

"Beyond Sober: You Put Down the Booze Now What?" is a guidebook designed to support individuals who are newly sober in their journey toward recovery. This book provides a wealth of practical and actionable tips for managing early sobriety.

Beyond Sober: You Put Down the Booze Now What?

By Laura Lee Wright

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BEYOND SOBER

YOU PUT DOWN THE BOOZE,
NOW WHAT?



Straight Talk
for The Newly Sober

LAURA LEE WRIGHT

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About the Author

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Chapter 1:

You Never Have to Feel Like This Again

You didn't pick up this book on the best day you have ever had. The good news is that you never have to feel like this again. Whatever pain, anguish, embarrassment, or discomfort brought you to seek sobriety can be a thing of the past.

It is unlikely you are on a big winning streak in which everything is going your way, your friends and family are happy with your behavior, and your physical body is at top performance. This is not to say everything in your life is chaos, but something brought you to these pages. You have a why, which is as unique as your fingerprints.

In this book, you won't find a solution to your addiction. You will find practical suggestions to help you get through early sobriety without going crazy or, worse yet, taking a drink.

To know what you want, it is essential to understand what you don't want. This is not as easy as it sounds. If you have been drinking for a while, your addiction may be telling you that you want to feel better, and the quickest way to feel better is to drink, get that buzz, and numb the problem. Even though that behavior has clearly brought you what you do not want, at this point, it probably still feels like the appropriate solution.

The essential thing in the first days of sobriety is don't pick up a drink. This sounds intuitive, doesn't it? Sanity in decisions is not what brought you to the point of seeking a solution. Before anything else can take hold, you must avoid the first drink. You have told yourself before that one or two glasses will ease your mind, help you relax, and make you feel better. That may be true for the person who can have one or two drinks, but that person isn't you, is it?

In the first weeks of being dry from alcohol, you may have what feels like a firm resolve. The

memory of your last drunk still sits in your mind like a weight. The idea of never going through that again can seem like enough to carry you into a sober life. If you have alcoholism, chances are that resolve won't last.

Maybe you can white knuckle for a few weeks or a month, but in the end, you will likely give yourself permission to drink again.

You have contemplated quitting before. Maybe even toyed with a plan and started preparing to quit. Many alcoholics recognize their problem with the drink before taking any action to stop. When alcohol permeates not only your body and mind but also your life, it is hard to maintain sobriety without discomfort and change. We don't like change and discomfort, alcoholic or not. Being willing to move through the pain of change on a promise of comfort on the other side is hard to swallow in the early days of sobriety.

There was no moment in my life when alcohol was not the center of attention. I grew up in a household gripped by double-participant active alcoholism. My mother drank and popped pills, and my father drank a lot. My earliest memories include hearing conversations about quitting drinking, the ramifications of drinking too much, and the word "alcoholic" being bandied about weekly. I grew up in chaos, insecurity, and neglect.

Like many middle-class American households, the one I grew up in looked good from the outside, at least for a while. My parents had a good income. My mother was a stay-at-home wife and mother during my first seven years. We had a swimming pool in the backyard and new cars, and a boat in the driveway. I learned that what happened at home was never disclosed outside the house's walls. That ingrained lesson would travel with me well into adulthood and even into my own sobriety.

Alcoholism is said to be a disease of the family. In my case, I can attest to the truth of that hypothesis. Drunkenness doesn't occur in a vacuum. The alcoholic, or in my case, alcoholics, spread their destruction to anyone and anything in their path.

Often in early recovery or pre-recovery stages, addicts will proclaim that they are not hurting anyone but themselves. Even though they are willing to accept that they may be drinking too much occasionally, they fail to see how their intoxication could affect their larger picture. This is particularly true of addicts who maintain employment and social connections. The active "wet" drinker who goes to work every day, pays most of their bills on time, goes to community events, helps their kids with homework, or any other bare minimum requirement for being a contributing member of society, can easily excuse a few late-night binges as a needed stress relief.

In my case, the years when my disease had the tightest grip on me looked like a success. The outside package was intact until it wasn't. My story isn't unique. The rise and fall of addicts are well documented in many memoirs. From celebrities to the girl next door, every social and economic group is represented by the affliction of addiction. Despite that, the first thing you may want to do is compare yourself out of the category of addict or alcoholic. I ask that you remember that you picked up this book for a reason and don't quit before you even start. Actually, quitting is the goal, but you know what I mean. Hear me out before you identify out.

Another excuse to continue a life of destruction comes up when addicts face the idea that they must surrender to something bigger than themselves—often called God or a Higher Power. In the pages of this book, I will talk about surrender, I will speak of Higher Power, I will talk about ego, I will talk about self-responsibility, I will talk about spirituality, and if I am doing it right, some of my words will make

you feel uncomfortable. If you keep doing what you are doing, the intoxicants will hurt you, but words won't.

Recovery is a profoundly individual experience, but the road cut out by successfully recovered people provides a path upon which you and I can travel to a more satisfying life. A life that is not only free from alcohol but a life on the journey to spiritual and physical wellness.

Stopping drinking only makes you a dry alcoholic with all the alcoholic problems and none of the relief you received from intoxication. Recovery from addiction requires work, and that work results in being well. It's time to begin your journey.

Chapter 2:

A Mess of My Own Making

Admitting that your life is a mess and your own fault is a quagmire, but you must persevere to climb up to sobriety. Reaching the contemplation stage of recovery is usually the result of a consequence that can be traced back to drinking. As I mentioned earlier, I've never met someone who sought recovery from addiction because everything was working out just fine.

When I took my last drink, I had no idea it would be my last drink. My daily pattern was simple. I went to work each day and struggled through the day in a job I hated. On the way home, I stopped at the grocery store to pick up something easy to prepare for dinner for myself and my two teenage sons. I also always bought a few bottles of wine. My first glass of wine would be poured before I even began dinner preparation, if I prepared dinner at all. I would drink glass after glass of wine until I passed out or went to bed. Most

mornings, I would wake with a splitting headache and begin the cycle again. The last morning I woke up after drinking wine until 2 am was the same as many mornings before, except it was different. I had a moment of clarity in which I could look around me and see that I was in a mess of my own making. Since that cold February morning in 2018, I haven't had a drink.

That day I began participating in a fellowship of like-minded people who have loved me and guided me in sobriety. I subscribe to the 12 steps of recovery. An array of options are available to take you on the road to sobriety. I chose one I knew worked because my mother had found the same fellowship 30 years before I began my journey. I am an advocate of the 12-step approach to recovery and overall wellness. It is from that vantage point that this book is written.

Alcoholism is a disease resulting from complex interactions between an individual's genetics, environment, and psychological and social factors. Alcoholism is also a chronic and

progressive condition that cannot be cured. It can be treated. Like other chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, there are treatments. Alcoholism may be recognized as a disease by The American Medical Association and the World Health Organization. However, society still hasn't caught up with that recognition. When someone becomes drunk at a social event, falls over a chair, or makes an inappropriate comment while slurring her words, her friends and family don't brush it off and say, "Jane's alcoholism is acting up again." Yes, alcoholism is a disease of the body, but also a disease of the mind and spirit. If all three areas are not addressed, the prognosis for recovery is unfavorable.

To complicate matters more, there is no test to determine if you are a real alcoholic. The only person who can truly diagnose you is you. There are no long-term medical treatments for alcoholism. The pharmaceutical companies have not developed a pill that can turn a problem drinker into someone who only wants a beer during the game or a glass of wine at brunch. So

here you are, someone who might have a disease that a doctor can't diagnose or write a prescription to fix. That is the bad news. The good news is that millions of people with alcoholism are in recovery and lead lives beyond their wildest imaginations. More bad news, before you get to a life of your wildest imagination, you might have to go through some stuff. Once you embark on the journey, you may realize that the life you thought you wanted isn't the life that will make you happy.

As I said in chapter one, everyone has a why. Why do you want to stop living the alcohol-fueled life you are living? As you discover your why you will likely unearth your unmanageable mess that needs cleaning up. For some of us, finding the why is easy. For example, if you recently got arrested for drinking and driving or disorderly conduct due to being drunk in public, the why is self-evident. You need to minimize the ramifications of breaking the law. I've talked to many sober men and women who began their journey to sobriety because their spouse or

partner insisted they stop drinking. Sometimes it is a divorce case or a custody battle that brings about a need for behavior change. My why still sits with me today. I wrote it down during the first week after my last drink. I still read the sentence often. It reminds me of my why and helps me stay on track. My reason why is two sentences.

"My life has become consumed by alcohol. I no longer want to hurt myself."

It's not a lengthy statement, it's straightforward, but it is what I needed to get started and what I need today to keep me going. Take some time to consider your why. Dig deep; your why is in there.

Do more than simply think about your why. Something magical happens when a pen is put to paper. Write down your why. This adds clarity. Writing down your why will help you pinpoint why it is essential to you. It can also help you to focus your attention and energy on it. Writing down your why creates a record of it. This can help you stay accountable to yourself. Having

your why on paper or in an app or note on your phone can be motivating. It can remind you of your goal and help you push through obstacles. Some people believe that writing something down sends a message to the universe, and their goals are more likely to be attained. There is much emotion wrapped up in your why. Writing it down can serve as an emotional outlet.

You now know why you want to pursue a sober life. Now it is time to admit you have a problem. Being honest with yourself probably isn't something at which you excel. I have not met many people who are comfortable with self-reflection. It is time to find objectivity and truth about your current situation. Recognize the impact of your drinking problem on yourself and others. Consider honestly how your drinking has affected your relationships, work, and feelings about yourself. This early in the process, many people want to blame the people or situations around them for their problem with alcohol. If your spouse wasn't so difficult, the job wasn't so stressful, and your life had been easier growing

up. All those "ifs" can create a good reason to abandon your intention to stop drinking and take you on a good binge. Now is the time to be honest with yourself. There is plenty of time to hash out the blame later.

Admitting you have a problem and need help is hard. No one wants to admit failure, particularly when you begin to see that your life is out of control and you were the one who was supposed to be managing it. Even more challenging is the action of asking for help.

I am independent. That trait was one of the few things about myself that I was proud of. I could care for myself; I had been doing that most of my life. Even though I admitted to myself that I had a problem with alcohol, I didn't want to ask for help. I didn't even know whom to ask. The morning after my last drunk was when I cried out for help. I closed my tear-filled eyes and softly said, "please help me." I didn't know what help I needed or whom I was asking, but the help came.

I have heard other people in recovery call similar moments the gift of desperation. I never thought about desperation as a gift. Still, in my case, my desperate plea was the catalyst to living life rather than surviving life. At that time, I knew one person who was in recovery. I texted him, half joking and half serious, asking for information. He told me where to go to find the local 12-step program, where I began to learn to ask for help.

At this point, you might think your drinking isn't that much of a problem. No one wants to think about being desperate in any situation or powerless, particularly over something like alcohol. If that is where you are right now, that is okay. Before you abandon the idea of putting drinking down, ask yourself a few questions. All alcoholics share similar behavior, even if the consequences are different. This is why it is vital to judge your drinking not by what you have experienced as consequences but by what your behavior around alcohol consumption looks like.

Think about your intentions when you begin a period of alcohol consumption. When you pour the first glass of alcohol or open the first beer of the evening, are you confident you can stop after one or two drinks? How often have you intended to drink a few servings of your favorite beverage only to find that you have lost control of your consumption along the way? Do you ever feel shame about your drinking?

How are you doing so far? If you see a pattern in your answers, let's ask a few more to provide a clearer picture.

Do you lie? This is a tricky question, isn't it? Let me ask it again. Do you lie about your drinking or behavior when you are drunk?

What about your memory? Do you have times when you wake up and have limited or no knowledge of what happened the night before? This is called blackout or brown-out. Has anyone in your life said something about your drinking, or is your alcohol consumption causing issues in your personal or professional life?

Suppose you answered yes to two or more of the question above. In that case, you should likely consider your relationship with alcohol and how it controls your life.

The book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the primer for the 12-step program, says the first step toward sobriety is admitting you are powerless over alcohol and that your life has become unmanageable. When I took a drink, I never knew when I would stop drinking. That is powerlessness. Although I had not had some of the extreme consequences others have experienced, my life was out of control.

Suppose you can say that your relationship with alcohol is one-sided, with the drink being the driving force in that relationship. You can admit to yourself that your life is in turmoil. In that case, it is time to ask for help. It feels lonely to discover that you have a problem, and no matter how much you have tried to help yourself, you can't. You can't fix it alone, and you will have to decide to ask for help.

Chapter 3:

The First Weeks

Once you have decided to begin the walk into sobriety, the first few weeks can be overwhelming. This is when the adage "one day at a time" comes in handy. I know that sometimes, it was one minute at a time. When I was active in my addiction, I toyed with quitting or cutting back. I remember an ill-fated plan: I would drink iced tea on the porch on summer evenings instead of my usual wine. I believed my needs would be satisfied if I had a beverage. I was delusional. I am sure you know what happened. It's not a complicated plot. I poured a glass of sweet tea, and my husband, at the time, poured a glass of wine. I didn't even finish the glass of tea before I had my wine; so much for that plan. Another time, I told myself I could cut back on my drinking and only partake on the weekends. This decision came after one of my co-workers commented about my drinking. I was going to

show him! I made it until Wednesday night before I resumed my typical daily wine consumption after dinner.

Each time I decided to cut down or stop drinking, I would set a specific time frame of a week, two weeks, or a month and always have permission to give myself when I failed. I failed to complete even a single week of sobriety. I always looked into the future and counted the days or minutes until I could drink again.

I don't make vows like that to myself today. I employ the 24-hour plan. I don't think about next week or even tomorrow regarding alcohol. I only think about today. I will not drink today. Sometimes, in the early days of my sobriety, I had to break it down into smaller pieces, like minutes or hours.

The idea of never having another drink is overwhelming. So, don't make that vow. Just don't drink today, no matter what.

Overthinking and being alone with those thoughts is dangerous for anyone. It can be deadly for a newly sober person. The number one thing I hear from other successfully sober people is that support was and remains critical to their lasting sobriety and wellness. There are many peer support groups for people suffering from addiction. I use a fellowship founded on the 12 steps of recovery. There are other support groups. The name of the group you chose is not essential. Choosing a group of people who share your addiction is important. You can select more than one group. I know people who belong to more than one fellowship which works for them.

Some of the more well-known fellowship support groups available include;

A.A. or Alcoholics Anonymous.

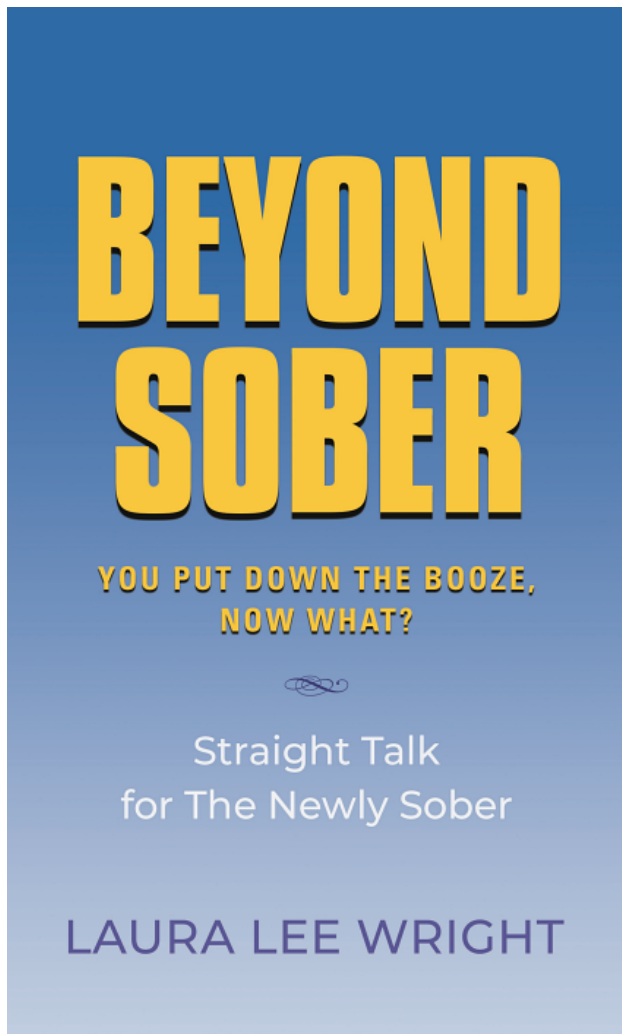
SMART Recovery

Celebrate Recovery

LifeRing Secular Recovery

Women for Sobriety

If you are active in your religion, that is also a route to consider. It is less about where you go for help and more about asking for help. The act of reaching out and admitting you think you have a dysfunctional relationship with alcohol is going to be hard. Be easy on yourself but stick to the resolve of asking for help.



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