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INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is poison. It's poison for your body, it's poison for your mind, and worst of all, it's poison for your potential. Has it been fun? Of course. Has it been worth it? There have been good times, no doubt. But until you stop and see what life really could be like, you can't legitimately say 'yes.' And you can't legitimately say 'yes' unless you've wholeheartedly given it your all.

If you're stuck in a loop of trying and failing to stop drinking, it's hard to see that life can be anything other than it is. Alcohol steals the joy of life: music sounds flat, colours look dull, and humour seems tedious. But none of these things are true. They are as rich and wonderful as they have always been; you've just damaged your ability to feel so. You've wandered so far from pastures green that you've forgotten what they look like.

The only thing that seems worth it is drinking because, with joy gone, it turns down the volume on pain—a feeling that somehow survives the deadening of all the others. If you're reading this, then you've probably reached the stage where it's not even doing

that. But as bad as things may seem, the green shoots of recovery have taken hold. Something inside you just can't accept that this is it. It just can't be this way.

This book is about the way back.

ABOUT ME

As I approached forty, my life was a total mess. The long-running problems I had with alcohol were exploding in my face; continuing was no longer an option. I'd known that something wasn't right in my late twenties, although, in hindsight, it was obvious from the beginning. The first time I drank was at my school Christmas party; it was the mid-nineties, and I was fifteen years old. The party started with a bang but ended with my throwing up all over the school Christmas tree. The details escape me today, but somehow, there were no consequences. And without consequences, the behaviour continued. It wasn't until years later that the significance of this event, in context, made much more sense.

In my thirties, I began to realise that I had a serious problem. It was at this point that my intentions to cut down or drink only at weekends just did not materialise. Not only did they not materialise, but I drank more—more drinks, more often, with higher alcohol content. And as the decade rolled on, the problem got worse.

My attempts to sort it out became more determined and would be accompanied by varying periods of sobriety. After the initial hump, things get better quickly when you stop drinking: you

feel better, look better, and your world improves. The problem is, when this happens, you delude yourself into thinking that you can go back and have both. You can't.

And thus began the iterative process of recovery and relapse. I've lost count of how often I did this, but it's a lot. But because it's a lot, I've experienced it a lot. And because I've experienced it a lot, I know it well: I know how hopeless it can feel, I know how hard it is, I know what to expect, and I know how to make it easier. This is what I want to share with you.

Eventually, I achieved escape velocity. So much so that when the events of 2020 rolled around, the thought of alcohol didn't even cross my mind despite very challenging circumstances. All I want to do now is help others do the same. I hope that by sharing my experience of that long, drawn-out process, I can offer you a shortcut to a better place.

Upfront, I should make clear that I have no qualifications in addiction counselling or anything similar. This book should not be seen as a replacement for traditional addiction treatments. I tried them all, and you should, too. They are helpful, but these alone did not get me over the line. It was, in the end, a problem solved only when I took full ownership: I sought, read, watched, and listened to as much as I possibly could about the problem.

I used myself as a guinea pig. I threw everything at it to see what stuck. I witnessed and analysed the pitfalls to see where and why I failed. I treated it as an engineering problem where I could. I accepted the faith the crossover into the spiritual, which makes no sense to the logical.

What I learnt was that a life of sobriety was always possible for me; it was just a matter of arranging the pieces and moving parts into a configuration that allowed for it. In this book, I've aggregated, structured, and packaged the concepts, practices, and motivations that I discovered along the way. They worked for me. I hope they work for you, too.