

## Becoming an Enthusiastic Social Drinker

I enjoy a good alcoholic beverage every now and then. Ok, maybe more like every now and now.

Not in a bad “I’ve fallen and I can’t reach my beer” sort of way, but often enough that I feel I should be exercising a little more restraint. Especially after I read a magazine article the other day that defined a casual drinker as averaging one drink per day, seven per week.

By that measure, I have a problem. Evidently two fingers of whiskey after work and a glass of wine with dinner places me among the refrigerator-box-dwelling underbelly of society.

I prefer to think of myself as an enthusiastic social drinker. More than that, an ethanol connoisseur; after devoting 30 years to becoming an oenophile (wine snob), I feared I may be missing out on superior attitude-adjusting delivery systems, so I decided to become a whiskey snob as well. I’m sure there’s a \$10 word for whiskey snobs, but I couldn’t find it.

I began sampling different whiskies last year to try to gain an appreciation for them, but it’s a slow learning process. Years ago, best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell popularized the idea that 10,000 hours of appropriately guided practice was “the magic number of greatness” to become an expert at anything, regardless of a person’s natural aptitude. I am prepared to make that sacrifice.

A side benefit of being a whiskey snob is being able to lord it over people who are not. A couple of months ago, LuAnn and I ran into a friend of ours at John’s Grocery who was clutching a bottle of cheap whiskey. After grilling him for ten minutes about his whiskey experience and preferences, we guided him to a rather pricey Redbreast 12-Year Irish whiskey – one of the best sipping whiskeys around.

He thanked us and then asked where the Diet Coke was. LuAnn and I looked at each other and I fearfully asked, “You’re not using this as a mixer, are you?” He

admitted he was, so we took the Redbreast from his hand, replaced it with the swill he started out with and sent him on his way.

Early in my educational phase all whiskies tasted the same to me, kind of like Listerine gone bad. But after a while I became able to differentiate. Even so, I never quite got the hang of the Islay Scotches, which are usually described as being “peaty” or “smoky.” To me they still taste like paint thinner sipped out of a used ash tray.

Eventually I decided the Irish whiskies were for me – they are lighter and fruitier. Maybe I like them too much – I have started adding a tablespoon to my morning coffee because I like the flavor. I suppose I’ll be OK as long as I keep an eye on the proportions and make sure coffee remains the primary component.

The saying goes “You can’t say you’ve been drinking all day unless you start in the morning,” so there you are – I’m on my way. So far, my lunches remain alcohol-free, but I have some ideas...

*Please resist the urge to inform Writer’s Group Member Dave Parsons about the evils of drunk driving, underage drinking, alcoholism or light beer. These are all very bad things. There is much more that is bad about drinking than good - he knows that. Lie down until the feeling passes.*