

Annie Grace: This is Annie grace, and you are listening to This Naked Mind Podcast, where without judgment, pain or rules, we explore the role of alcohol in our lives and culture.

Hi, and welcome to This Naked Mind Podcast. Today I'm really excited, because I am here with Sasha Tozzi. Sasha and I sort of met through mutual friends and it's just awesome. But Sasha, thank you so much for coming on and joining me.

Sasha Tozzi: Hey Annie. Thank you so much for having me. It's great to be here.

Annie Grace: That's awesome. So what I'd like to do is just kind of start really with your story. So as far back as you want to go, I'd love to hear it.

Sasha Tozzi: Sure, my story. So how long do you want my story to be?

Annie Grace: I don't know. 15 minutes or something? I want the details.

Sasha Tozzi: Okay. Cool. So, yeah. Let's see. So I'm 32 now and it came to my attention that I had a problem, I had problematic drinking habits and behaviors from the first time I ever drank at like 15. And when I was 20 years old my family sort of staged an informal intervention on me for really my cocaine use, but the alcohol was in the mix of course, and every time I drank I wanted to use drugs. So it was both of them. A bunch of people were trying to ... would confront me about, like, "You have a problem. You need to get a hold of this." And I was 20 years old. and I just thought to myself, "I'm too young to have a problem. This is what kids my age are doing. This is what people in college do, they binge drink." Because I was a binger. I was a partier and a binger and I could go days without doing anything.

So I just didn't ... it wasn't in my definition of what an alcoholic, well, if you even use the term "alcoholic", what an alcoholic looks like. And so I wasn't convinced that I had an issue. I was convinced that I could control it. I grew up in a Catholic Italian family and it was all about ... my dad was very strict and very "where there's a will there's a way". And so I thought that I just had to try harder to control it. I thought that I was the problem and that I just had to figure out a way to control my intake. But every time I tried I failed. So I just felt like a failure.

Then, a couple more years of that, a couple more years of getting blackout drunk, doing tons of things that I don't remember, and that I would experience so much shame from the next day. I just got to a point where I had just turned 26 years old and I was seeing a therapist and I was in school. I was finishing my undergrad, so I went back to school. I had taken a long break. I was working in the restaurant industry, which, by the way, just breeds drug addiction.

I had gone back to school to finish my psychology degree and I was seeing a therapist. The therapist, in our session, was just like ... she handed me an AA

pamphlet and I really liked this particular therapist. I felt like I was vulnerable with her. I felt like I could let my guard down, I wasn't being judged. She wasn't super, "You have to do this." Or like, "You have a problem and you need to get help." She was very gentle. That's just the approach that worked for me. I was able to really hear what she was saying. And she didn't say much. She just kind of handed me the pamphlet and I decided to check out a meeting.

So that was my introduction to sobriety, was through AA. AA doesn't work for everybody, it's not everybody's cup of tea. I didn't really like it in the beginning. But I grew to respect the foundations and the fundamentals that I learned in AA, and I really adopted the idea of, like, "Take what you want and leave the rest." So I just saw it as another tool in a box of tools, not really the end all be all, but just like, "Oh, I can go to this place that has a lot of people that are sharing authentically from their hearts and just see myself in their stories and just connect." That's what I really loved about it. Even though I didn't like going and I was super socially anxious, I liked hearing, I liked listening to people's stories, like how people do now on podcasts. You know, just listening to people's stories and hearing bits of your own in there and really getting to feel understood.

So that's how it started. That's how my sobriety journey started. I got really into yoga at the same time and I got serious about my practice. So just on another level of healing, that was integral for my physical healing, like my body healing and-

Annie Grace: You said you were 15 when you took your first drink, basically?

Sasha Tozzi: Yeah.

Annie Grace: And so when you were 15, I mean, was there anything major going on, or was it just completely social? Was it that you loved it from the beginning? I'm just kind of curious about how...

Sasha Tozzi: Oh sure. I guess I ... Yeah, I didn't spend too long there. So when I was 15 I ... Well, I remember the first time I drank it was at a party. I was at a party with upperclassmen. So I was an incoming freshman in high school and I was on cross country and I was invited to this party with older people. I had three older siblings, so I was exposed already to their partying and to just kind of having a shew in to the cool crowd. So I went to this party and I was naturally just painfully shy and did not really know how to talk and converse, especially to guys. So for me it was a way to just ... it was a cure for my social anxiety in the moment. And that's what it did. When I found it and when I realized I could be confident and talkative and not afraid when I drank, I was like, "Wow, this is the cure. This is the magic." I thought I had found the answer. You know?

I didn't realize that it was within me and I could have cultivated that. I really just thought it was in the drink. But I will say, like, at that time I was very ... I was a great student, conscientious, really hardworking, attentive. But I was super

sensitive. I was very insecure. I was very self-conscious. I had already been struggling with clinical depression and clinical anxiety, actually. My parents had sent me to the doctor. And so I was an easy target to start abusing alcohol. You know?

Annie Grace: Yeah. I had always ... So according to some studies that I'd read, basically, there was a differentiator, and this is one doctor's sort of opinion, but there was a differentiator between people who have their first drinks and who are really not experiencing emotional pain, and social anxiety is very painful. I mean, it's incredibly painful. You feel exposed and vulnerable and uneasy, uncomfortable in your own skin and you feel like there's something wrong with you because everybody else is perfectly, seemingly, fine in these social situations.

So people on one hand who have not experienced this emotional pain and they have their first drink, there isn't that instantaneous, like, "Where has this been all my life? This is the thing." Right? Yeah, they get tipsy, but often that tipsiness isn't even that pleasant for them. Whereas on the other hand, somebody who has their first drink and is in deep pain, whether it's depression or social anxiety or just anxiety in general, it has a completely different effect. And so this one theory is basically that addiction breeds much, much faster as soon as we start to use it, even unknowingly, to self-medicate. And it sounds like that was very true in your experience.

Sasha Tozzi: Oh, that was absolutely the case. It was a short-term cure. Like, in the moment, it worked. But long-term, it actually created more depression, more anxiety, which you know. But I think using it as a form of self-medication is very prevalent.

Annie Grace: Yeah. Yeah. That's really where it is. Then, you said when you were 20 your parents kind of took you aside about drugs and alcohol. What was that sort of-

Sasha Tozzi: What was that like? Sorry. What was that last part?

Annie Grace: Yeah, was it really ... I mean, I'm just trying to imagine. Did you feel ... were you really rebelling at that time so you didn't really care, or you'd found kind of another identity?

Sasha Tozzi: So I guess how it went down was I was working at a restaurant and my employer called my sister to let her know that I was really ... I was using cocaine like all the time and that she was worried about me and worried about ... I was really, really reckless. One night I just climbed the side of someone's house down from the second floor, the balcony, trying to get in someone's window to get more drugs, and I fell and I landed on my back. I came to, and I don't know how long I had been there for. I mean, I could have died probably, for sure.

So these stories would get around about all the ways that I was endangering myself, and driving drunk all the time, but never getting a DUI. My employer

called my sister, my sister called my mom. They sort of got me to come over to the house, and I had no idea what was going on because I was in my own world. Like, I was in my own ... I was in a haze. I was getting to work, but I waited tables, so I would get to work at like 3:00 p.m.. So I would party all night and stay up all night and then by like 9:00 a.m. I would try to sleep for a few hours.

And I was so out of it and strung out that when I got to my mom's house and they were all kind of standing there, and my mom took me in the bedroom and it was just her. And I thought she was going to tell me that, like, my grandmother passed away. I really was absolutely clueless. I thought I was fooling everybody. So I thought I was kind of keeping it under wraps and I wasn't at all. And she was just like, "It's you." I said, "What's happening? Is it Nana?" And she's like, "No, it's you. It's you. You're not okay." And I was like, "What are you talking about?" Just in denial.

I was in such denial. I mean, I didn't even get sober then. I waited another six years. It was still a pivotal moment, like, looking back, it planted a seed. I had tried to get sober then and I just ... it just didn't take. But it was kind of like a stepping stone. Right?

Annie Grace: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Yeah, that's cool. I mean, it's amazing how we do that, how things can kind of be falling apart around us and we're still just thinking deep down, like we're not fooling ourselves, but it takes ... It's almost like there's two minds inside the same head, the one that-

Sasha Tozzi: Yeah, totally. Totally. Totally.

Annie Grace: So then 26 is when you finally were like, "Okay. I'm going to give this a try." And it stuck? Is that true?

Sasha Tozzi: Yeah. It stuck, and I wasn't necessarily planning on it long-term. I just was like ... I've said this before, but I just wanted to get out of my pain and out of the shame. A lot of times the things that I would do drunk or high, for that matter, would leave me in such shame and pain that I would become suicidal. And I was already battling depression anyway, so it was just a compounding effect.

So when I finally, at 26, I was just like, "Okay, if I don't try this, then I don't see myself making it to 30." That's the attitude I had going in. But I was just like, "I'm just going to try this and see how it goes." I told all my drinking friends that I was doing a detox, because sometimes I would do that. I was into exercise and health and wellness. So I would go on these binges where for a couple of months I would be a health freak and I wouldn't drink and I would exercise, I would eat healthy. So I was just kind of portraying it to people like it was another one of those. But then as time went on, more truth was revealed to me that this really had to be a long-term decision. It was the best thing for me.

I got a lot of pushback from my family, actually. Like, interestingly enough, they ... people don't understand. There's a lot of myths and a lot of lack of awareness around what addiction really is, what it looks like. Some of them said to me, like, "Are you really sure you need to quit drinking? Isn't that a little premature? Do you really want to ... " and since I was using AA at the time, and part of AA is kind of owning the label in a way, as a form of not letting it own you. So they were like, "You really want to label yourself an alcoholic? That's kind of serious. That's kind of intense. I don't think it was that bad." And I was just like, "What the hell? First of all, you guys had an intervention on me and now you're telling me that I can just get over it or something."

Annie Grace: Right. That's crazy.

Sasha Tozzi: But, yeah. So as time went on, so obviously it's been ... I'll have seven years in September. It's changed shapes so much. It's just really evolved. And every day that I stay sober and kind of ... it's not just about being sober, it's about kind of being in my life, being present to my life. So being sober enables me to do that. So I get to learn and grow so much and have things today that I never would have had if I didn't first decide to just let go of that way of life.

Annie Grace: That's so awesome. You said something about just being painfully shy. And so how have you dealt with that without the crutch?

Sasha Tozzi: That's a good question. Well, there's not really a simple answer to that. But I'll say that I ... for a while in my sobriety it was still a huge pain point. So I sort of became a hermit, because I didn't ... it would cause me so much anxiety to just go to social events that the only way for me to ... for a while I just avoided going to social events. Now I know myself a lot better and I've challenged myself a lot in terms of doing things that make me feel uncomfortable and knowing that I can get through it. But I also give myself permission to be who I am. So not making myself wrong for every little personality quirk I have, and just sort of accepting myself as I am.

But I will say that one of the things that came in handy for me about being in the rooms of 12-step, was that it was where I learned how to have a voice. Like, it was where I learned how to speak up and share. It took me two to three years to be comfortable to raise my hand and share what was going on. Like, I would have anxiety attacks every time I went to a meeting and every time they would ... if they would call on people randomly I would just be sitting there the whole time freaking out. And eventually I got to a point where, as I said, about two to three years in, where I was really hindering my own growth because I was keeping so much inside. I wasn't sharing. I wasn't letting people get to know me.

I had this turning point where I remember, like, I volunteered to share, and I shared, and it felt so liberating. And I really needed to share. I needed that space and I needed to feel heard. It was so therapeutic that now I almost can't leave a meeting without sharing. So I've just changed my relationship with what it means to be heard and I also have done a lot of work in being assertive and

being confident. So for me, working with my social anxiety has really been about increasing my confidence levels and my self-esteem and self-worth and learning how to ask for what I want and ask for what I need. So that takes away some of the fear of being with people.

Annie Grace: So that's so awesome because what you're basically describing is, okay, so there was this crutch, this bandaid, and you could slap it on, but then it had all these unwanted side effects. But actually, even if you have just crippling anxiety, you can do the work and put the time in and understand and get to know yourself to where it just doesn't ... because you would have never struck me, like, I've known you for a little while now, and never as someone who has social anxiety. In fact, I thought you were really outgoing. So that's awesome.

Sasha Tozzi: That's funny. Yeah.

Annie Grace: You know, just to say that that's how far you can really come, to where you really create a life that you don't need to drink to escape from, which is such a cool thing.

Sasha Tozzi: Exactly. And you can get through things without drinking. You can kind of use your inner wisdom. There's always a way. You can figure it out. There are so many tools. And also, just knowing that I'm not the only one that's ever experienced anxiety or ... I mean, I still get it, and I still get, from time to time ... it varies in terms of intensity and it's much, much, much less than it used to be. But there are certain circumstances that will just trigger that anxious default response of, like, a lot of times performance, performance anxiety. When I know I'm going to be watched or graded and things like that. But even those things are, like, I'm able to get through them.

Annie Grace: That's awesome. That's so cool. And now you help other people do the same, right, in your work? Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Sasha Tozzi: Yeah. Well, yeah. Anxiety is one of the things that I work with people on. But I work with ... I've been coaching for three or four years. I work with people in recovery, getting into recovery and then really thriving in recovery, so connecting into their purpose and their power and their joy. So just because I've found that many people get sober and then it's like they treat it like a life sentence or something, like life can't be good anymore. Right? And it's, quite frankly, the opposite.

So just working with people on that. Because getting sober to me is such a self-discovery process, I just partner with people. And as their coach I am the person that they're accountable to, and I show them basically where their blind spots are, because we all have them. Right? It's so valuable for ... I work with a coach and I ... being able to be a coach to others is extremely rewarding.

I recently, and I know I've told you this, Annie, but I recently got trained in a form of therapy called rapid transformational therapy. It's hypnotherapy and it blends a bunch of different schools of thought. It is one of the most transformative things that I've personally experienced. So I got trained in it so that I could deliver it. It's basically a way to ... I've paired it with coaching for people. But it's extremely effective and it's extremely fast in getting to the root cause of things because in hypnosis you can access your subconscious mind so easily and really getting to the root cause and then changing the meaning of certain events that happened in the past and the way that they're holding you back today. It's so incredibly ... it sort of feels like magic. I'm so stoked, because this all just happened and I just recently got certified. So I've been doing sessions since I got back and I'm just amazed at the power of this technique. So my work with people is a blend of coaching and rapid transformational therapy.

Annie Grace:

I don't know if you would answer this as a coach or based on your own experience, but having somebody ... because a lot of people ask me, you know, "Well, my daughter or my sister or my husband, like, they're drinking too much. I want to talk to them about it. How should I go about talking to them about it?" Obviously you had an experience with people talking to you, but then also you're coaching. So I'd love to just hear your thoughts on that question. Like, if somebody has a loved one who's stuck or suffering, like, what is the best way to bridge the topic?

Sasha Tozzi:

That's a really good question, too. I'll share a little tidbit from my personal experience with that, because I had a family member who was really, really struggling with alcohol abuse, like, to a severe level. It's always severe in my opinion, but it was like low bottom. And I didn't know what to do. And being a coach, I thought I was supposed to know what to do, and that I should know exactly what to do and I should be able to ... and "should" in air quotes, I "should" be able to fix this or something.

I ended up ... that was actually when I started getting into my codependency work, because I realized how it was affecting me and just how much some of my ways of relating to them and relating to anyone who has a problem were just extremely codependent. And I started going to Al-Anon and learning really the best ways to help someone without being controlling, without being enabling, without being obsessed with trying to help them and save them and rescue them.

So I learned so much in that process and I'm still learning every day. But to answer your question, I think one of the best ways to approach a loved one who's suffering is to let them know that you love them and that you're there for them, that you're a safe space if they ever want to talk, and maybe ask them questions. Like, ask them some really ... some open-ended, non-judgmental questions, like, "How have you been feeling lately? What's going on?" Like, really creating a safe space for them to open up. Because if you go at it from any other angle, like most people that I know that are abusing drugs or alcohol are

going to get super defensive and kind of shut you out. And you want to keep the line of communication open.

That's not to say that you can't ever do the tough love thing, because I think that works, too. Depending on the circumstance and the person and all of that. It's really a case by case thing. But in general, I would just let the person know that you're there for them to talk to and just get curious about their life and maybe ask them some questions that are going to plant a seed, but without making them feel like they're being attacked.

Annie Grace: Yeah, that's great. That's really good advice. Thank you. All right. So I have two more questions for you, Sasha. And this has been awesome. First of all, where can people find you if they are curious about working with you or more about rapid transformational therapy and the stuff that you do?

Sasha Tozzi: Yeah. So I have a website. It's [SashaPTozzi.com](http://SashaPTozzi.com). That's a good way to reach me. I have blog posts, I have a contact form. Then, I'm on Instagram. I'm really active on there: [SashaTozzi](https://www.instagram.com/SashaTozzi). And I'm on Facebook. I'm really active on there. And I have a Facebook group. It's by approval only, so if you click on ... I have the link to ... the link is in my Facebook profile, but it's Soul Power Recovery, is the group name. And if you search it you can find it and then you can just ask to join. It's a great community group of people that are committed to their recoveries and really committed to their individual growth. I'm in there a lot. I'm in there daily posting things to ... I post questions to get you to think and to get you to really dig into what's going on for you and to be in that process of inquiry. I post lots of different things, like inspiration and all of these other things and I do live trainings in the group, too.

Annie Grace: That's awesome.

Sasha Tozzi: So all of those places. Then, from my website you can always send me a personal email or a direct message through Instagram or Facebook is fine, too.

Annie Grace: That's awesome. Very cool. All right. So last question. If you could go back and tell Sasha, you know, 20 years old, what life is like kind of on this other side, what would you tell her?

Sasha Tozzi: Oh my God! I would say that it's more beautiful than you can even imagine. It's everything that you deserve that you don't even know you deserve, and that it's the best thing you'll ever do for yourself.

Annie Grace: That's awesome. That gave me chills. So good. Well thank you so much, Sasha. It's been really an honor.

Sasha Tozzi: Thank you, Annie! You're so lovely! I love talking to you and I'm just really stoked to be here. You're so lovely and authentic and just joyful.

Annie Grace: Yeah. That's all because I stopped drinking, probably. I don't think that was all true before. But that's awesome.

Sasha Tozzi: It was there before, it was just hidden.

Annie Grace: It was just hidden, just buried. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, thank you so much. This has been great.

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