

## I am so proud of my wife quitting alcohol. The blackouts, vomiting and drunken injuries were the final straw

I've seen how alcohol destroys families, so I knew my sons couldn't go through the same ordeal



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'Drink problems sneak up quietly, taking their insidious grip before we realise how hard it is to shake off,' says Paddy, pictured with his wife Leanne Credit: Charles McQuillan

**Paddy Rice**

04 February 2025 5:00am GMT

It's 6.30 on a Saturday evening when the doorbell rings. There, on the step outside our home in County Down, I'm confronted with my wife's colleague, a man and a woman I've never met and swaying unsteadily, held up between them and looking the worse for wear, is my 38-year-old wife, Leanne.

The colleague explains she also works at the secondary school where Leanne teaches English. "I'm sorry, we overdid it a bit at lunch and, well, Leanne's not feeling so good..." she apologises. The man appears to be her husband. Both seem mortified, while Leanne looks out of it. I quickly thank them for bringing her home safely then hastily shut the door.

A few hours earlier, Leanne had left the house a sharp-looking blonde in leather jeans and high heels as she headed out for lunch in Belfast with work friends. Now her mascara is smudged, her hair wild. I need to get her up to bed – quickly – before our boys see their Mummy. Cartoons are blaring from the living room, so I just pop to check they're in there. Then, just as I'm returning to look after Leanne, she stumbles on her heels and there's an almighty crash: my beautiful wife of 10 years has face-planted in the hallway. It's like watching a classic comedy slapstick move. She's too drunk to protect her face [from the fall](#), but no one is laughing.

There wasn't blood, so I didn't then realise her nose was actually broken. All I could do was guide her into bed, making sure – as I was now used to – there was water and paracetamol on the bedside table, and a sick bucket below. ([Red wine](#) vomit had ruined a mattress in the past.)

By the time I put the kids to bed Leanne had passed out, but I was so stressed and anxious. I knew this cannot carry on. For two days I could barely speak to her, because I was so angry and upset.



Heavy drinking didn't feel like an issue in the early days of our relationship, says Paddy

I'd seen – all around me really – how alcohol can destroy families, and how the children of [alcoholics](#) grow up worrying for a parent's health or fearing their moods. I did not want this for my boys.

Drink problems sneak up quietly, taking their insidious grip before we realise how hard it is to shake off.

Leanne and I always enjoyed a drink. Like most couples, we drank to celebrate, we drank to commiserate, it's part of every milestone in life – from wetting a baby's head, to christenings, birthdays, weddings and wakes. From Friday nights to Sunday pub lunches, but in the north of Ireland heavy drinking is the norm. And in the early days of our relationship it didn't feel like an issue, really.

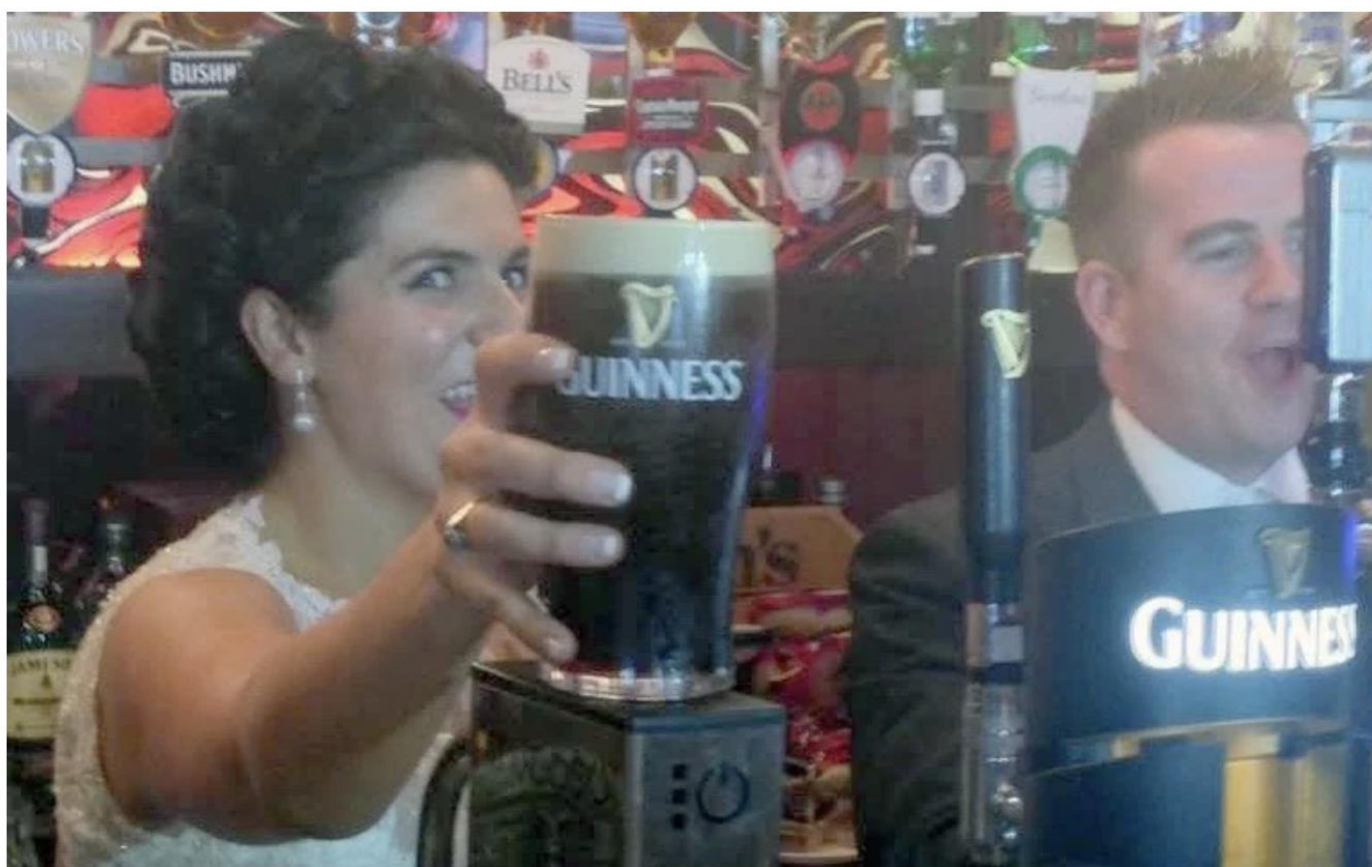


Paddy proposed to Leanne 18 months into their relationship and married soon after

It was back in March 2012, with us both in our late 20s, when Leanne and I shared our first date. I was so nervous in that restaurant but Leanne, a lovely looking teacher, was so down-to-earth and immediately put me at ease. I remember beaming when she called me a “gentleman”. Dates always revolved around pubs, dinners with drinks or cinema dates followed by drinks. But isn’t that the same for many young couples?

Within 18 months I knew Leanne was “The One” and I’d asked her dad for his permission to propose – I’m quite old-fashioned like that. Sadly her father died the next month from [terminal cancer](#), so he couldn’t walk her down the aisle at our wedding in July 2014.

Happily we were blessed with baby Ollie (now nine) the next year, and his little brother Luca (now six) three years after that. As a teacher, and the oldest of three girls, the youngest of whom has special needs, Leanne is naturally caring and maternal and is a wonderful mother.



Leanne pouring a pint of Guinness on their wedding day

It’s hard to pinpoint when alcohol became the problem. Obviously Leanne didn’t drink during her pregnancies, nor ever at work while teaching, but my fun-loving wife was often the last woman standing (or not standing) in the pub. It only worried me when, after both of us shared some Friday night drinks, she would stay up later drinking alone, sometimes drinking an extra bottle of prosecco.

Leanne always had a lot on her plate: her mum had only died a couple of years earlier than her dad, and sharing caring duties of her sister with Down's Syndrome was a strain. Plus as wonderful as our boys are, raising kids is hard work on top of a job. The clichéd “wine o'clock,” after all, is a message promoted by (understandably) knackered mums, and I worked long hours, often away from home.

I didn't like raising my concerns, fearing being “judge-y”. During the week, she'd only have the odd glass of wine to wind down after work. But the weekend [binges grew out of control](#) – spirits, wine, and shots, too. Then came arguments – booze tends to lead to them. Even when we were out together in Dublin for a special occasion.

Mostly she'd wake up hungover and full of remorse, apologising and ashamed. We'd smooth it out and she'd promise to stop. Or cut back. Sometimes she did for several weeks.

I'm a regular gym goer, and every year I don't drink for a couple of months to reset my health and Leanne would join in those dry weeks, too. But when I finished training I'd reach for a beer, not realising at the time how silly that was of me, as it encouraged her to follow suit. I suppose neither of us wanted to admit it was a problem .

“I'm so [stressed](#), Paddy,” she'd justify, pouring a large red wine after a day at school. Teaching a class of teenagers all about *Of Mice and Men* would surely test the best of us, I reasoned.

A month after Leanne broke her nose following that Belfast lunch, we'd been out with her middle sister and her husband for dinner. We did this every six weeks, but it had got to the stage where each time, Leanne would drink to black out those nights (after picking arguments with us first).

After one particular dinner, once Leanne was helped yet again to bed, her sister had waited to speak to me alone. “You’ve got to do something, Paddy, for God’s sake,” she said. “This has to stop – for the kids’ sake, if nothing else.” I knew she was right, and I swore I would talk to her. But once alone at the kitchen table that night I cried my eyes out.



Paddy has also reduced his drinking, and says their new routine has significantly improved his and Leanne’s relationship

The next morning, with the boys out of earshot, I took a deep breath and as kindly as I could issued an ultimatum: “Something needs to change, Leanne. We can’t carry on like this. I can’t carry on like this, and if you can’t stop drinking I’ll have to leave and take the boys with me.”

Harsh words. Whether I’d actually have walked out on her I’ll never know. It felt brutal, our marriage was everything to me. But something had to change, and threatening to take the children was the hardest blow I could think of.

Leanne immediately burst into tears and promised she'd stop. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, please forgive me" she cried and cried as I scooped her into a cuddle and cried too.

"It's OK, I'm here," I muttered into her heaving shoulder. "We can do this." Leanne swore she'd get help, she'd do whatever it took to take back control of her life. And she did.

That was in March 2022 and she's not touched a drop since.

She joined up with Just The Tonic coaching, which gently guides people in small groups online in a safe, non-judgemental environment. Leanne had tried to moderate her drinking before but always lapsed after a bad day. Somehow, this time it worked.

I've significantly reduced my own drinking too, and at home I've switched to [alcohol-free beer](#).



'I'm sure [the kids] notice now how much more energetic Mummy is, more patient and present with them without a glass in her hand' Credit: Charles McQuillan

Leanne was always a great mum, and amazingly we hid any episodes from the children, but I'm sure they notice now how much more energetic Mummy is, more patient and present with them without a glass in her hand. She doesn't wake up with hangovers or self-loathing, and there are far fewer rows.



We put our phones down at home now to talk more, don't have the heated arguments over nonsense and have a calmer, happier marriage, with both of us more present and in touch with how the other one is feeling. With her not staying up late drinking we go to bed at the same time which is so much better for our relationship, and wake up with clear heads.

And we do more things together as a family. With the money we're saving from not drinking we're taking the children on holiday to America this summer.

Giving up alcohol doesn't make every problem in life simply disappear, but it certainly helps to cope better. She's also seeing a counsellor to help cope mentally with all of life's stresses, far more effectively than drinking ever was.

Leanne has realised she's just as much fun without a drink in her hand, and at my 40th birthday party a couple of years ago she was still the last woman standing – but a sober one. I'm so incredibly proud of her, and for her 40th last year I threw a surprise party in our new house stocked with all Leanne's favourite drinks – the [0% Tanqueray gin](#) (which tastes the same as the real thing) and Lidl's Burg Schöneck non-alcoholic sparkling wine, which she has instead of prosecco. We all had a blast – and best of all, could remember everything the next day.

*As told to Susanna Galton*