting to cry. I was completely overwhelmed by this feeling of being alone. It was horrible. But as kids are great at doing I was easily distracted by some toy or other and then I was on my way playing with the other kids just like they all were earlier before. I was now one of them. I remember other kids getting dropped off by their mums during the year and some reacted like me and others just ran and got stuck in to all the play. I imagine my sister's first day was the opposite of mine. I bet she just jumped in and got on with it as that's what she was like.

At the school there were only 3 ethnic kids. Me, Charles and Rosy. Charles was half Mauritian half white and Rosy was black. Charles is still a very good friend of mine to this day and Rosy I still know through a mutual friend so I get

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kept up to date on her life. One thing we never experienced was racism. I never felt different to the rest of my colleagues and it would be sometimes mentioned that they forgot I was even Asian. I am fairly certain kids have no capacity to be racist. You either like someone or you don't. Colour never comes in to it. You grow up to be racist but as a child it's just not in you hence I never had a hard time being a different colour.

Infant school was a breeze. We did a bit of academic stuff and I was pretty much ahead of my class all the way through. The reason being we were taught to read, write and add up before we went to school. Just having that slight advantage meant that you were yearning to learn something new. When something new came along I lapped it up, digesting and fully understanding it while the others were still trying to grasp what was taught before.

For this reason I was top of the class. No joke. There was one other boy who was in my league and we always battled for the top spot. Sometimes he won sometimes I did. Funny thing was he was naturally intelligent. I don't think he studied at all. He was just clever.

I used to study out of fear of my dad's disapproval. I was very scared of my dad. I never really knew him. He was just this big loud spoken person who disciplined me if I was naughty. Throughout my childhood years I never liked him and when I was around 25 I had a frank chat with him to say I felt he never cared too much for me and that I do not care for him too much. The only link was the fact that we were both very fond of my mum (his wife). We have not spoken for 7 years but he is still with my mum. When I visit my mum he just makes sure he is not about.

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I never really had a father to discuss ideas with or get an idea of how to be a man. I was pretty much left to my own devices. I had an excellent relationship with my mum. In fact I think my bond with my mum is made doubly strong with the fact that my mum knew that there was no bond with my father and she took it upon herself to make sure I was ok.

I think not having the support of my father just made me more scared of the whole world around me. As a boy you just do not know what the right thing to do is. If you have no guidance on matters of being a “man” you just either follow the wrong boy to get an idea of what to do or just not step up to the plate. I did the latter as it was easiest.

I never really exerted any strong opinions either way growing up. I was not the funny guy, political guy, sports guy, tough guy or musical guy. During my formative years at school I defined myself as the smart boy. I was the guy who did well at school. I was by no way a geek. I used to wear designer clothes and I knew the right people but I never put myself out there. That was because I knew I had nothing to back it up with!

If I were honest you could say I suffered from low self esteem. I probably had opinions but because I had no way I could back them up with any confidence I would shy away from expressing them. I was scared of someone challenging me, making me look stupid and me ultimately losing face. It was better to keep protecting myself by telling myself that my opinion did not count.

I read somewhere that having a strong father son relationship was essential for boys under 12 for their self esteem and I can sort of understand that. I think if you know your dad is behind what you say then you might stand up and

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say them. This is because you have had your dad's approval and maybe that is all that matters when you are that age. Anyway I am not a psychoanalyst or psychologist and I am not here to blame anyone for the way I felt in the past however I felt I suffered from low self esteem.

I spoke down to myself all the time:

“No one cares what you think”

“Do not say that as you will look stupid”

“Other people know better than me as they are better than me”

Etc.

This protected me from me putting myself in the firing line. I kept quiet and stuck to my role:

The quiet clever guy.

This strategy worked well for me through secondary school. I fitted in well and had an ok time. I had a laugh with my group of friends that I hanged around with at the time and continued to be the clever guy.

I was never in the popular gang however I was accepted by them. I was a classic inbetweenener. Not in the geek gang, not in the sports gang, not in the bad boy gang but in the general mass of those in between all of the other gangs.

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When it came to girls I did not get much action! That was because I never put myself out there. I was the quiet guy. I was the brainy guy. I was not the outspoken guy, funny guy, tough guy or trendy guy.

I remember the first time I kissed a girl. We were at a party. I was aged 13. There was cider going about. I must have some but I am sure I did not get drunk. There was one girl who had got drunk and decided to kiss me. I was quite taken aback but enjoyed the experience. But the funny thing was now I was feeling confident and I saw another guy kissing a girl. He had his hand down her knickers. I watched him then he got up and left. So I went over to her and started kissing her and she obliged! I then, like a parrot, copied exactly what he did and stuck my hand down her knickers too. I did not know what I was doing however I just copied what the other guy did!

Looking back these girls were drunk. I must have associated something about girls who get drunk becoming more sexually available from then on. It is this that must have led my curiosity with alcohol and girls to pubs and nightclubs.....

Now I am going to take you on a journey of my alcohol days. It is quite a journey. So I want you to sit back, read and enjoy this trip I am going to take with me. I won't ask you to do much but when I do I hope you do.

Ending this love affair with alcohol is easy. It really is. I want you to believe that no matter what other experts say. The reason I know that is because I did end it. Quite easily.



Chapter 3

Age 15-18

I discovered cigarettes and alcohol

I started smoking at age 15. A lot of problem drinkers have another addiction other than alcohol. My first addiction was cigarettes. Now I felt like a grown up as only adults could smoke.

But the real enlightenment came when alcohol arrived! A group of us all went to the off licence and one by one we would attempt to buy alcohol. Some of us got served others didn't. But no worries. Whoever got served just went back in and got more booze.

Then we would go to the playground parks and start drinking. I chose the strongest beer as my first drink! While the others got the normal strength beers I knew that I physically could not drink that much so I just went for the strongest beers as I would have to drink the least volume. The true mathematician within me came out! I had already worked out that one can of special brew was equivalent to two cans of fosters. Also as money was tight being young the special brew looked such damn good value!

So we all started to drink. One of the guys was a bit more advanced than us. He used to buy a quarter bottle of whiskey. He pretty much came up with the idea to go and get drunk. I suppose you only have to wait for one of the boys to come up with the idea for us all to follow.

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Now I was the relatively quiet guy. However when I started to get a bit merry the inner voice that had always quietened me went away. I would be cracking jokes as I no longer had the worry that I would look stupid. And if I did look stupid then so what! They used to laugh at me for getting pissed on one can but that was all it took.

So it became a regular thing to do to meet up after school, go to the off licence, get some booze and then have a laugh in the play ground. I remember saying to all “How can anyone get addicted to this?” and all laughing. Little did I know.....

So this went on for a few months but I wanted to meet girls. These guys I was drinking with were quite happy to get drunk together however I wanted to get laid! I had been told by one of my colleagues about our local nightclub. He told me that the music all sounded like one record as they mixed each song together. I was interested in music (as well as girls) and I wanted to go to this nightclub and hear this mixing as well as look at the girls.

I convinced my friend Charles, the half Mauritian guy to come with me and I also introduced him to drink. We went to the same off licence, got spirits this time with orange tango (fizzy orange) and mixed it with Bacardi as we walked to the nightclub.

We would get pissed during the one hour walk to the club. We used to have a right laugh. Some of my closest friendships were built through the chaos that drinking bought. Through the adversity created a sort of bond that bonded you together.

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We both had fake ID and we strolled up to the bouncers at the door. Amazingly they let us in! My fake ID was rubbish but at the time underage drinking was not such a big thing as it is now.

So we are in there and let me tell you we were WIDE EYED. We got in, took in the surrounding and pretty much said nothing to each other when we were in there. The only thing I said when we were in there was after 30 minutes we got in and I said:

“Do you want to go home?”

And his answer was:

“Yes”

It should have been “No we have only been here for 30 minutes!” however I think he was relieved that I said do you want to go home.

The next day we were raving about it. It had opened our eyes to what adults do and we wanted to be one! To think that standing in a nightclub for 30 minutes was pretty much the best night of our life was crazy however we loved it even though we didn't look like we enjoyed one minute.

So we planned our next trip. This time we would get more pissed as we established we hadn't drunk enough! So I mixed up some of my parent's drink cabinet and put it a half bottle size of spirits. Charles brought something from his

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parents and off we went swigging from our bottles drinking the vile liquid that was in it.

We got pissed.

We got in and went to the same seat we sat in the first time we went there. Then I felt this warm feeling on my leg. I looked down on my leg and Charles had been sick all over my leg! So I went to the toilets and padded my leg down with water. Another guy was in there and was doing the same thing as me claiming someone had been sick on him. I guessed Charles had done the same to someone else!

Anyway we hit the dancefloor and me, the quiet guy, had decided I was a great dancer. I was up on the podium and dancing with girls. Well not girls but more like WOMEN! It was brilliant. So much better than the last time we went.

Charles and I stayed until 2am and then we walked home. During the journey home I woke up on a hill covered in mud. I had fallen asleep on a hill and Charles was nowhere to be found. I then carried on the journey home without Charles and the next day we raved on about how good last night was!

Now the link with girls, alcohol and clubs had been firmly linked. Alcohol means clubbing means girls. All excellent pursuits as I loved the way alcohol made me feel, I loved music and I loved girls.

From age 15 to 18 I frequented our local town club and became a regular fixture every Friday and Saturday. It was all about going to the pub first and then on to the club and try to pull.

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Also I attended the local college and I would often go out with fellow students to the local bar, pubs and other clubs out of town if we could find a driver.

Alcohol was brilliant. I had so much fun however I did not have to drink to have a good time. We could go out and not drink which was kind of weird looking back on it however when you are young you have more of a memory of being sober than being drunk. So having a good time whilst sober was not as alien to me as it was say when I was 35.

So I still felt it strange how anyone could get addicted to alcohol. You just drink at the weekends and that's fine. Everyone drinks at the weekend so no problem there. People who get addicted to alcohol must be stupid, weak or have a propensity to drink which I did not have. Ignorance was bliss!

It was my time at college when I met my first serious girlfriend aged 17. It was a friend of one of my college colleagues. I lost my virginity one week before my 18th birthday in the back of a Ford Fiesta XR2 in a grave yard. I felt brilliant. I was now officially entering adulthood as a man!



Chapter 4

Age 18 – 25

Smoking, drugs and binge drinking in the week and weekends

I was now a man. I had the freedom granted to me by my parents. I had finished my A-levels so I could do whatever I wanted, come home whenever I wanted and stay wherever I wanted – so I did!

I started to hang back around with the guys that I first started drinking with. We decided to hit the drink again. Firstly deciding to drink one can of tenants super for the day. The next day deciding to drink two cans for the day. The third day to drink three cans. This was a mistake. Three cans of strong lager, drank in the day, was well over my limit. That equates to 13.5 units.

I woke up finding myself quite embarrassingly passed out by a busy road in the early afternoon right next to the entrance of the cul de sac of my parent's home. Good job my mum or dad didn't see as I am not sure quite what my explanation would have been!

In the holidays I got my a-level results and I got the grades to go to the university of my choice in the party capital of the UK:

LONDON!

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I did not realise it at the time but sending a teenager who loves to drink to the big city is like taking dynamite to a naked flame exhibition! I remember my first day quite well. It was nothing like my first day of school that's for sure.

My parents dropped me at my halls of residence. I brought my big speakers and decks and put them in my room which had two beds in it. An older girl student was in charge of making us newbies settling in. I immediately got on with her and soon forgot about my parents who were sort of hanging around. My dad told my mum "come on lets go, he's settling in just fine". I think my dad had clocked that the girl had taken a shine to me.

I ended up in the bar by 3pm and in her bed by 2am. This was my first day at university. I thought great! I met my roommate at around 4am when I stumbled in and accidently woke him up. We never hit it off and I moved in with another guy, Jeremy, who liked a drink and was up for a laugh as much as me.

I then met a lot of other people who I felt a lot more on my wave length. In particular Gareth. Gareth would drink with me and we turned fresher week in to fresher term. I did absolutely no work in the first term. I always remember at the end of the first term Gareth saying "I think fresher's week is over now". I had to agree. We all went home for Christmas and then we were back for the New Year.

Gareth used to be in to rock music. I had introduced him to my sort of music which was rave and hardcore at the time. He quickly latched on to it and wanted to take it further. He wanted to go raving. So we went. However he wanted to get drugs. Precisely he wanted pills. Ecstasy. I hadn't cared too much for drugs. I had taken speed once, enjoyed it, but never really took it again.

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However I got easily led and I embarked on a big drug episode for 5 years. I used to go raving, make music and DJ for 5 years during my university years and early working career. Ecstasy was my drug of choice however I did speed, cocaine, ketamine and smoked crack once.

My drinking was reserved for in the week and when I was not going raving. I think I latched on to the drugs vibe as it was simply better. I knew lots of people who were doing it and the buzz was a lot friendlier.

I did mix speed with alcohol but not really with ecstasy as they just did not go together. However speed and booze was probably the best buzz. You could drink for ages and not get pissed. So it was like getting pissed but having all your faculties together.

My relationship ended whilst I was at university. I had changed and my first girlfriend was just becoming too psychotic and punching me all the time that I had to end it. I simply flinched every time she got angry.

I had several casual affairs during my time at university and met another girl Julie who was a sweet kind girl but it only lasted 6 months. The problem was I liked chasing different girls. I know why this was. Because of my low self esteem I thought if lots of girls like me then I might like myself. So I would constantly chase girls. There was no such thing as too many girls.

I had taken a year off after I qualified from university with quite a good degree under my belt. In this year I focused on my music career and also girls! I drank regularly but only when I went out. The main reason of going out was to go clubbing and to go on the pull. I would go out mid week as well as at the

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weekends. I would always take advantage of the drinks offers and happy hours pubs and clubs used to have. Happy hours really do work if you want to encourage binge drinking you know!

During my year off I tried to make it as a musician. I made plenty of tunes, had several recording contracts but never quite made it. Reality set in and I had to get a job. I managed to get quite a good job as a trainee accountant with a well respected firm.

My drinking patterns pretty much stayed the same for the first 3 years of employment. From ages 22 to 25 I trained to become a chartered accountant. You could not really drink too much as you needed a clear head if you were going to pass the exams. I managed to control my drinking to a little bit in the week when there was a works do and getting blasted (as I always had done) at the weekends.

The funny thing is everyone else got blasted also. I really think us Brits think it weird if you do not get drunk when you were young. I do not remember ANYBODY who went out and did not get drunk all the way through growing up. It just never happened. No matter where you came from, what class you were or what religion you were (including some Muslims I know!) we all got drunk to have a good time.

So as far as I was concerned I was doing nothing that was different to anyone else. The only little secret I had kept from my work colleagues was that I used to do illegal substances. A bit of speed and ecstasy at the weekends. No big deal.

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It was around the age of 23/24 when I started to drink at home. I lived in two places at that time. One place was near my place of work. It was with a husband and wife Roger and Eleanor who let their house out to lodgers. I used to stay there 3 or 4 days a week. Roger was and is still an alcoholic. I used to drink with him sometimes when I got home from work. I still see Roger to this day. He is very ill. He has too much iron in his blood and has to have one pint of blood removed from his body once a week. He still hasn't cut down and he has been demoted at work.

Eleanor left him several years ago. I know why. It was because of the drink. Eleanor has a massive heart. She put up with Roger for too long but that is just Eleanor. She is officially my second mum. I still see Eleanor also. She really looked after me while I lived in her house. Both Roger and Eleanor used to feed me and never asked me for any money extra whatsoever. Eleanor has rebuilt her life as a single woman now at the age of 59. I have a lot of admiration for Eleanor as she eventually took the hard choice and made her life better for herself.

The other place I used to stay was my new girlfriend Lucy. I used to stay at her mum's house and this is where I used to go to the off licence and get my one can of special brew to add a little spice to the evening. Lucy's mum used to look after me also. I would regularly eat at Lucy's house and dine as one of the family. Her mum pointed out that I had a drink problem as both her brothers were certified alcoholics so she was very sensitive about alcohol. I just ignored her and told Lucy your mum is crazy. I suppose looking back she wasn't! She was also by the way a nurse.

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I was not happy at work. I hated it. I felt I had to be someone else. I had to be a professional middle class intelligent accountant when really inside I felt like a cool DJ soon to be superstar musician whose music videos will be on MTV! What I felt inside to the career I was actually doing were so different. This upset me greatly. Drink was a great escape to take away that mismatch I felt. I could not resolve the way I felt inside to the way I was portrayed on the outside. I wish I could have just come out to my employer and said “Hey you have the wrong guy. The guy you have employed is not the guy you know. I am actually a drug taking piss head DJ who is actually quite a dude so please accept me as this guy from now on”.

Of course I never had the courage to do such a thing. People in the accountancy profession just don't do that. You would not get in if you thought you could do that somewhere down the line. I obviously was in the wrong job!

So during the week was a great deal of stress and if I were honest very upsetting. Therefore when it came to the weekends there was NOTHING that would have come in my way of enjoying my Friday and Saturday night. Absolutely NOTHING.

I drank to get drunk, took drugs to be able to drink more and engaged in unprotected casual sex with whoever would oblige! That was my right as I worked 5 days a week in a job I did not like.

Now amazingly I managed to pass my accountancy exams. God knows how. We were taught some excellent exam technique which I think has helped me in later life. The accountancy school I went to was so focused to passing the exam and not necessarily understanding the topic. This meant that you could

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pass the exams without really understanding the questions. Sounds crazy but it actually worked.

The reason being the exams required only a 50% pass mark and the scores were calculate relatively. So all you had to do was be in the top 70% of all the people sitting the exam. The exams were so difficult that everyone struggled to score above 30% so if you titled your question, put a few keywords in your answer and made the answer look pretty you would get presentation marks. Sometimes these were the only marks that most people got hence you got in to the top 70%.

So after all the years of GCSEs, A-levels, Degree and Accountancy I was now a fully qualified chartered accountant. This meant no more exams. This also signalled to me quite strongly that I could now drink whenever I wanted as there was no need to study in the week anymore. It was such a liberating feeling. I could drink everyday if I wanted to. I could have fun every single day. Okay I might have to work in the day but if I could have fun in the evening everyday then life would not be so bad. Brilliant!

So from age 25 daily drinking was my pastime. Every evening was party night.....



Chapter 5

Age 25 – 28

Smoking, drugs and daily binge drinking

I had always been a skinny bloke. If I described my body frame I would say it was slight. But after the years of drinking I started to get a beer belly. At first I found it quite amusing and if I were honest I quite liked it as it was a novel experience to be called fat instead of skinny.

My drinking habits were as such:

- Mid week and staying in: Either 2 cans of strong lager or a bottle of wine.
- Mid week and going out: One can of strong lager at home and then 2-3 beers and several glasses of wine. Sometimes some shots of spirits.
- Weekends: 2 cans of strong lager, then several glasses of wine and some shots of spirits.

The drinking was everyday but always with someone. At no point did I drink on my own. I made sure that I was never on my own so I could always have someone to drink with even if they were not drinking!

Now you can imagine what it was like drinking heavily mid week and trying to hold down a full time professional job. I would struggle to get up in the morning, my performance was at best average and I would want to get home dot on when the clock struck 5.30pm.

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I am not sure if my employers noticed or not as I never had a bad appraisal. However during my final years of employment I never got a promotion either! I stayed in employment till age 27. I realised if I wanted to carry on drinking I could no longer work for anyone. So I handed in my notice at age 27. It never crossed my mind to stop drinking to carry on working. It was to stop working and carry on drinking.

Drinking was so much fun. I had no doubt that life was about fun and drinking and not holding down a job that I did not want. Today I agree with half this statement. I do not believe in holding down a job that you do not want however I do not agree that life is all about fun and drinking.

So now I was the master of my own destiny. I could theoretically drink whenever I wanted. I could drink Friday afternoon, Thursday lunchtime or even Monday morning! Wow. Freedom like that must be reserved for only the rich and successful. I forgot that it was also reserved for the down and outs!

When I left my job I went on several holidays. Some with Gareth from university. We took a lot of drugs and simply partied. I lived at no fixed abode usually sleeping on friend's floors. These friends were either drinking or drug buddies. I had a great time with these people. Often ending up in clubs or bars having a right laugh and meeting other drinkers and substance abusers along the way. The funny thing is alcoholics, drinkers, drug users and abusers are just like you and me. Totally normal people who you would know from other walks of life except they partake in indulgences. I knew doctors, lawyers, graphic designers, midwives, accountants, managers and the unemployed who all enjoyed getting out of it.

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Again during this time drinking doesn't feel like something I should not be doing. So much fun is being had so how could it be hurting me in anyway? Everyone drinks when they are young and at age 27 I still considered myself most definitely young.

During this time I was regularly using illegal drugs. It was after a 3 day bender after millennium eve that I decided I was not going to take any kind of illegal drugs regularly. I had enjoyed myself but the buzz was too long. I had lost 3 days of my time and somehow I was uncomfortable with that. The fact that I was not working was bad enough but being a junkie as well, well that was too much for me. My love affair with drugs came to an end so I could focus on alcohol. Alcohol was a lot more fun, easier to get, a shorter more manageable buzz and of course safer.....well that was I thought anyway.



Chapter 6

Age 28 – 33

Smoking, occasional drug use and daily binge drinking

At age 28 I was a free man. I was free from an employer and I could do literally what I wanted. I also was single. I was no longer with Lucy so I had no one to answer to (not that I listened to Lucy anyway!).

At age 28 I was still hanging about in the town I grew up in. I had managed to find people to drink with in the day (if they were up for it) and in the evening. I remember I had my DJ decks at a friend's house, Karina, and I was seeing a girl that was a friend of Karina's called Elaine.

Elaine loved to drink. We had a lot of benders together but we would always end up fighting. When I say fighting I mean her bashing me when I had wound her up too far. Karina lived near the town centre so whenever me and Elaine stayed round there the temptation to go out was always strong.

Karina's ex-boyfriend Darren came round one time and he went out with Elaine for a drink. By the time they had come back Darren was convinced I was seeing Karina. He explained to Elaine that he was going to beat me up because he thought it was wrong.

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I remember looking in to his eye and explaining to him that Karina is just a friend and eventually, with the help of Elaine, he calmed down and realised it was a stupid idea. The drink had got the better of him and I was glad it did.

It made me realise who I was hanging around with. The town I came from had above average unemployment, above average social housing and above average crime rates. I knew a lot of people who were either unsavoury or knew unsavoury people. That was just the way it was in the town.

Coming in to near scrapes was part and parcel of growing up. I had taken a few beats before but I realised that my home town, as much as I loved it, was holding me down. I needed to get out of the town and start a new life and make something of myself. Technically I was unemployed, had no money (all I had was an overdraft) and nowhere to live.

I decided to cut ties and move to Chigwell in Essex. I rented a room off a guy Tony, whom I still know to this day, for £55 per week. When I moved in he moved out! He had started seeing this girl and he was staying there all the time so I was left in the flat pretty much on my own.

Since I had decided to give up drugs I thought I could really indulge in my drinking. I think I had issues with doing drugs. It was a pain to get “sorted”, the quality was always flaky and ultimately you did not know what was in them! At the time there was a lot of publicity about “don’t do drugs” and “Just say no” etc. that my consciousness got the better of me and I thought drugs are not the way forward. However this was not the case with the drink.

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In fact with the drink the opposite was true. No one was saying “do not drink” or “just say no to drink”. There were posters of drink companies all around me showing people having a great time whilst drinking. This all said to me is that drinking is ok. So in my mind I thought I was doing myself a great benefit by saying no to drugs and yes to alcohol.

This was the trigger for me to be ok with drinking alone. So at age 28 I took my first drink alone. It was great. It did not signal to me that I had a drinking problem. It just meant that I no longer needed to think of something to do whilst at home. I cannot really remember what I used to do when I was younger and I was on my own. I imagined I would watch TV or something and then go to bed. But now I could actually have fun, at home on my own!

Before I moved in I had gone to France to get some cheap booze. I bought about 30 crates of strong lager called Skona (my friends called it Skoda!) for less than 50p a can. When I moved in with Tony I got him to help me unload the 30 crates and pile them up in my room. God knows what he must have thought when I was moving in however he did not say a word! He just helped me load the crates in my room and then said “see yer later!”

So I would drink my 2 cans every night, have a great time with or without people and built a business from this little room in a small flat in Chigwell. Total cost of getting pissed £1. Still no recognition that I had a problem.

I met a girl Emma and we got on really well. Only after 6 months did she mention something about my drinking. She was only 19 however she made a throwaway comment to my question “do you think I lack confidence?” which she answered:

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“Is that why you drive a big car, chase money and drink beer every night?”

It was a funny comment which we laughed about however she had linked my drinking of beer with lacking in confidence. How did she know that? She was my sweet 19 year old who as a little naïve in life. How wrong I was about her and people in general.

Now let me tell you everyone knows why people drink they just do not like to say it. Drinking makes someone feel confident. So if you know someone who drinks you know on some level they do not feel confident about themselves hence they need that confidence boost. That is what is so great about alcohol. It makes you feel how you want to be. Confident. It is a confidence boost in a can or a glass. Within minutes you can go from feeling unconfident and uncomfortable in your own skin to the person you truly believe you are. How magical is that.

And the good thing is this stuff is legal, is drunk by successful people and actually has some medical benefits if drank sensibly. I was only drinking 2 cans so how bad is that? In my mind alcohol was amazing.

Forget the notion that alcohol makes you relaxed. All it does is make you feel more comfortable with yourself. It changes the way you feel. This in turn helps you come to terms with yourself, the people around you and what is going on in your life.

Over the next 5 years I drank daily, built a successful business, made a very good friend and met my wife....

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Chapter 7

Age 33 – 36

Occasional drug use, daily binge drinking

By age 33 I had built myself a successful business. Things did not work out with Emma however we are still friends. A lot of my friends had settled down, got married had kids etc. However I was still single. Although I had achieved my financial ambitions I was ultimately alone. If I carried on the way I was going I was going to die a very lonely but wealthy man.

I decided to put my further financial ambitions on hold and go get me a wife! I went speed dating, internet dating, single nights and also went out to bars and clubs whenever there was an opportunity or I could convince someone to come along. Midweek going out was a problem for most as they all had to get up for work in the morning however the speed dating and single nights fitted in well for this as you could go on your own and not look like a freak!

During this time I met someone called Alan. He was also self-employed and had a lot of time on his hands. What followed was consistent daily debauchery! Alan liked going out as much as me. Alan did not have the history of drinking, drugs and girls like I did so he loved going out to these clubs and bars.

However there was one strange thing about Alan. He did not drink.

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So we would go out, I would get pissed and he would be the driver for the evening sometimes till 5am! He did make one comment once when he arrived at my house whilst only knowing me for a few weeks:

“You’re always drinking”

I brushed his comment off with something like:

“Yeah, anyway.....blah blah”

And change the subject. That was the only time Alan brought up my drinking.

Alan was the first young person I knew who did not drink. It was really strange. He would get his water, diet coke, orange juice etc. whilst I would get tanked up on special brew at my house and then order glasses of wine while we were out. I would get pissed and have a laugh. He would stay sober and have a laugh. Admittedly I had more than a laugh than he did (as he was a bit more serious than me) however he still had a laugh.

I always remember the time when he asked me:

“What is ‘having a laugh?’”

He was asking me what I actually meant when I said do you want to come out and have a laugh and if there was some ritual that had to occur to certify that we went out and had a ‘laugh’. We still joke today about that comment. I remember defining ‘having a laugh as:

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“It’s having a laugh init!”

I couldn’t actually define what having a laugh meant. Technically it did not require laughter at all. You could go out for a laugh and not laugh one bit. The true definition back in those days for me going out to have a laugh was:

To drink.

I must have substituted the word “drink” with “laugh” to ease my conscious. So if I were to call up a friend and ask them if they wanted to come out for a drink it would be a reminder that we were going to drink alcohol. However if phrased as do you want to come out for a laugh then it sounds a lot better and positive. Who could say no to going out and having a laugh?

So it was having a laugh with Alan in the week and having a laugh with other friends at the weekend. It was in the week when Alan asked me if I wanted to come to his friend’s flat in London. It was a girl that he sort of liked called Helen. I said ok and I went to her flat and drunk pretty much the contents of her fridge. It was white wine followed by bottled beer.

Then after that I said come on Alan lets go out! The night turned out to be like all the other midweek nights. Me getting blasted, going on to a club and then grabbing a kebab on the way home. An almost perfect night in my books!

At this time I was seeing a girl called Elizabeth who I quite liked. She enjoyed getting drunk and doing pills. She lived in Manchester and so my weeks started taking a pattern of spending the weekend in Manchester getting pilld up

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and pissed and in the week around Essex, Kent and London going to bars and clubs.

If I was honest with myself Elizabeth was not the right girl for me. I had sort of convinced myself she was as we had a lot of fun. I really looked forward to my trips to Manchester as I knew no matter what we were going to have fun. It was like a holiday every weekend. She also knew a lot of other people who liked to get drunk and take drugs so perfect! Manchester really lived up to its reputation of being the party capital of the North West.

Also at this time Alan's friend Helen had expressed interest in me. At first I said I was not interested as I knew Alan had sort of an interest in her and I did not want to go there.

It was on a night out in London when Alan got a text from Helen. Alan called her and said that I was with him. I actually spoke to her and I innocently asked her to come out and cheer herself up. We were in the Loop bar in London and it would be great if she could come down. This she in fact did.

Helen is a tallish girl with long dark blonde hair with very striking features. It was on this night that I realised what a pretty girl she was! There was a downstairs bit to the bar where music was played and we went downstairs to continue the night.

Obviously I had been drinking and some slow music had come on. I could see that Helen wanted me to dance with her. I looked over to my Alan to say is it ok if I go for a dance with Helen. He gave me the nod. I took that as his green light that it was ok to take over from now. It was just one of those things. She

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was drawn to me even though I never felt anything that great towards her. I appreciated that she was very pretty but my mind was on Elizabeth. But me being me could not resist the opportunity for a casual affair.

An affair did ensue and I am glad I did. Helen showered me with so much care, love and affection I had never experienced in my life. The kind of care that came close to it was the love and care my mother gave me. Except Helen's was more intense!

I continued to see Elizabeth but I soon got found out. I was glad that I was found out. I spent more time with Helen and within 2 months of knowing her I asked her to move in with me. I had NEVER asked any girl to move in with me before so this must have been serious.

She did move in and I lost my urge to go out chasing girls. The natural path emerged and I had at last chosen a monogamous relationship with a woman. It felt weird and very final. But as time grew it was very liberating. I was no longer on the hunt and that part of my brain always looking for the chase shrank and was replaced with better things like how I could provide a better life for the both of us.

And here is another thing strange about Helen: She did not drink! She was not interested in any kind of mind altering substances and was happy with her mind being exactly where it was. What a weirdo!

So now I had two people in my life that I spent a lot of time with who did not drink. They thought it was normal to stay sober on a Friday and Saturday

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night. What was wrong with these people! Or was there something wrong with me.....?

Helen was quite a tidy and clean girl. When she moved in the first thing she did was do a much needed spring clean of my house. After a few days the house was spotless. I was still a smoker when she moved in. When I used to visit her flat I had to jump out of her window and lodge myself on this makeshift balcony and smoke out there. Now she lived in my home I don't think she had the heart to ask me to smoke outside so I would smoke indoors.

Smoking indoors in such a spotless place felt strange. Smoking was so dirty. I am not sure how Helen put up with it knowing she was such a clean and tidy person. My smoking just now felt so out of place. 3 days after she moved in I booked myself in to hypnotherapy and never smoked again.

Now a non-smoker and a VERY occasional drug user it was my right to drink as much as I wanted. I felt so great about giving up smoking that I proudly said drinking is my only remaining vice. I indulged in this vice for a few months but then Helen said I should go and see someone about it. I went to the doctors and he asked me what I did for a living. I told him I worked for myself and he asked me how is business. He was expecting me to say not great but actually business was doing very well.

My success in business worked as a great delusionary tool for me. I mean how could I have a problem with drinking when my business is doing really well? I think a lot of drinkers who have great jobs, outward success or high social standing convince themselves of this lie. Always remember this: There is no rule that says if you have a drinking problem everything else in your life needs to be

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crap. I have heard of the term “high functioning alcoholic” which means everything else in your life isn’t crap however you drink at dangerous levels.

There are plenty of high functioning alcoholics in the world and I was one of them. It is only when you let someone in to your life and they can see behind the scenes that everything is not ok. Yes you are functioning alright but nowhere near the levels you are capable of. Helen could see this. So much so she was the one who convinced me to go and see the doctor. I was assessed and it was recommended that I go for counselling. This I did.

Counselling was strange. I would walk in to the room and my counsellor would stare at me waiting for me to speak. After about 15 seconds of uncomfortable silence I would think shit I better say something and then I would start talking.

But guess what. The counselling didn’t work. I know why it didn’t work. It was because it was Helen’s idea that I gave up not mine. I enjoyed drinking. To give it up would be like giving up a big part of my life. My reward system was all based around drinking. After a hard day’s work I could treat myself to getting out of it and feeling comfortable with myself.

You see I still did not think drinking was bad for me. I was only being told that drinking was bad for me. I used to think that the government guidelines of 3-4 units a day were over cautious. They had to be. So what the government were really trying to say was at least double was safe. If it was that dangerous they would not make it so easily available if it was that dangerous would they? As far as I was concerned the amounts I was drinking was safe.

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The lies we tell ourselves sometimes! So as you could see giving up drink had no benefits and only a downside of crushing my one source of fun. It really was my only source of fun. Having a good time was drinking. Drinking round friends, at a wedding, in a club or at a picnic. I believed that if I could not drink then I could not do these things. No drink = No life.

Helen was good however. She could see I was trying to make an effort to give up but could see my heart wasn't in it. She backed off and let me drink. She would even buy the alcohol for me when she went shopping. She showed me that it was me who was deciding to drink. It was 100% my decision to drink. Once I knew it was 100% my decision to drink then it has to be 100% my decision to give up.

For 3 years I carried on drinking. My intake was going up. For 10 years 2 cans of strong lager would do it for me. However I was finding myself finishing my 2 cans (or 1 bottle of wine) and looking for a top up. I would either open up another can or open another bottle of wine.

So now knowing this buying 2 cans of lager or one bottle of wine could leave me wanting more. If I had nothing left in the house it would mean buying either 3 cans or buying one bottle of wine and one strong can. This was definitely a shift in my mind. My dosage was increasing like they said it would.

You hear that an alcoholic's intake has to go up as they build a tolerance to the alcohol. Obviously this is what was happening to me. From age 15 to 25 it was one can, age 25 to 35 it was two cans and now age 35 onwards was it to be three cans?

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A well timed documentary was on channel 4 about Paul Gascoigne, Gazza, the England football player. I will never forget his ex-wife saying that up until 5 years ago he just drank like a normal heavy drinker. You know the type, the football supporter who goes to the pub, drinks with his mates, sings and comes home at midnight and falls asleep in front of the TV. But she said it suddenly changed.

It became a more severe addiction where he started drinking in the day and he turned in to a full blown alcoholic. As she remembered it was sudden but it probably happened over a few months. That turning point can happen to any normal heavy drinker. I was what you call a heavy drinker at this point. Could I actually turn from a heavy drinker in to an alcoholic? Could it be that sudden? I suppose so. I had turned from a two can a night person to a three can a night person. I can say, certain but rare nights I have had 2 bottles of wine or 4 strong cans in one session so I knew my body could take accommodate it.

The shame I was building up drinking was culminating. I did feel bad. I was letting down Helen. I decided to try and get help again. I had a liver test and they found that my liver was enlarged slightly and one of the tests was showing an abnormal reading. It was nothing serious and it certainly did not make me give up. Even though they told me all this I thought I would just take it easy and not drink so much.

I decided to go for counselling again. This time I wanted to go. Over three months or so my counsellor spoke to me and with a combination of my determination, her words that would drop in my mind and wanting more for myself I gave up drinking on the 18th December 2008.

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The 18th December 2008 was 10 days before my 37th birthday. I gave up getting drunk for good.

I went without alcohol for 6 months solid. I have had the occasional episode when I have got merry, 3 to be specific, in the 3 months following my period of abstinence. I am still undecided on whether I want to be completely free from alcohol or have the occasional drink where I do not get drunk i.e. less than 4 units.

I am no longer controlled by drink. I feel so liberated and clean. However I also feel a bit stifled. I have run away from myself for so long I have not dealt with my issues like normal adults have. I certainly feel a bit immature for my age as I haven't worked through things that normal adults have. I have simply reached for the can and partied.

I am on the road to growing up now. I had always felt like a little boy inside a man's body. For the first time I am starting to feel like an adult....and I LOVE IT!

I have created this forum so we can all meet. You can also drop me a message here direct in my forum. So what are you waiting for.....visit www.giveupdrink.com



Chapter 8

The quick way to give up alcohol

Ok so now to the juicy bit of giving up alcohol. You simply need to follow these steps to give it all up:

1. Be sure that you really want to give it up.
2. Set a date.
3. Find something you want to do.

That's it. Simple isn't it? The US army had a saying called K.I.S.S. Meaning Keep It Simple Stupid. When new weaponry was introduced to the troops they all came with an operating manual. The manual had to be point and easy to follow. The reason why it had to be simple was because they were at war. You didn't want to have to look through a complex manual whilst facing a life and death situation. Is giving up alcohol a life and death situation? Well....YES!

So let me better explain my manual for giving up alcohol.

1. Be sure that you really want to give up

Look, drinking is fun. That's why you drink. If there is a tiny bit of you that still wants this fun then you don't want to give it up. This is because you enjoy drinking. The only way you are going to give in to this heavily seductive drug is to be 100% sure you want to give up. If there is 1% of you that still pines for the drug you will eventually give in. Alcohol is all around us. All I have to do

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to get my fix is go in to the kitchen open the fridge and pour myself a glass of wine. I can get my fix within 20 seconds of leaving my computer right now and start the party. If I had 1% of me that still wanted to do this you can be sure 1 minute out of every 100 minutes I will simply give in to my impulse and drink.

So if only 99% of you wants to give up put this book down and pour yourself a drink. Enjoy it as you obviously still want it at some point in time. However if you are 100% sure you want to give up as you cannot see how alcohol can help you live a better life in the future then read on.

2. Set a date

You need to prepare for this momentous change in your life. As much as you want to say today is the day you give up alcohol it just isn't going to happen. I suggest setting at least 7 days ahead of today's date or a date after any social occasion where drinking is expected of you.

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In between this time promise yourself that you can drink without restrictions. Treat this time as a party celebrating your eventual cessation of alcohol. It's important you do this to get it all out of your system. So make sure you drink without guilt or regret. You will thank yourself for it. Trust me.

In between the drinking prior to your give up date I want you to mentally prepare for it. You have to make sure that all the drinking you do prior to your give up date is in exchange for you committing to the date and beyond that you will actually stop. If you need to throw out or give away the remaining alcohol in the house then do it. If you always meet up with some friends on a Wednesday for a drink then let them know you won't be there next time as you are giving up the drink. If they laugh at you let them laugh. You can't expect to get support from your fellow drinkers.

Once a date is set you have to stick to it. This is the date that your life moves towards a new direction. It's an important date so treat it with the respect it deserves. If you have a spouse or partner let them know the date. The more people you let know the more you will be committed to the date. The more committed to the date the more you will be looking forward to this date as this is the date that your life changes for the better. It is the date you have promised yourself to live a better life. You get me?

3. Find something you want to do

The first two steps I asked you to do are relatively easy compared to this final step. Being 100% sure you want to give up is why you are reading this book. So the 100% sureness is really a formality. Setting a date is as simple as well.....setting a date! But finding something you want to do is the hard bit. But let me tell you why you need to find something to do.

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Asking someone to stop doing something is hard to do. If you keep telling yourself “don’t drink, don’t drink” all you will hear is “drink, drink”. So even though you are reading this book which is all about stopping yourself doing something I want you to put that far from your mind. I want you to replace the word “drink” with another word or words that you want to do.

Let me tell you how I found out what I wanted to do. I had a reasonably successful business. The reason why it was successful was because I enjoy doing business. However I did not want to become a workaholic so I would make sure I had leisure time also. So in this leisure time I would drink. But at least I was not working all waking hours.

But then it hit me. I realised I really like business and working. So I replaced my drinking time with working. So my mind was telling me to “work, work” which I rephrased to “do business, do business”. I wasn’t thinking “don’t drink” I was thinking “do business”. You get it? Call it positive affirmation, call it replacement therapy, call it whatever you like. You simply have to find something other than drinking to do. So as soon as you think “drink” you think “xxx”. Replace xxx with whatever you like!

So can I ask you, what do you like doing? What have you always wanted to do? Here are some examples of other things you could do instead of drinking:

sport

get fit

lose weight

travel

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acting
writing
find love
shopping
self help psychology
yoga
volunteering
meditation
spirituality
getting rich
film appreciation
hobbies
running a hobby club
have a child
cooking
set up a website
build a house
find a new job
find new friends
join a political party
find a religion

Obviously this is not an exhaustive list. It took me a few days to realise that business was my replacement. So you need to go deep within and come up with an answer. You may even find the answer whilst drunk on your favourite drink. But if you do not find the answer you will struggle to follow through. It has to be something you want to do. You may think there is nothing you want to do but I challenge you that you are simply not asking yourself hard enough.

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Now I know you are thinking I have oversimplified giving up alcohol but I am living proof that if you want to give up alcohol you can use this very simple method.

From now on I can only wish you good luck and I sincerely do. Welcome to the rest of your life. Please tell me how you got on at www.giveupdrink.com

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The End

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