

I got drunk for the first time the summer before I started high school, and it was glorious. I had never felt so free, and I partied hard starting in 9th grade. I never really fit in in middle school, but once I found alcohol, I felt like I belonged and managed to become one of the “cool kids.” I had the time of my life the next four years— a lot of fun with very little consequences. I got one citation for underage drinking my senior year, but that was it. I skipped class, smoked cigarettes, worked retail, drank like a fish, dated, and couldn’t care less about school. I made it out by the skin of my teeth, and I went to college at a large public university.

Things changed in college, though— it was a pretty dark time. My drinking was terrible, and I had little to no respect for myself. I didn’t realize it or know what self-respect was, but I didn’t have any. I was blacking out and engaging in behavior I’m not proud of, and I went to the hospital several times for alcohol poisoning. I also got a DUI. I wrecked into a parked car, the airbags deployed, and from what I read in the police report, I told the police officer that I wasn’t injured, I just “drank too much.” If nothing else, I’ve always been honest.

But even though I was a crazy, hopeless drunk, I was terrified of failure, so I kept up my schoolwork. I worked hard at school in between blackouts. I managed to graduate (after a fifth year, what some call a “victory lap”). I graduated in 2009 and moved to Washington, DC. I didn’t really have any money, so I slept on a friend’s floor while I job-hunted. More dark times. Pretty much the only person I knew other than my roommate was my ex-boyfriend, and I had a tendency to black out and show up at his apartment, demanding to be let in. His neighbors were

not fans of mine. Yet, for some reason, he took me back and we moved in together. And six months after moving to DC, I found a job I very much wanted.

For the next three years, I was living the dream. I had a job I loved, I was in a relationship, and I had a ton of other young professional friends. However, my drinking was only getting worse.

Though I went three years in DC without getting arrested or going to the hospital, I was going to happy hour every day after work, drinking until I blacked out, and wreaking havoc in my personal life. The few real friends I had said they were sick of defending me. My boyfriend, whom I cheated on, told me many times that I needed to quit. I also had anger issues that led to fights. I didn't care. Working and drinking were all I cared about. And as far as I was concerned, as long as I was getting my work done, there was no drinking problem.

I did feel like I was wasting time, though. While I didn't ever think about quitting drinking, I realized I was losing much of my life to it. All that time at happy hour could be put toward a more productive pursuit. So, I decided I'd go to grad school part-time. I looked around and saw lots of lawyers, so I thought law school made the most sense. I took the entrance test, did well, and applied to three major schools in Washington, DC. Interestingly, I only got into the one that didn't require disclosing your entire criminal history.

Working full-time and going to school at night was very demanding, and it didn't leave much time for drinking. So rather than drinking daily like I used to, I only drank on weekends and only times when I could drink like I wanted. I have never in my life had one drink. I never stopped at just a buzz. I wanted total oblivion. I wanted to escape every thought, every feeling,

every stressor. I wanted complete freedom. Unfortunately, with my new schedule, I could only do that a handful of times a month.

That first year of law school while working full time was HARD. When I wasn't drinking, I was constantly on edge. I would have emotional meltdowns in the office. Someone I worked with told me I was "the most unprofessional person she'd ever met." I had horrible insomnia. I would go days without sleeping, bouncing from doctor to doctor and trying different medications. Nothing worked. Law school was incredibly stressful, and I almost dropped out. But I didn't—I stuck it out. May 1, 2012 was my last final exam that first year. I was done with my first year of law school! So, I went out to celebrate. And celebrated for the next six weeks.

Then came June 15. It was a Friday, and I was attending a networking happy hour.

Unfortunately for me, it was at a nightclub. Unfortunately for everyone around me, I treated it like a Friday night at a nightclub.

Shockingly, I don't remember what happened that night. My only memory past around 8pm is of my friend trying to pick me up off the street. I woke up the next morning in the back of an ambulance, on my way from the hospital to the police station. Oh no. This was not part of the plan. They put me in a holding cell. Not my first time in a holding cell, but this time I had stuff to lose. I had a Big Girl Job. I was in law school. What was I even being arrested for? I had no idea, but it wouldn't go over well with the boss or the dean, I'm sure.

They took me out of the cell and into another room to have my mug shot taken. I begged and pleaded with them to let me go. The officer said to me, “You’ll never change; people like you never change.” I told him I would. I started praying. I don’t know why, but I did— out loud. And a miracle happened— they let me go. They gave me a piece of paper that had the details of the arrest but said there would be no record of it. I found that paper a few months into sobriety and framed it.

I went home and panicked. What the hell happened? And more importantly, who was there and saw it? I started calling people. I found out there were pictures, videos. I tried to get information about who was taking pictures— it was a lot of people. There was no containing it. I was embarrassed beyond my wildest dreams. Yet, for some reason, I didn’t drink. I think it was a combination of shock and disgust. But I didn’t drink the rest of the weekend.

I went into work on Monday and told my boss what happened. She told me that people had let her know about the incident and that people had shown her pictures of me in handcuffs. She asked me if I had a drinking problem. I said I did but that it had never affected my work. Apparently unsatisfied with this response, she put me on a probationary period and sent me to the employee assistance program. They said, “Why don’t you check out AA.” I said okay, sure. Anything to save my job.

I went to my first meeting at noon on Wednesday. I announced to my coworkers that I was “going to my AA meeting to do something about my drinking problem.” I wanted the boss to know I was taking it seriously. I was terrified of being fired. That job was my entire identity. It

was my security. What would I be without it? Who would I be? People told me I was born to be there, now I'm going to lose it? I can't.

I went to AA and I told them the deal. I'm just here to save my job. Not interested in what you're selling. No intention of quitting drinking long-term—I'm just taking a break until this situation resolves itself. Yes, while I'm here, I'll tell you my life story.

I went to a meeting every day. I loved AA from my first meeting. The people were so nice and friendly and much more interesting than the general population. Most importantly, they got me. I felt right at home in AA and looked forward to going to the meetings. I also didn't drink because I told my boss I wouldn't, and I've always been honest. I could hold off until the end of the probationary period.

A month into not drinking and going to meetings every day, I was told I had to resign from my position. I was devastated. My job was everything to me—I thought I'd never find professional happiness again. I was convinced my life was over. Yet, instead of going to the bar to get drunk as I had planned, I went to a meeting and shared about it. I was comforted. And I didn't drink.

As it turns out, in my experience, not drinking and actively participating in AA meetings every day will change you. AA had taken the place of alcohol. I went to as many meetings as I could get to. I hung out with other people in AA regularly. I dove into the twelve steps headfirst. And since I was soon without a job, I was fortunate in that I had time to make getting sober my primary focus.

That August, I went back to law school sober. Everything was different. I was no longer so stressed that I couldn't sleep. I didn't want to drop out. I poured myself into school and AA. And things got a lot better. Over ten years into sobriety, I can't believe the life I have and how happy I am. Times can still be hard— after all, I'm a lawyer and most days, I don't feel like working. But I show up, do my job, be of service in AA, and be a friend to my friends, a partner to my partner, a mom to my dog— and life is pretty good.

I was the most self-absorbed person I knew. I did what I wanted, when I wanted, and didn't let anyone or anything stand in my way. If I can change, anyone can. But I couldn't do it without AA. I owe everything I have and everything I am to AA. Sometimes I think, “what a weird thing— standing in a circle, holding hands, chanting— I can't believe I actually do this.” But it's worked for ten years, and I believe that it will continue to work as long as I show up and put in the effort. The result is I'm happily married to a wonderful person and have a career I could only dream of ten years ago. But those are just the external results. Internally, I'm happy—and peaceful (well, most of the time).