

Annie Grace: This is Annie Grace and you're listening to This Naked Mind Podcast where without judgment, pain or rules we explore the role of alcohol in our lives and culture. Hi, this is Annie Grace and welcome to This Naked Mind Podcast. Today I have Erica with me and she's going to tell her story. Erica, welcome. So glad to have you here.

Erica: Thanks. I'm excited about being here.

Annie Grace: That's awesome. Why don't you walk me all the way sort of back to the beginning for you? Like maybe your first drink or the early days and kind of where it all started.

Erica: Sure. I am a member of the This Naked Mind community and I see a lot of different people's stories. I'd say mine is different than some. I did not drink in high school. I'm pretty strait-laced. My parents, they drank. Looking back on it, I can remember parties where I'm sure there was alcohol there, but it wasn't that apparent. It wasn't that up front and center. I didn't really think, "Oh, I've got to drink to be cool." Well, I mean yes. There was an association of drinking to be cool, but I knew I wasn't part of that anyway, so I really didn't drink until I went to college. I went to University of Illinois. Pretty much from the get-go you're invited to parties and there's alcohol there and it's good tasting alcohol.

It's not beer. It always something weird, fruity. Definitely in college I became quite the binge drinker. I didn't drink every night. I was still pretty studious. I would drink on the weekends. Occasionally there'd be a like a Tuesday night or a Thursday night, but mostly just drinking on the weekends, but excessively. Puking usually. I mean I had a reputation for throwing up. I would drink to excess and I would throw up. I'd say after I graduated from college, that continued quite a bit. I worked in Peoria at Caterpillar, and Peoria I feel like is kind of a drinking town. Again, the binge drinking was able to continue.

I didn't buy alcohol and have it at home, so at that point I still was kind of a weekend drinker. Occasionally if I went out to dinner with a friend or something, we might have a drink or two out on a Tuesday or Thursday, but again mostly binge drinking on the weekend again and still throwing up and acting crazy. Really I think alcohol just let me let loose because I had been a pretty uptight person. Still kind of am an uptight person. But again it was sort of contained to weekends more or less. Fast forward many years living in Chicago and met my husband. I met him when I was still in Peoria, but he was a beer drinker.

This is also the kind of point in time when it became very cool to like craft beers and go to craft breweries. That became kind of a thing. I started drinking craft beer and we would go to microbreweries. When we lived in Chicago, there was always some place we could go. It gradually started becoming more and more of a daily sort of a thing and maybe not every day, but it definitely was not contained to the weekend anymore. It continued that way until ... Okay. It

continued that way. Oddly enough, I felt like I lived in a suburb where there are a lot of stay at home mothers. I am not a stay at home mother. Okay.

Coming back to living out in the suburbs and being in a community where there are a lot of stay at home mothers, it really became easy to see drinking as a way of handling all of your or avoiding your responsibilities I think. It's just sort of a slippery slope where I started drinking much more frequently. It was very, very rare if I had wine that I would have a glass or even two. Usually it would be three. Sometimes a bottle. That sort of became much more of a pattern for the past couple of years. It also became sort of a way in which I would determine who I would be friendly with. If somebody wasn't a drinker, I would have sort of write them off as like, "Oh, they're probably not much fun and not my kind of person."

I looked for any social opportunities where drinking was involved. I remember going out to dinner one time with my family and my parents suggested a restaurant and they mentioned that it didn't have alcohol and I was like, "Of course, we can't go there." My parents were like, "Oh, of course." I don't really think it mattered to them. I'm sure they went to this restaurant plenty of times, but I was like, "You can't be serious. We have to drink. We, of course, have to drink." Then the point at which it just became overwhelming and it was again sort of a slower realization for me, I had ... My friend reminded me of this. This past St. Patrick's Day, we had gone out.

It was sort of a planned thing. She was a huge drinker too. She and I both drink a lot together. In fact, we drank a lot together back when I was in Peoria and kind of all throughout twenties and thirties. We were both big drinkers. We had determined we were going to go out for St. Patrick's Day, my friend and I. It was definitely going to be a big drinking day, but I also was figuring that we would go out. At this point, I sort of knew that it was like, "Okay. I really can't just keep drinking. It's not healthy. It's not good for me. I knew this." I was thinking we'll go out to a few bars and then we'll probably go home about 2:00.

There was a point at which we were out drinking and I thought we should go home and she's like, "No. The guys are watching our kids. Why don't we still stay up? Why don't we keep drinking? Why don't we keep drinking?" I was like okay, but I kept at various points in time saying, "I think we're alcoholics. I think we need to go to AA. I think we need to go ..." Well, rehab. We always talked more about rehab. We need to go to rehab. She'd be like, "Stop saying that. I don't want to think about that today." It's not the first time I had brought it up because we had ...

When people come to our house, a lot of times I like make sure we're fully stocked with alcohol and I really do encourage people to drink. I mean people who are like, "Oh." It's like I try to figure out then for the next time they come, what's the one thing you like, and then I want to make sure I have that because I really wanted people to drink with me. There had been a time not too long after that where she came out and we were having people over. She was encouraging

shots and I was willing. Of course, I was, but it's like, "Okay. Well, she's the one who brought it up, so yes we'll do the shots," even though we've already been drinking plenty of beer and we have been drinking wine, to the point where we were even lying to my husband.

My husband was like, "Are you doing shots," and I kind of gave him a look and then my friend is like, "Don't worry. I told Dave that you poured it down." I was okay, so now we're really lying about how much we're drinking. We would talk about the fact that during the day with our kids in the house we would do shots by ourselves with our kids. Like not the kid drinking the shots, but like to avoid or have it feel more fun. Once she started telling me she was doing this, then I started doing it too. I bought a big bottle of whisky and I would do one shot of whisky. Now I need two.

This would just be random middle of the day Friday after my son was home from preschool. My husband didn't know about that because I work other than Friday. It was pretty contained to either Friday or the weekend. My friend though, she was doing this more regularly. Again it felt kind of like okay, this is what we do now. This is just a part of our life and we drink like this, but that particular day that she came to the house and we had drunk this shots, when she was on her way, her husband told her he knew how much she had been drinking. He knew that she was sometimes drinking a bottle of vodka. It's like gone and she replaced this. He knew this.

He got her to admit she had a problem and she decided she was going to talk to her mother-in-law who was an Alcoholics Anonymous person. She started down the AA path at that time. My friend told me this. Of course, I have thought the drinking was too much and I thought about Alcoholics Anonymous, but I also felt that that just didn't ... That seemed daunting. My husband had even mentioned Ebert. I think it was Roger Ebert had an AA person and he had sent me an article from Ebert. I read it and I was like ah. Like it didn't make me want to be a part of it and it felt too cultish to me. Facebook has recommended some book to me through its algorithm or whatever that was about controlling your drinking.

I read it and I was like, "This one doesn't seem quite right," so then I just went online. I thought, "Well, maybe there's a different option of something that might be more about controlling your drinking if I don't want to go AA and I don't want to stop drinking all together." Clearly I can't control it, and that's when I came upon your book. I think just based on the reviews that folks had, it seemed like it was the better option. Like probably the best option out there of a book to read to talk about controlling your drinking. When I started into reading it, I was really hoping that I could still maintain the drinking somehow. I mean not to the same level, but I had hoped I would be able to moderate better.

I read the book and I will say I read it relatively quickly and I was like hmm. My friend is a nutritionist by the way. I would tell her about some elements of the

book and this, that and the other thing and she, my friend, would argue and ... Not argue. She's not really argumentative, but she would say, "Well, I don't think drinking is ..." She definitely had a position on alcoholism and not being an alcoholic based on the AA model. She objected to the idea that anybody can become addicted and that no, of course, there are differences in people where some people are going to be ... Like her husband could have just one drink and be fine where she was going to drink a lot.

I just kept thinking to myself, "Where do I fall in this? I don't feel like I am a true AA alcoholic, but I definitely am having an issue with drinking." Your book was very good. I thought it was very good, but again at the same ... I'm definitely going through it. I'm like, "Okay. Clearly she's suggesting that being alcohol-free is ..." Well, that wasn't a term in the book. It was something I found in the community later. I don't recall that term AF being a thing then, but it definitely seemed clear to me, "Okay. Clearly the best positioning here is to not drink at all, but at the same time, whatever limited consumption you can have is a good thing, so let me try that."

After I read the book the first time, I did attempt to moderate. Somewhat of a success. I mean at least I kind of was questioning when I would go out to drink like why am I thinking just it's the middle of the day at noon like why do I think it seems fun to drink. We also went on a big trip to Spain for three weeks. My brother-in-law around the time also got in some of sort diagnosis with high liver counts, so he was trying to cut back. I was like, "Okay. I should be cutting back too, but we're going to Spain and he sort of said the same thing." We were like, "Well, we're going to drink in Spain, of course."

I did pretty good, but again it's like I still had this tendency to drink more than I wanted my husband to know because he definitely had observed a lot of concerning patterns with the drinking. We came back and I just felt like I was like just kind of in a panic about things and I was definitely drinking ... I didn't really know how I was going to stop drinking and I didn't know what else was going on with me. I have anxiety and I felt like the anxiety was getting worst. Then one night, I had gone to a fundraiser where the drinks weren't free. No. They definitely were not free. We were still paying for them, it was a karaoke fundraiser. Of course, I have to be drunk to karaoke.

I was with a friend who was a very heavy drinker as well, she and I. I think I have definitely had surrounded myself in these circles with people who really enjoyed drinking because I did as well. She was buying me more drinks than I had wanted and I was, of course, going to drink them. What am I going to do? Pour it down? Make her drink it? I mean I was not far from home, but I did drive myself that night. That night when I left and I drove home, I don't remember the point of getting home and going to bed at all. What I know is I woke up in the morning and my husband wasn't in the bed and I was like, "Huh. Last night was probably not a good thing." Then I asked my husband about ...

Also, I should say that after I read your book, I went and I joined the online community, This Naked Mind community. I started posting and blogging. I thought it was a great thing and I thought interacting with folks who are also trying not to drink, but weren't putting themselves through AA was maybe the right scheme for me or the right way to go. After this whole night happened and my husband, you know, I definitely got ... I had argued with my husband many times when I was drunk, and I argued, yelled at him. I'm like, "Oh, I'm going to divorce you," and just basically because I'd say he was controlling because he was trying to control my drinking. It wasn't that he was controlling in any other way.

He was trying to control my drinking, but I said that was controlling. I will be like, "I'm going to leave you," and say things like that. I didn't mean that, but I would do it. Then this time it was like okay, I realized when I woke up, he's not saying ... I asked him and he's like, "Well, I wasn't going to argue with you in your condition." I'm sitting there thinking, "This is the most realistic point at which this could lead to divorce." It's not when I get mad and say he's controlling because he doesn't want me drinking anymore. It's the fact that I drove and came home and blacked out, left the car running, which I've done sober because it's one of those push button things.

I tried to tell that to him, but he's still like, "Come on." But yeah, completely blacked out. So then again, I was like, "Okay. Well, yes, I will. I'm going to go AF now," because I had been considering the alcohol-free thing ever since joining the community and hearing people talk about it, but I didn't think that that was kind of a reasonable way of life for me I guess. But after that night I was like, "I do. I really need to pull the plug here. What am I doing?" I kind of went back to it and went on the community. I was very active on the community. The first week I definitely had a problem sleeping because I had been a person who ...

Unlike some people on the community or some people that describe their own stories, I wasn't the person who would go into work hungover. Like I had gotten to a point where I knew how to drink right for me. Between every sip of wine, I'd have water. I would know when to stop it in the evening so that I wouldn't drink until midnight and stay up until midnight. No. I would pretty much go to bed by 9:30 and hopefully have stop drinking by 9:00, and most of the time I did. I had become a pretty savvy drinker. I was like, "Well, I'm not ..." Generally, I wasn't driving drunk because usually I had a driver. If I knew I was drinking, I'd have someone picking me up or my husband would be driving, but it would limit where I would go.

I would think, "Oh, maybe I should go and do this thing." It's like no, because if I do that, then I'm going to have to either not drink or drive drunk and I don't want either of those situations. I would avoid something that wouldn't let me drink. Getting into the community and hearing people talk about their experiences AF, it just took a bit of a mind shift. But the book, the whole element of it affecting your subconscious I think is very, very true. As much as I still have cravings and the last day I had this occasion was August 30th and

today it's November 16th, so it's been a couple of months, I had a lot of urges right away.

In my first week, I had trouble sleeping, but then after the first week I got over that and I didn't have any other withdrawal symptoms I wouldn't say, but the urges were certainly very strong and I really wanted to drink and especially around the end of the workday. But I would say that some of those are gone now, but occasionally they do come around. Even in the moment when it's like, "Oh, I could have a drink. There's a bottle of wine right in front of me." I'm in a mommy play date ... Well, the kiddo play dates and the moms have wine out. I'm like, "I could just have a glass of wine."

There's also a part of me and it's definitely I think more of a subconscious thing that's like, "You don't want it. Once you drink it, you're not going to really feel ... Like don't act like this wine is something that's going to make you have better enjoyment. That's not it at all." It had definitely become a crutch for me and had become something that I associated with all of the fun and social interactions that I wanted. I know that's a little bit of a just kind of garbage out of the mouth of a lot of things I said-

Annie Grace: No, it's great.

Erica: ,, , about drinking, but ...

Annie Grace: Yeah, it makes so much sense. It's so good that now you can come into that kind of conscious space and say, "Okay. Well, all the moms around ..." It's really great to be able to sort of identify that trigger and that thought process. It'd be like great, but is that real? Is that a real outcome or is this just something that because I've done it for so long and been in this scenario for this many times that this is very much a trigger? One of the cool things about triggers, I guess cool and not cool, cool in the sense that they really diminish once you deny them one or two times. Just getting through those first times.

I don't know if you've noticed this in your experience, but if you go to the mommy play date and you don't give into the trigger, then the next one it's like so much easier.

Erica: Yes. I noticed that with going out and especially with restaurants. I had gotten to a point where almost every restaurant I've been to since we've lived in the suburbs here for six years, I was so used to drinking at every restaurant. We would just go out because I wanted to drink out not because ... The food wasn't that good and I'd probably rather eat at home, but I wanted to have a drink out. Once I had stopped drinking, going to the restaurant was like, "Okay. What am I going to drink?" But once I've been there one time and gotten something else, then it was like, "Okay. Now I can picture and imagine the experience and imagine the enjoyment of the experience without the alcohol."

I definitely had that happen. My sister's house was oddly a trigger for me. Again, it's because my brother-in-law likes to drink a lot too. My sister drinks very little, very little, but it's kind of this scenario where I'll be like, "Hey, I got this bottle of mulled wine," because she likes something more fruity. My sister's house, going over there it's like, "Oh, but how is that going to fun if we're not drinking?" I'd been over there once before and ... Well, maybe three times and once was a big party, but my friend, the same friend, the nutritionist, who is in AA, we were there to support each other, so that was sort of easier to keep the desires from drinking from happening.

I did actually observe some of the folks I would typically drink with seeming a little silly and not really at their best. It's very interesting when you're not drinking and starting to observe that and realize, "Huh. Okay. Yes, I definitely was having a good time when I was one of them, but from an outsider looking in, it looked sort of silly." But then when I've gone to my sister's house now a couple times, the most recent time was like a week ago, and again I came and my brother-in-law had some whisky. I thought, "Oh, that seems fun." I had a sip.

I'm like, "Let me try it," and I had a sip. I was like, "Ooh," and then I'm thinking, "I don't want anymore of that. Like I don't," but it bothered me for some reason that my sister was having two bottles ... Again, she's not a big drinker, but she had two hard ciders. My husband has also been engaging in this path with me even though he doesn't have the issues I do, but he realized it's always better to not drink that much anymore and felt like he was probably drinking too frequently as well. He pulled back quite a bit, but occasionally he will. He had had a beer and then he was having a cider with my sister, my brother-in-law is drinking the whisky relatively heavily.

I was sitting on the couch with the kids and my husband later was saying that, "Oh, you weren't really very social." I mean I was interested in watching the music videos that my nephews were watching anyway, so there was sort of that to it. It wasn't like I was necessarily avoiding, but at the same time, I thought, "Well, what would I rather be doing now? Would I rather be sitting at the table sort of getting drunk with people or I'd rather be sitting here sort of interacting with my nephews while they're watching a new music video of a band I really love?" That was kind of more what I wanted to do. I think people sometimes, and especially my husband, can be easy to ...

When I am a heavy drinker and I'm drinking heavily, anything that he perceives as, "Well, that's a negative way to act or why are you acting that way," it's easy to blame it on the alcohol. Like This Naked Mind, it really does remove a lot of things that people can either blame on it or that you blame on it.

Annie Grace:

That's awesome. I remember when I lived in Brooklyn, there was a restaurant that didn't allow alcohol. It was like an Indian restaurant and they didn't allow alcohol. I love the food, but we would specifically not go there because we couldn't drink. Then eventually they let you bring your own in and it was like such a relief. Then it became like our favorite restaurant because we could

always bring stuff, but it was amazing how much those sort of decisions influenced all the stuff we were doing.

Erica: Yeah.

Annie Grace: You know.

Erica: I was just reading ... In our suburb, we have a moms and dads Facebook group and people comment on various things in the area. Just today they were talking about a restaurant. They're like, "I think it's really gone downhill." They were going on and on about it and someone mentioned, "Well, I stopped going there after they stopped serving wine." I was thinking, "Oh, they stopped serving wine. I hadn't been there in a while," but that would have been me had I not stopped drinking. Trust me. Six months ago, if we had gone there and they hadn't had wine, I would have probably told my husband, "Let's go somewhere else." I might have been shocked, acted crazy.

Annie Grace: I mean I totally get it. I really like that though just trying and even sort of taking a sip and saying, "Yeah, no, that's not for me." I remember one instance. It was probably three or four months after I had stopped drinking and I had a business trip to Brazil. It was so weird. It was like they were literally insulted if I didn't try their national drink called a caipirinha. I'm like, "I'm not drinking anymore." It got like almost really heated and stuff because they have this special alcohol that's made out of sugar cane. It was like very almost a prideful thing.

I remember one of the guys we were with had to tell this other guy like, "Dude, you need to leave her alone." But then I was like, "You know what? Just let me touch it to my lips. Let me have a sip. Let me. Oh, yeah. That's interesting tasting and stuff," but it was really almost an empowering thing to be like, "You know what? I'm going to indulge you, but then I'm going to make this decision that I didn't actually want that." It was really cool. I really appreciate that too.

Let me ask you the question that I always sort of ask kind of at the end of the story is if you were going to go back and talk to Erica of a few years ago or Erica who was driving and not remembering it, leaving the car on, which I understand, I would do something like that too even sober if it was that difficult of an ignition, but what would you tell her about kind of how things are going these days?

Erica: I think ... Oh my goodness. What would I tell her? It's so hard to say. Well, first of all, there's the health element of drinking. I mean it really is so unhealthy for you. There are all of these articles out there that talk about how oh, just having a glass of wine. There's such a suggestion that drinking is positive and good. There is a lot of societal pressure. I don't think I remotely realize that a few years ago until this all started frankly in reading the book. I mean I guess it's helpful that you work in the alcohol industry because that sort of makes you think, "Okay. Well, this is from an insider who knows ..." It's not just that.

There's probably anything different in that industry than any other industry, but I'm very skeptical of corporations and their lobby. Of course, they want to sell their product. They want to make money selling their products. The alcohol industry has been quite successful in making people think it's a good thing. Think drinking is a positive thing. Yes, you're not supposed to drink and drive, but are there really enough things in place that would prevent that I mean in almost any instance? I mean in Peoria, I had an ex-boyfriend.

Well, I have an ex-boyfriend, at the time moment boyfriend, and I remember him joking saying, "The town should just pass an ordinance that says you're allowed to drive drunk between the hours of like 2:00 and 5:00 and then everybody would stay off the road at those hours." It's like, "Yeah. Well, I mean we need to be able to drink. The bar is open until 4:00. We got to get home and there's no public transit. Taxis were like ridiculously expensive." Honestly, it's hard to say what I would say to myself. It's more like you got to read this book because I've been a person who ... It really does take a book to sort of convince me of something and a book that's very well done with a lot of footnote.

I can't say I always read the footnotes, but nonetheless, feeling I know how to evaluate the primary sources of what someone is claiming. For example, I'm a vegetarian and I stopped eating meat ... Well, actually I didn't stop eating all meat. I stopped eating all meat, but ... Well, I read this book called Diet for a New America back when I was in college and it talked about the meat industry and how meat was produced in our country. It was about the humane elements and the health elements. I was sold on both points.

Again, it sort of started out similar to my reaction to this book where I'm like, "I'm not going to give up meat. That seems like ridiculous, but I'm just going to try to make sure that it's like cruelty-free or free range," but at that time, I think this was like '92 or something, I would ask a waiter or waitress and they didn't know what I was talking about. You couldn't go to a store and get organic meat. You didn't have the options that you have today. At that time I was like, "You know what? I read this book and I'm really sold on it. I'm just going to stop eating meat." It didn't talk about fish, so I kept fish.

It's not surprising to me that the thing that will finally click and get to me would be a book that's got a lot of information. It's not just one thing. I mean there was a lot of research done for your book. I think that that's maybe what I would tell myself. I am happier. I do have anxiety, extreme anxiety. It got better with the drinking. I mean, sorry, better when I stopped drinking because I did not know. This is again back to the health aspect of this and how good the alcohol industry has been. You get the idea that, "Oh, you take a drink to relax and it's going to relax you." I'm a high strung person, I'm an anxious person, so let me drink, but it doesn't actually help.

I never remember the science that I read about, but it says that it really is damaging to anxiety because of this, that and the other thing. I have experienced that firsthand. I think there's just a whole lot of things. I would tell

myself, "Here's this book." I mean I think that that would just be how I would want to introduce myself to the book and the concepts and the way in which society encourages us and to just basically tell myself it's bull.

Annie Grace: That's awesome. That's so cool. This has been great. I mean I really appreciate your story. I think it's the story of so many parents, especially with young kids. It was certainly my story. I don't know. It's an interesting thing where we all are just kind of doing the best we can with the tools we have and then we have our eyes open to the fact that there's different tools or the tools that we thought we had might actually be like, you know, giving us blisters.

Erica: Right. Right.

Annie Grace: It's really cool that you've kind of taken and owned that information and taking it forward into your own life. That's awesome. So cool. Well, thank you so much for your time, Erica. It's been a real pleasure and I really appreciate it.

Erica: Of course. Nice to meet you.

Annie Grace: Yeah. Nice to meet you too. Enjoy the rest of your day and thank you again for sharing your story.

Erica: Thank you.

Annie Grace: Okay. Bye.

Erica: Bye.

Annie Grace: This has been Annie Grace with This Naked Mind Podcast. Thank you so much for listening. You can learn more at thisnakedmind.com, and please remember to rate, review, and subscribe as it really helps us spread the word.