

Annie Grace:

This is Annie Grace, and you are listening to This Naked Mind Podcast, where without judgment, pain, or rules, we explore the role of alcohol in our lives and culture.

This episode is sponsored by The Path, the coach-guided membership designed to help you make alcohol small and irrelevant in your life by removing your true desire to grab that next drink. Our science-based, compassion-led program allows you not only to shift your behavior and your relationship around alcohol, but more importantly, uncover and reprogram your subconscious conditioning and neural connections that have been keeping you stuck for years. With daily live breakthrough coaching and intimate and supportive community, regular peer-to-peer connection calls, and a complete vault of resources, this is where your path to total freedom and effortless enjoyment of your new way of life begins. Join us at nakedmindpath.com.

Hi, this is Annie Grace and welcome to This Naked Mind Podcast and I'm here with Sandra. Hi Sandra.

Sandra:

Hi Annie. How exciting is this?

Annie Grace:

It's so great. I'm so glad to talk to you like this. This is amazing. So why don't you take us back to the beginning in your drinking journey? Where did it all begin for you?

Sandra:

Sure. So being from Scotland, it wasn't a case of when did alcohol creep into my life, it was in my life from the very beginning. And where I grew up, I didn't know anyone that was an alcoholic, but I didn't know anyone that didn't drink. It was just something that people did. When I was in my teenage years, so I went to university in Glasgow when I was 17 and it was a real party, binge-drinking culture and I absolutely loved it. And I never drank on my own, I never drank at home, but I always drank when I was socializing. And quite often I would discover that I drank more than I wanted to on a night out, but I just thought that I had to try harder to control it, and I always just tried to laugh off getting up the next day and having slight gaps in my memory of what had happened and just trying to make it out that it was all a bit of a laugh and having a hangover was just normal part of life.

And that's how I carried on. And at that point, I was drinking cider and black currant, which now sounds pretty horrible, but I remember that the black currant made it taste not too bad and so then I moved on and when I was in my early 20s, I trained as a chartered accountant and I moved into London. And again, it was a real party culture. So I was living in a shared flat with some friends and I was working in an investment bank and it was a real work hard/play hard culture. So when I was out with my friends at the weekends, we went to see a lot of gigs, we were really into music, and it was a real party for that.

And then when I was out with work, we went to posh wine bars and it was seen as a real badge of honor to go into work the next day after having drink loads the night before but still pushed through with your hangover and still turn up for work. And I worked in a mainly male environment and I'm not very tall and I weigh eight stone so it didn't really take that much for me to get drunk. And again, the same pattern continued where I wouldn't be able to control how much I drank in a night out and I would just have these really crippling waves of anxiety the next day.

And it was worse when it was with work, I had this just feeling this horrible dread, "What have I said? What have I done? Have I made a fool of myself? Have I offended anyone?" Luckily this was in the days before mobiles, so there wasn't any pictures, but I used to avoid people and I had a horrible time afterwards. But again, I just carried on thinking, "Okay Sandra, you just have to have a bit more control," and it never, ever entered my mind to stop drinking. Its just like, more control and you'll get the hang of

this. And everyone around me was drinking a lot as well. I now realize I was probably drinking more than some people, but I certainly wasn't aware of that in my teens and 20s.

And then I guess when I got to my 30s, it was like my lifestyle changed, my drink of choice changed, but my alcohol consumption was still fairly constant. So by this point I had moved on from vodka and Red Bull and maybe a vodka espresso. And then I started drinking nice wine and I would go more to restaurants than to a bar. And I'd done things like wine appreciation course in London, I went wine tasting in America and in France. And I was like, "Oh I love wine." I would try and work out what wines pair with what foods.

And traveling was my real passion. I took a year off when I was in my 20s and I went backpacking around the world, which I absolutely loved. And I drank all the time there, but that was a holiday so that was different. And then when I was in my 30s, I was really fortunate to go to some amazing places on holiday. So I'd done a few charity cycle rides. I'd done one through Rajasthan in India. I remember going on a yoga retreat to Ibiza where you weren't supposed to drink, but every single holiday I drank. In India, I had a drink every night because it was the stress of being on the bike with the back roads. And with the yoga trip, it was like, "Well it's a long bank holiday, why wouldn't you have a drink?" I thought it was perfectly normal to sneak in two bottles of wine to a yoga retreat for one weekend, because it wouldn't have crossed my mind not to drink.

And I still think I was in this massive denial that I'd done all these things, but I still kept drinking. And if you looked at me from the outside, you probably wouldn't have said there was a problem. I never missed a day at work because I was drunk. I never really, if I drank on my own, it would be a glass of wine, it wouldn't be what I considered a problem. I wouldn't be someone that would be, if I had a bottle of wine open, I have to finish it. But at the same time, I started becoming aware I felt incredibly deprived if I tried to not drink at the weekend or if I was out for dinner with one of my friends. On holiday, I drank every single night. I always drank on a bank holiday. So, I was drinking quite a lot, but it seemed to be not a person that anybody, least of all me, thought was an alcoholic. So I was surrounded by everyone else that seemed to do similar.

So that carried on in my 30s. And then in my 40s, I went into this self-development journey. So I had a couple of health problems. I had a problem with a tension in one of my eyes and I had this real horrific anxiety that I had glaucoma and I really couldn't handle the anxiety and so I ended up, I found this fabulous life coach and she helped me overcome all my demons. And I know this sounds silly, but realize that all the stories I was telling myself weren't true. And so I felt like this was an amazing thing that nobody really knew about that you could control your thoughts. And I wouldn't say I was great at it, but I certainly could see the benefit.

And so then I'd done things like, I had a meditation teacher when no one I knew in London meditated. I ditched processed food, I eat really healthily. I was doing marathons. I was relating to yoga, but I just really turned a blind eye around alcohol and I was still having the same pattern with, every so often, there'd be a night out, I would drink way more than I ever intended and I actually don't think ever in my life I ever intended to get drunk. I always wanted to have a few drinks to have fun, and every single time I got drunk, it was because I had lost control. So it was quite shocking to think that went on for like 20 years.

And when I hit my 40s, I just thought, "I cannot bear this anxiety any longer and I've sorted out all these other things." I'd had a career coach. I had a life coach, I had the meditation teacher, and I was like, "There must be something I can do." And I would've been absolutely horrified to think of the idea of going to Alcoholics Anonymous. It just didn't even enter into my thought process. And I don't even like the word sober, I just think it sounds quite miserable. And when I read about moderating people, it was just to say, "Well, just cut down." I was like, "There's got to be a bit more support than that."

And then I came across you in a podcast that you'd done with Club Soda. And I just, when I had an image of AA, I thought about people that were really down in their luck and I thought about someone that's a home drinker, somebody sitting on a park bench with a brown paper bag with some kind of nasty, strong spirit and they've lost everything. And then when I seen you talking about controlling drinking and I thought, "Oh, this sounds amazing because this woman seems quite smart. She's a professional woman." And you didn't ever say you have to give up and then you also said about learning how to change and rewire your subconscious beliefs.

And I thought, "Oh, that sounds amazing." So I was really, really intrigued and I must have signed up to a mailing list and I can remember I was at the airport and I was going home to Scotland for the weekend. And I was sitting at this seafood and wine bar and I got this email came up and I was having a glass of wine because I would never, ever get on a plane without having a glass of wine first.

Annie Grace:

Me neither.

Sandra:

And I seen it and it said, it was your first ever intensive program and there was a part of me thinking, "Are you sure about this, Sandra?" I was thinking to myself, you've done some weird things in your time, but this is new territory. And I was thinking, "Wow, do I really need this?" And then I thought, "Well, this subconscious beliefs thing will be good." And so I remember signing up and then I can remember how amazing it was. And some of the things I think were quite funny where it started in, it must have started in May and I remember you saying like, "We're going to do two months and then we're going to go alcohol free." I remember thinking, "That's ridiculous, because that means I'll be alcohol free in July." And I remember saying, "There's no way I can do that because it's summer."

And then I remember about a month in on one of the Q&As and I said to you, I was absolutely dreading going alcohol free, and then I started getting excited. And so I'd done the 30 days and I hadn't told anyone I was working with you, because I just think I hadn't really processed it myself and I just said to people, "I'm just having a break," and halfway through the 30 days, Scott said to me, "Well, you should really extend it to 100 days." And to me, this was like, "I'm really getting into unknown territory here." So I didn't know anyone that had not drunk for that long. I had one friend who told me he hadn't drunk for three months, but he'd actually had some kind of illness and he was on medication. So he was like, "That doesn't count."

And so I was like, "100 days? What am I going to be like after 100 days?" So I was going through the 100 days and then Scott said, "Well, I think you should actually do a year." And I was always really, really adamant that I was never going to give up drinking. It was always going to moderate. And something happened about halfway through the year where I thought, "Oh, this is quite funny because I'm actually enjoying life more." I'd always thought if I get a year, then I'll be really strong and I'll work out, I'll have a nice glass of champagne on my birthday or I'll have this amazing glass of wine once a month. And I was like, I don't want to drink.

And I fought it for a while, a bit like the opposite of people that fight, when people that want to give up, there was a part of me that wanted to go back to drinking and I had to be honest with myself and say, "Sandra, you're happier now." And I just wanted to thank you so much for that, Annie. Because honestly, I'm guessing a lot of people come on this podcast and they say, "I can't believe it." I don't think anyone was more amazed than me that I actually have given up drinking, not for health reasons, because I'm happier without it. It's amazing.

Annie Grace:

I love that. That's so cool. I love too how you were almost resistant to the idea, which just shows that your story and your journey, I think, is such a good example of it just really being ultimately decided by you because at the end of the day, yeah, you could have gone back and you could have, at any point in time, and then you're just like, "You know what? Actually, what would be the point?" I was on a BBC interview earlier today, a BBC radio or podcast, and one of the questions was, "Well, why don't you just have the odd glass of wine or the odd cocktail? What's the big deal? Is it really that big of a deal?" And it was a panel so there was a few different answers. And the answers were really like, "I don't see the point anymore. It's not that I feel like I couldn't, I just don't know why I would." Right?

Sandra:

Yeah, absolutely. That's so funny because I met some friends about six weeks ago for the first time after lockdown. And one of my friends was like, "Have you heard Sandra's a coach and she doesn't drink?" And this friend of mine said, "Why don't you just have a drink occasionally?" And I said to her, "Honestly, if I occasionally wanted to have a drink, I wouldn't be able to coach people in an authentic way and tell them that I'm happier without drinking." I said, "The reason why I don't, even if I knew I could just have one, I don't want it." And I think that is something that's hard for people to get their head around because they tend to think that if you can just have one, well then you should. And the idea that actually even one might not be fun is revolutionary.

Annie Grace:

Yeah. And it's so interesting too, because a lot of people, of course people come in all the time and they're like, "Well, can I moderate?" And I said, "That is totally your decision. This is not about, around here at This Naked Mind, we don't make decisions based on your behavior. So never drinking again or getting sober or moderation or how many drinks you're going to have a week, we make decisions and goals based on how you want to feel." And so what I'm hearing from you is like, "Oh, I just want to feel happier and this actually is the path to feeling happier."

And at the end of the day, we humans, we do most everything we do to feel a certain way. So for me, my goal was that I wanted alcohol to be small and irrelevant. And if that meant I had an occasional drink, fine, but if that meant I didn't ever drink, that was also fine. And it was really interesting because by definition, in order to make alcohol small and irrelevant, I had to get to a point where moderation was, by definition is making lots and lots and lots of decisions, right? It's how much, when, what is too much, how do I make sure I don't have too much because I know that after two, all bets are off? Am I going to do it tonight or not tonight? What about this circumstance? And so there's all of these decisions and the human brain, we have decision-making fatigue, which means it is literally as hard to make a really big decision as it is to make a really small decision. And the more decisions we make, the more fatigued our brain gets and the worse our decision making power gets.

And so it just takes a lot of effort. So when people are like, "Can I moderate?" I was like, "You might choose to moderate or you might choose that that is just going to be too much effort." And I think that's one of the things that people don't understand is like, "Yeah, I feel like I could moderate alcohol." I also feel like that would be a life and a lifestyle that would just be so much effort for me. I don't see any point to even attempting it. And so I can't say definitively because I, frankly haven't attempted it because I wouldn't see the point knowing everything that we teach about alcohol.

Sandra:

Yeah, absolutely.

Annie Grace:

That's awesome. So, how has it been with friends and family?

Sandra:

So, most people I know still drink. I'd say that I feel that people don't realize what we've just said about even one drink is not fun. I think my parents are really proud of me. I think most people thought it was a bit weird, especially when I became a coach, but my dad in particular, he can see, he reads all my testimonials and he gets excited. So, socializing for me now, I enjoy it more. I find that amazing because I remember you explaining things like when you socialize and you're not drinking, you can be very intentional. And so whenever I had to go to work events, being able to be quite smart about who to chat to, how long to be there, and that amazing realization that you don't have to be there until the bitter end.

And then being out with friends, in the beginning I would think, "Right. Will I tell them my funny story about this?" And I realized when I was drinking, I would just be commanding the conversation without thinking about how I was showing up. And in the very beginning, one night I remember feeling a bit awkward for the first hour, but then I also remember about two hours in thinking, "I'm actually enjoying myself better than everyone else." And that felt really good. So yeah, I love the fact that you can be quite intentional about who you go out with, how long you go out for, and that I get to decide. Who knew that you didn't have to stay until the restaurant or the bar closed? You can actually get up and go because the best part of the night is over. So yeah, it has felt completely different, but I'd say I'm enjoying it more.

Annie Grace:

I love that. That's so true. And I feel the exact same way. It's amazing. And so, have you found things to replace alcohol? How do you unwind these days?

Sandra:

Yes. So I think that's one of the important things, right? Because for me, I wouldn't have been able to carry on being alcohol free if it had felt like deprivation. So after work, relaxing for me, giving myself the gift of doing nothing, which is just lying on the couch and listening to music, I find really enjoyable. I like a lot of non-alcoholic drinks. So, I feel like I can still connect to people and I can still socialize, but the good thing is I don't feel worse afterwards. So I'd say that I've just become a bit more particular about my social life. And I do feel like it's an upgrade because I don't tolerate something that I don't enjoy anymore.

Annie Grace:

I love that. I love that so much. And so Sandra, you have decided to take this and go all in and make this your career now. So, can you tell me about how that journey was for you and making that decision?

Sandra:

Yeah, sure. So I mean, again, I just think it's been amazing. So after I had done about a year, I remember going to Denver and one of the reasons I wanted to become a coach, one of the things that you've taught me, Annie, is to be brave. So when I went to Denver, I wasn't drinking, but I hadn't told anyone in work that I had done a course to give up alcohol and even when I was in Denver and you were taking pictures, I made sure I wasn't in the picture because I had this corporate life and I thought, "Nobody can know." And I just remember thinking, "There's something really sad about the fact that I feel amazing, but at the same time, I'm still stuck in this stigma where you don't talk about alcohol or you don't..." And when people say, "Why did you give up?" I've come up with this lame reason.

And so you then spoke about, you were launching The Path, which was a very original path. And I remember you turned around in Denver and it was at the end of the conference and you said, "Just so you know, the people that sign up, when I look for my first coaches, it will be in this group." And I was

like, "Right, I'm in." And I remember, and I just thought, "That is what I want to do. That's it." And I remember saying to you and Scott, "Look, I don't feel like I'm struggling with alcohol," because at that point I'd been about six months alcohol free, "but I love the idea of carrying on the self development and I wanted to become a coach." And you both said, "Look, it's not just going to be for people that are starting at day one trying to give up."

So I'd done that for a year and then I went back to Denver. All the time I was telling people in work that I had a group of friends in Denver, so I thought it was a bit strange that I kept going to Denver. And then I'd done the coaching qualification and I realized that if I wanted to do it properly, I had to be all in. So it didn't really work for me doing it and still having a corporate job. And so then I started thinking about, "How could I do this full time?" And I was incredibly fortunate because I know that COVID obviously caused a lot of problems for a lot of people, but for me, I was very fortunate in that the company I worked for had done a voluntary redundancy scheme last year and they asked me to stay until the end of the year but I was then able to do this full time.

And I think, it feels like doing it full time and being able to be honest about, "This is who I am and this is what I do," I'm telling the people that I work with, "By the way, I'm a coach and I teach women how to get control over alcohol." And they were like, no idea, but this is who I am now and I think the thing about you teaching me to be brave, I recognize in the other women that I work with that sense of shame. And when people ask about confidentiality and stuff, and I think, "Look, I get you because I was there." So I feel like by me kind of living this identity, I totally understand what that's like and I do my best to help people get over that.

Annie Grace:

I love that so much. And you're making such an impact, which is so great. So if people are interested, where can they find you? What's your website?

Sandra:

So I'll tell you how I got the name for my website. So the first year that I stopped drinking, my catchphrase was, "Just a tonic," because every time I went to this restaurant and I asked for a tonic, the barman always turned around and said, "Gin and tonic." And I would say, "Just the tonic." And then when it came to deciding a name for my business, I wanted it to be something that was a bit fun as well, because I'm doing this because I truly believe people can have more fun when they're alcohol free. So the name of my business is Just A Tonic and my website is justatoniccoaching. So that's where people can find me.

Annie Grace:

I love that so much. And we'll put that in the show links too. That's awesome. So Sandra, let's finish up with the question that I always ask at the end of these, which is, if you could go back in time to talk to Sandra of yore and tell her about what life is like now, what would you say?

Sandra:

So, if I went back to my younger self that was struggling with alcohol, I would want to tell her that she is amazing as she is just her, herself without needing any alcohol. And I would tell her that when she gets to her 40s, unlike what she might have expected, that life becomes more predictable, it's actually going to blow her mind. So she's going to discover that life is actually way more fun without alcohol, and also just discovering what she's like as a person alcohol free is going to be really fun. It's going to be exciting.

Sandra:

And all the challenges my younger self had, all those mornings when I woke up and I felt so low about myself and so sad and so worried about what had happened, to know that I can then use that to resonate with other people and that actually becomes a bit of a power, because I can help other people and I can then build this career. I was a chartered accountant and now I'm working with people and they're telling me that I make a difference in their life. So to discover something like that in my 40s is amazing. Yeah. So I would tell her to hold out for being a bit older, because it's all going to get a lot better.

Annie Grace:

I love that so much. There's a song that actually we had played at our wedding, a friend of mine who's a brilliant singer, she's sang it live for us. And the chorus is, "Grow old along with me because the best is yet to be." And I've always loved that sentiment of the best is yet to be. It's just so hopeful and I think it becomes so true when you make this change when it is such a positive change. It's just great.

Sandra:

Yeah. And I want to thank you so much Annie, because you really are a trailblazer. You definitely changed my life, not just for me, but for other people as well. And I think you were really different in that you made it acceptable to talk about alcohol and you had a successful career, you were smart, and a whole bunch of people that would never have identified with any other form of wanting to control drinking, you managed to reach out to them. And I mean I absolutely love what I do now and during COVID and seeing how people were struggling with alcohol, I just always felt this massive wave of gratitude that I discovered you and I discovered This Naked Mind. It's been amazing. Thank you so much.

Annie Grace:

Oh, you're so welcome. And thank you so much for being here. It's just so much fun and so great to talk to you and hear more of your story.

Sandra:

Thanks very much, Annie.

Annie Grace:

Hi, it's Annie Grace. I wanted to interrupt this podcast, I guess the end of this podcast to say that if you're totally serious about actually and truly and forevermore transforming your relationship with alcohol, really leaving it behind in the rear view mirror for once and forever and changing your psychology about it, we have a program called The Path that I've created specifically for you.

Now, it's not for you if you're still dabbling or trying to figure out where you want to be, or maybe even if you still want to moderate. All those things are fine, that's great, but if you're beyond that and you're like, "No, I just want to be done with this. I'm ready to invest some time and I'm ready to just make this happen. I want the answer. I want the easy way out," then I want you to check out nakedmindpath.com and join us in The Path where you receive coach-guided and community support so that you can truly make this lasting change that you want in your life.

And as always, rate, review, and subscribe to this podcast as it truly helps the message reach somebody who might need to hear it today.