

# When “Sober” is Wicked Good

By Ben Jacques

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The word “sober” has gotten a bad reputation. It’s no-fun sober. It’s designated-driver sober, something obligatory, a sacrifice of one’s pleasure for the safety of others who are out to have a good time. We talk about the sober truth, as if it’s something that hurts. Kind of like a poke in the eye.

One morning a habitual marijuana smoker woke up and walked into his back yard. The sky was blue. Clear. Brilliant. The chickadees were chirping, and a mockingbird flashed its wings as it careened across the yard. His cat rubbed against his leg. All of the sudden, he felt high. High on the cool clarity of a new day without the familiar cloudiness of cannabis. High on sobriety. He liked it. He wanted to stay that way.

One day a recovering alcoholic met an old friend she hadn’t seen in years. They had dinner at a nice restaurant and talked and laughed like schoolgirls. They shared both the happy and sad developments in their lives, and promised to meet again soon. One had ice tea, and the other water and lime.

When I stopped taking drugs, a friend told me, it was like I moved to Colorado. Everything was fresh and new. With the support of others in my program, I was able to stay sober.

Neil Duggan, who with his son, Michael, run the Wicked Sober referral and coordinating program in Boston, says that for the first two or three years of recovery, sobriety is really tough. Then something happens. Sobriety becomes something beautiful. “That’s why we say, at first, ‘living sober,’” Duggan says. “Then, we say, ‘sober living,’—really living!”

I still remember a party I attended for adult children of addicts and alcoholics. We all brought something to eat or drink, and it was one of the most beautiful evenings of my life. We had all grown up in families where alcohol or drugs draped pain and abuse in silence and denial. No alcohol was served. We didn’t need it. We didn’t want it.

Let me ask you something? You may not be alcoholic or addicted. But are you able to have a good time without drugs or alcohol? Can you get through a day without a drink, or two, or four? Can you model for your children a lifestyle that doesn’t need alcohol or drugs to be happy, or to ease your pain, or to deal with conflict?

The folks in the Stoneham Substance Abuse Coalition would like to give sobriety a good name. They want to share the concept and the reality that sober is beautiful. It isn't easy, as any recovering pain-killer or heroin addict, or alcoholic, will tell you. And it usually takes a village of compassionate friends, family and professionals to achieve it. But when it comes, it's a wonderful thing.

Wicked sober. Wicked good.

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