

# 101 days OF DETOX

When giving up booze is a big, fat reality check

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**H**ere's the thing no one tells you about enlightenment: with it comes the realization you were living like an asshole all your life.

## THE BEGINNING

I once read an article about a French model named Louise Delage. Her Instagram account showed off her

impossibly perfect life — an afternoon at the beach, a visit to a Parisian cookie shop, reading a book in her unkempt bed. She gazed into the camera earnestly, making you believe she was genuinely showing you a glimpse into her uncurated life.

But if one looked hard enough, there was one thing all these photographs had in common. Every single one of

**Above:** In a previous life, networking and booze went hand in hand.

them had alcohol in it. Whether it was a ghostly glass of wine next to her books, a sun-drenched cocktail waiting by the pool, or that sneaky bottle of wine poking out from her purse, the photos showed that Louise's life was never without drink. This was how I saw my inebriated lifestyle — lofty, easygoing, harmless. Maybe even a little sexy.

As with any illusion or gimmick,

Ms Delage, who loved to drink wine while nibbling on a chicken wing, was a big fat phony. As a matter of fact, she was hired by a French agency to dupe her 50,000+ followers for their Like My Addiction campaign, which told youngsters how alcoholism sucks and can be so easily missed. While Ms Delage's issues with the hooch appeared more fun than detrimental in my opinion, she had beauty and youth on her side. But how does it work when you're a thirtysomething New Yorker who loves a good shot of moonshine every now and then?

My twenties were filled with booze. At the time, I was working in public relations. Networking and drinking go hand in hand. And, yes, I've made lots alcohol-induced mistakes ... like cheating on a boyfriend, then cheating on them both. There was that one time I bought a magnum bottle of Dom Perignon and drank it by myself on the floor because I was sad. But who hasn't? If you're going to cry, you need some Dom. And as long as you got home safe, that's all the matters. Even while blacked out, I was still in control as far as I was concerned.

While drunkenly weeping in a prom dress then passing out can be considered young, reckless, even cute in your twenties, do the same when you hit your thirties, forties, and fifties, and it becomes melancholy, distressing, pathetic. Over the years, for me, it became a short road from lighthearted drunk to sad drunk. And somewhere in between, drinking became a quiet, lonely endeavor.

Two weeks into my 101 days of no booze challenge, I was on a psychiatrist's chair telling him about my "low-grade constant hum of depression."

"Are you an alcoholic?" my shrink asked me.

"I don't know."

He asked again. "Are you an alcoholic?"

"Maybe."

"Claudia Chung, are you an alcoholic?"

"OK."

And that was that. What I had labeled as a complicated and dysfunctional relationship with alcohol had a name. It's called alcoholism — binge drinking to be exact. And I officially had it according to a top-notch psychiatrist. It felt misty, unclear, and cunning, like that ghost boy behind the curtains in the 1980s movie

*Three Men And A Baby*. Is it real or a trick? An urban myth maybe. My shrink's first order of business was sticking me in group therapy.

## THE MIDDLE

My weekly SAD (Sex, Alcohol, and Drug) meetings were held on Wednesday nights at our shared psychiatrist's office. It was a mix-match group (mostly men) thrown together by our tendency to self-destruct: alcoholic teachers, Silicon Valley bigwigs, and even a legit scientist. Then there was a sex and nicotine-addicted surgeon, an unemployed cross-dressing, bi-polar, homosexual man who later turned out to be a multimillionaire, and me.

The only other women were Lucy and Josie. Lucy was a comely woman but time and overt plastic surgeries had gotten the best of her. A recovering alcoholic, battling a

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very current painkiller addiction with sex addict tendencies, Lucy started off her sentences with, "I could be wrong but ..." Later, as we walked back home together, I learned she'd been a personal shopper at a luxury store for more than two decades. One day they just let her go without an explanation, taking away the only professional identity she knew. She never recovered.

And Josie lived and worked in New Jersey. She often came to meetings with stories about her work colleagues who'd just got out of prison. Working in the packaging and shipping industry, Josie worked the overnight shift assembling boxes. It's a surprisingly dangerous profession: should she accidentally hit a colleague with a box, a fight could break

out or her tires could be slashed. Neither Lucy nor Josie could understand why I was there. I didn't belong. And they said so loudly and frequently. Perhaps I wasn't craving, longing, or crying enough. Maybe they were right.

Well into my 101 days, I began to see myself through stark and uncompromising eyes. That's what happens when you don't have that hazy glow of booze. No longer do you see yourself as this awesome human being that loves, creates, and nurtures. But you catch yourself being annoying, ungracious, and a big-time jackass. It thoroughly sucks to find out you're not that great of a person.

The worst time not being able to drink was after work, on the subway ride home. My longing for that first swig of red wine will go unsatisfied. Perhaps I was more addicted to the anticipation — the taste of hope.

Once I spotted a man eating a burger on the subway during rush hour. The whole cart smelled like a cocktail of urine, sweat, and a McDonalds in Newark. I imagined punching him in the face and all the passengers applauding. I'd be a hero.

Then a few weeks later, the blonde woman sitting across from me started licking her fingers and tried to eat her pad thai with chopsticks. I just stared at her with utter disdain while hostilely perplexed how and when she decided this was a good idea.

For all I knew, these people had just come from the hospital where their only kid received his or her first chemotherapy and they hadn't eaten for days. But I didn't care. I hated them.

I think my heart is hallowed and black.

## THE END

I had a fantasy that, by end of this detox, I would be a waifish elf, a Korean Wynona Ryder. But I was dead wrong. I am actually up a pound and eight ounces, more irritable than ever, and my teeth have taken a yellowish hue from all the coffee I've been drinking. I might also be an alcoholic. I'm still trying to figure this one out.

More than anything else, in the past 101 days, I saw pain — the human pain in others and myself, desperate to fix it, hide from it, or straight up ignore it.

**If you need advice or help, call 311 or see [www.oasas.ny.gov](http://www.oasas.ny.gov)**