

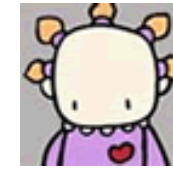
who are we?

Stop and Start Over is an online community of people in recovery. It is a place to get information about the recovery process, and learn how to get help for problems with addiction and alcoholism. It works. So visit.

stopandstartover.org

Mural (photographed) and illustrations are by the artist De La Vega.

All stories are printed in their original format, as submitted by people in recovery. To submit yours, visit stopandstartover.org!



But I'm Smart!

I was a person who looked like I had it together. I had a job, friends, even some money in the bank. I read the New York Times, payed attention to politics and could cook a pretty elegant dinner for friends in no time, and did so often. I had a secret though. When I started drinking I **could not stop**. I would be out with friends or coworkers having drinks, and I would become so obsessed with how to get more without making myself noticed that I would not be able to pay attention to what was being said to me. "When I order a vodka tonic, make mine a double", I would whisper to the bartender while slipping him a ten dollar bill. **I would hide bottles in my purse and desk**, having drinks before because going out because I knew I might not be able to get enough. I didn't drink every day though, I would have time in between binges, and every time I came off one I would swear it was the last. Those were not promises kept though, because I still believed I could drink. Alcohol was a cunning and would get me back in a matter of days, even months. I would see people casually drinking and decide I was like them and the cycle would begin again. Eventually I could not continue, I was having the same problem over and over again and it was keeping me from others and myself. Alcohol was hurting me and beginning to cause tangible problems in the world, the only good amount for me is none. I had to accept that I could not drink like others. There are many like me, I am quite average for an alcoholic it turns out. I have to remind myself daily that I am an alcoholic so I don't forget and think I can take a drink. The connection to other sober people is what keeps me in check today.

Maresa, 35
Berkeley, CA



Afraid of Admitting I Had a Weakness

What my drinking was like at the end – the agent of my demise sitting on the other side of my door and all I could think to do was open that door to it one more time. Where a normal person would be pushing the furniture up against the door to keep it out, I would cheerfully fling that door open: "Come on in!" No matter what horror, embarrassment, or degradation had resulted from my last binge, the moment would come where I would again invite that misery into my life. Once **I took the first sip, my problems would slip away** for those few hours and I would again have peace, but only until I came to.

And then, one day, I stopped letting it in. I can't explain why. It was a day just like any other. My latest drunk had been just run of the mill; certainly not my worst. I'd been sticking my toe into a twelve step program – just sort of lingering around the fringes – for a few weeks. My head cleared enough for me to realize that I really wanted to quit drinking, but I was more afraid of admitting that I had a weakness than anything else. One Monday morning, the mental anguish, the remorse, the shame and the physical problems finally overcame my pride. I asked for help and I got it. I entered a treatment center in February of 1999 and haven't had any mind-altering substance since that day.

Darren, 33
New York City

“when I started I could not stop”



On My 19th Birthday

I had just moved from the East Coast to San Francisco. Everyone seemed to be doing mass amounts of cocaine with alcohol as a chaser to take the edge off. I was a part of the trend and thought nothing of it. Getting high and drunk was a part of my life, almost as routine as brushing my teeth, which didn't happen on those nights I blacked out or passed out, to say the least.

I reached a bottom, awareness that this was not working enough to numb the pain and other difficult emotions I was being tormented with inside of my head and heart. One day, I awoke with the same massive hangover, remorse about not being able to remember what happened the night before, and for the first time a feeling I needed to make a change in my life around this pattern.

So I went to a meeting. My first experience was fear. Everyone was at least 10 years older than me. There was a language which seemed to be understood by the meeting's members. There were these slogans and steps hanging on the wall in an old roman style font which reminded me of a scroll that would be read by a messenger for a King in a royal court. They looked ancient, and I had no idea what they meant.

There was a lot of talk about God and God could relieve a lot of this if only I put my faith in "him." I left confused and felt totally isolated. I could not relate to what was said nor grasp the meaning of these wall hangings, slogans, and people so much older than me. I felt further out of place and extremely confused about what this 12 step program was about upon leaving the meeting. I was two weeks sober, a mere chicken still living inside an egg that had rotted a long time ago.

But I kept going, and met a young person who then introduced me to another person in **my age group** and **I saw that this was working** for them and I wanted to be a part of that recovery process. This is the point at which I reached a support network to help me to embrace a 12 step recovery program, which with the support of a close group of friends, managed to keep me sober for 13 years.

Nancy, 32
El Cerrito, CA

“I met some people my age and connected with them”

stopandstartover

helping you through recovery



“At first I was so scared”

I Believed I Was Crazy

One morning, after the office holiday party, I woke up with a massive hangover next to my boyfriend who looked at me with complete disgust. My antics or “adventures” as I liked to call them, just weren’t cute anymore. I knew I had to do something; I wasn’t going to remain alone for the rest of my life because I couldn’t drink. I knew a woman who was sober and happy about it so I reached out and asked for help. That was almost 7 years ago.

At first I was so scared. I didn’t know what to do with myself and I had absolutely no idea of who I was or what I was capable of. I had hated myself for so long I was sure everyone else felt the same way. Little by little I began to open my eyes and realize people weren’t nearly as obsessed with me as I thought, in fact they were coping or struggling just like I was. I found this very comforting... I am not alone. I have a place I can go, every day if I want, where I am accepted and where I have learned to participate. I am not insane and I am not a bad person. I am an alcoholic and so I do whatever I need to do to stay sober. I laugh, cry, play, dance and walk through all that life has to offer without regret. I have friendships based on trust, love and service. I belong.

There is nothing special about me. I am a garden-variety drunk who has been given a gift and to keep it, I must also give it away. Life doesn’t change... we do. We’ve got nothing to lose.

*Maria, 39
New York City*

Virgin Beer Mishap

I remember in early recovery... Oh, by the way my name is Jeffery Dean Ruiz and I am A 32 year old dude with six years and some change not taking any mind altering substances. So any hoo, I remember when I hadn’t takin’ anything for a couple months and I was feelin’ so fucking good physically and mentally and I had an excess amount of energy for everything. Well, there was this alcohol and drug free camp out at a place called Spicer Meadows right off the Stanislaus River that I went too and I thought I’d bring beverages to offer and so I brought a couple cases of non alcoholic beer to offer my new found group of friends. The beer was simply called N/A BEER. I was so thrilled about bringing this copasetic swill to the camp out. I am very ritualistic and I just loved the idea of drinking shitloads of these puppies by the campfire roasting marsh mallows and talking smack.

Well the cases of virgin beer didn’t go over anywhere near as well as I thought they would. I remember feeling embarrassed, upset, disappointed, angry... I remember feeling all kinds of feelings at once. I thought I was fucked for a moment because my first thoughts were, “OH fuck, these self righteous nerdy insecure judgemental fucked up invalids even thinking drinking beer with no hooch in it is satanic.

*Jeffrey Dean Ruiz, 32
San Francisco, CA*

“I realized shit-I have a problem”

I Discovered A Whole New Part of Me

Once I got into my thirties, I began to notice most of my peers didn’t drink as much and as frequently as I did. The way I “controlled” my drinking was through binging. I would not drink for a series of days knowing that saturday night I would allow myself no limits. On those nights, I would drink usually all night, throw up often times publicly and behave completely inappropriately (for example, hitting on my boss in front of my boyfriend). Even during this time, I thought I just needed to blow off steam. I am simply a fun person who likes to have a good time.

My therapist kept asking me about my drinking. It annoyed me so much. She suggested that I try to control my drinking. For the next six months, I lied every week about how much I drank. It wasn’t until after my last bender that I realized-Shit I have a problem!

That was in June of 2003. I am slowly learning how to cope with life without drinking, which initially I thought would be a death sentence. But it has been completely the opposite. I have discovered a whole new part of me-a part that I am proud of. I have learned how to open up, be honest, and most importantly how to ask for help. I learned there are a whole bunch of folks out there who have similar experiences with drinking and they recover and grow. Oh my God, I am so happy to be on this path now.

*Christine
34, Los Angeles*

First Sober Date Story

When I see the men and women in suits outside sucking down cigarettes, I say to myself, “I don’t think this is a restaurant”. My date opens the door and a wave of heat and loud music bathe us in the smell of sweat and booze. I recognize this place, this is a bar. Not just any bar, but specifically a hot spot for the after-work crowd comfortable dancing to club favorites at 6 o’clock on a weekday. This is lower Manhattan at its finest, the financial district after 5 o’clock. These workaholics are reminding me I’m an alcoholic and no matter what a drinker is wearing they all dance and sing-along the same.

As we scan the place for a table I see him, The Drunk Guy. Every bar has at least one and most regulars think management is renting a room to him in the basement. As my first-sober-date-luck has it, he is by my side for the rest of the evening, swaying and slurring. Stuck in a corner booth, across from the DJ, on the edge of the dance floor I am having dinner with The Drunk Guy and my actual date. To make recovering alcoholic matters worse, the waitress who is so easy to identify with the glitter lettering across her mutually funded double D’s, follows us to our table with two cold bottles of beer. She pops them open, my eyes as big as her areolas and declares, “They’re free!”

There I am standing at the edge of the swimming pool. I have my suit on, my towel over my shoulder and I am wearing flip-flops. I look like I am ready to go swimming. I have to back away from the pool. I push the beer farther out of my reach and start reading my menu. I hear the clock start to tick, and I ask myself, “What am I doing here?” Then, very unexpectedly, the vacuum closes. I shut my menu, look at my date and I start asking him questions, “Where did you grow up? Do you have any brothers or sisters?” Before I know it, my soda water has arrived, he is drinking the other beer that was intended for me, our hamburgers are almost finished and the crisis is averted.

Now, it has been almost two hours since the bell has rung, releasing these financial mongers from their work cages and they are acting more like zoo animals than when we’d first arrived. All evening I expected The Drunk Guy to spill or swear but instead he casually places both of his beers and plate on our table intermittently throughout dinner while my date assures him, “It’s okay”. Even more memorable was when a woman in the crowd suddenly stops dancing, looks at me and asks, “Are you using that napkin?” I look down at the cloth napkin on my lap and say “You want my napkin?” She looks back at me and says, “Oh, I’m just kidding.”

To cap off the evening, my date tells me about his most recent keg party where he pored vodka down his roommate’s throat and the guy was blacked-out throwing up until four o’clock in the morning. Fortunately, the end of this date is on public transportation and the chance of him going in for a goodnight kiss seems small. As the subway doors close behind me and I find myself alone on the platform, I exhale for the first time since the evening began. I survived my first sober date and I can’t wait to call and tell someone about it, “She asked for the napkin that was on my lap! Can you believe it?”

*Lola, 25
New York City*

“I ran out of people to blame”

What’s Wrong With Me?!?

I watch people around me drink the same way I do but they don’t get wasted like I do. There must be a trick, some secret or learned way of drinking that I haven’t figured out yet, but I will. I’ll try beer instead of vodka. I’ll try eating more before I drink. I’ll find a way – there must be a way. It’s not like I’m a drunk or something! I’ve never lost a job, I’ve never gotten a DUI, I never drink in the morning. If I was an alcoholic, I wouldn’t be able to say that. This is simply a matter of getting a grip on drinking, figuring out the way to do it.

Welcome to one of the many scripts that ran through my head before I got sober. They varied a bit here and there, but they all led to the same message – I could not accept that I was an alcoholic. I was diligent and smart enough to accomplish many other achievements, so I thought it was just a matter of time before I figured out how I could keep drinking. Well, it was a matter of time.

My drinking became dangerous and destructive, over time. All the things I told myself in the scripts couldn’t stand up to the mess I had created. I ran out of people to blame and I ran out of new ideas for my ‘strategy.’ I had tried everything within myself but I never asked for help. When I finally asked for help, I found the way. And I haven’t had a drink since.

*Alioop, 38
San Francisco, California*