

## Not Everyone Wants to Hear About My Sobriety

By AUTHOR

07.23.16

When I first got sober, I had miles of life to recover and countless apologies to make. I'd put a few months of sobriety together and was starting to feel like a human being again—almost for the first time. It was a special kind of joy that I wanted everyone to understand and hear about. I wanted to tell anyone within the atomic-blast radius of my drinking that I was on the road to recovery; I wanted people to know that I'd figured out how to get my shit together. They say that when you start drinking, you arrest your brain wherever it's at. It simply stops growing or developing in the bathtub of booze you've been soaking it in. (I guess that explains a lot of the teenaged decisions I made into my late twenties and early thirties.) I could finally feel the gears and rotors starting to lurch forward in my head, creaking into action.

**Comment [HLM1]:** maybe instead of "miles of life" you could say "years of life" --I'm not sure life is measured in miles, although I get the metaphor

**Comment [HLM2]:** I think if you move this sentence to the end of para 1 you will have a transition:

**Comment [HLM3]:** I really like the atomic-blast radius image

Late in my drinking career, I couldn't understand why my hands were shaking all the time, so I went to the doctor again. By this point, I'd put my primary care doc through impossible mental gymnastics, trying to figure out what was wrong with me. He was a kind, soft-spoken man who regarded me with the sort of pity you give someone who can't figure out the self-checkout line in a grocery store. To this day, I'm not sure why neither one of us ever put two-and-two together about my alcoholism and my physical problems. I brought him so many symptoms it wasn't funny: gout so excruciating that I couldn't my put shoes on without crying; brain-racing anxiety; terrific stretches of insomnia. He gave me a battery of tests: electrophysical nerve tests, a CT scan, a stress test where they inject you with radioactive dye and have you run on a treadmill. When a simple blood draw came back revealing that I was punishing my liver on the regular, I started to cry in the room. I'd been discovered. I admitted that I was killing pints of vodka and hiding wine bottles around the house. He looked relieved. This was the missing puzzle piece.

**Comment [HLM4]:** I think we could use a stronger transition between the 1st and 2nd para--the link isn't all that clear for me even though the writing is amazing. See above comment about moving this sentence to the end of Para 1: "It was a special kind of joy that I wanted everyone to understand and hear about."

When I returned to his office, weeks later sober and (relatively) happy, he nodded as he listened to me, reviewing my chart. I was riding the pink cloud. I started to tell him all about the wonderful world of sobriety as if it was a Brigadoon lined with gold and wonder. I talked a mile a minute. Finally, he cut me off.

"I get it," he held up his hand, half-smiling, ballpoint pen entwined between his fingers. "I understand."

And with that, I realized that not everyone cared about my sobriety. I'd put this poor man through two full years of detective work, when all I should have done was admit that I was drinking all the time. It never occurred to me. There's an unique sort of weariness that comes with hearing someone talk endlessly about something everyone else has figured out. It's like hearing someone who just arrived to the party hours late after finally finding the address. Everyone else got there just fine.

**Comment [HLM5]:** It should be "a" before "unique"

It's been a common theme with my sobriety. I find myself less in awe of my ability to stay sober than me having been checked out from reality for so long. I'd forfeited so many chances and opportunities without even knowing it: jobs, relationships, happiness. I'd just coasted through life, operating on a sad sort of autopilot. And now that I'd taken back control, I found myself with a life half-lived, if lived at all. But when it comes down to it, not everyone cares. Most people don't. Getting sober isn't about getting pats on the back, hugs, or congratulatory emails. It's about living rightly. That's enough of its own reward.

**Comment [HLM6]:** This sentence gets a little AWK. What about "I find myself less in awe of my ability to stay sober than I am about the persistence with which I kept drinking for so long"?

And yet, I kept trumpeting what it's like to be sober—what it's like to be taking everything in instead of keeping everything out. I continued putting messages out on Facebook, telling co-workers, and friends and family. Truth of the matter is: the people closest to me don't necessarily want to hear about it. I'd put them through so much that it was a relief, yes, that I'd stopped drinking. And with that came a whole bunch of other things: no more lies, no more excuses, and a sort-of guarantee that I'd show up when I said I would. I suddenly had a memory, too. I wasn't living in a world of no tomorrows where my promises evaporated as quickly as I spoke. It hurt whenever someone pointed that out, but I just drank the remorse away. One of my best friends (and most ardent day-drinking buddies) Cole used to criticize my lack of follow-through with a matter-of-factness that rattled me: "It's not that I don't believe you *want* to do something. I just know you won't." In the end, no one really cares what I used to be like. They care what I'm like now.

**Comment [HLM7]:** This section should be reworked because we lose the sense of whose perspective it's from. Also, can we come up with a better word than "things"? New expectations? New responsibilities?

Whenever I get annoyed with someone who's taking forever getting to their point, I have a habit of mentally twirling my finger: *Okay. Let's wrap this up.* That's what it's like getting sober and telling people about it. I have to imagine that everyone who's still around after my whirling-dervish days of drunkenness just wants me to wrap it up. It's time to move on; it's time to get living. *Congrats on not being a monster anymore.* It's a great lesson for an alcoholic like me: stop expecting people to care about me doing the right thing. I shudder to think about the things that came out of my mouth while I was in twilight. Every once in a while a memory will come to me like a long-forgotten dream, like that time I drunkenly asked a friend's dad, a Vietnam veteran, how many people he killed. Now, when I talk, I'm not thoughtlessly hurtling forward with an idiot's velocity, free-associating what to say next. I have to trust that my actions fill in all those missing spaces. After all, sobriety is about moving forward without expectation—not looking back on a life spent not moving at all.

**Comment [HLM8]:** Consider revising this sentence to "That's what it's like being someone listening to me tell about getting sober."

**Comment [HLM9]:** Consider revising this to "stop expecting people to pat me on the back after doing the right thing."

**Comment [HLM10]:** I would change this to "not looking back on the part of my life I spent not moving at all."