

Error Error – Life on the wagon

Amongst the stuff that we inherited when we purchased our Golden Girl was a set of bathroom scales. Neither of us are overly obsessive about our weight but on the basis of not looking a gift horse in the mouth, and the fact that they looked quite expensive, we decided to keep them. It turns out that they don't really work on a boat. The problem is that of shifting weight. I don't mean that we are dieting so furiously that the scales can't keep up with us.

No, the problem is that when you stand on the scales the boat rocks and the electronics in the workings can't understand what's going on. About four out of five attempts result in a long delay before "EE" is displayed. I am assuming that at least one of those letters stands for Error, your guess is as good as mine as to the other one. Electronic Error perhaps? Or maybe just Eating Excessively. Anyway, the point is you have to keep stepping on and off the scales multiple times before you get a reading. Just attempting to find out your

current weight is probably a reasonable workout and may in fact result in a steady stream of diminishing readings if you keep at it long enough.



Captions welcome

As I said I don't usually bother with such things but as I have

joined the flock of sober sheep that are doing Dry January I thought I might just weigh myself once a week to see what difference an absence of alcohol might make. After a prolonged session of what must have looked like the easiest step exercises ever, I managed to get two identical readings indicating that I had lost 3lbs. I hastily stepped off the scales and put them away before they changed their mind.

This is the third time in four years that I've done Dry January. I didn't do it last year because I

was worried that I might be developing a habit. It's been much easier this year in that I know what to expect, know I can do it and there is altogether less drama about the whole affair. I think I do it mostly to prove to myself that I'm still in charge, thus giving myself permission to drink again for eleven months of the year. I've never felt for one minute that I was in danger of becoming dependent on drink but I do have an alcoholic gene in me so I'm always aware that the potential is there given the right circumstances. Besides it's nice

to spend a month sleeping like a log, eating like a horse and waking up every morning feeling as fresh as a daisy. If you've never tried it maybe you should give it a go next year and find out what it's like to experience a variety of life forms other than your own.

**Wet and dry January
and preventing a
drowning!**



That's a full canal

Boats don't travel around in the dark that much, not on the canal system anyway. That's why I was a bit surprised to hear the now familiar sound of a diesel engine and to see somebody manoeuvring their boat around the marina early

on New Year's Eve. It was about 4.30pm, already dark and raining, so the idea that somebody might be going out for a pleasure cruise seemed unlikely. It turned out our new neighbours were arriving, later than expected, having been severely delayed by a lack of water in some of the locks they'd had to negotiate. We had only just landed ourselves and as I brought the last of our boxes on board I thought I could hear raised voices. I told Gill I would just pop out to see if they needed any help mooring up but as I stepped outside I was greeted by the

screams of a terrified women up to her shoulders in the water and clinging desperately to the end of our jetty. I'll never forget that sound, it was the sound of pure fear. Not so much the fear of drowning, but the fear of being crushed by fifteen tons of steel narrow boat piloted by her husband who had no idea she had fallen in.

By now Gill was on the scene too but we realised there was no possibility of lifting her out. The jetty is narrow and slippery, as she had found out to her peril, and even a small person weighed

down by soaking winter clothing is impossibly heavy to lift in such circumstances. Thank goodness her husband had realised the danger by now and was backing away. That's when Gill realised that the poor woman was attached to the boat by a rope around her waist and somehow we managed to untangle it just in time. We eventually calmed her down enough to convince her that she was able to stand on the bottom of the marina and then walked her to the bank where there were plenty of helping hands appearing on the scene. Somebody produced a ladder and she was

finally able to escape the freezing water to the safety of our boat.

We expected to start New Year's Eve off surrounded by more of our possessions, and wondering, once more, where on earth we were going to store everything. The addition of a very frightened, wet and extremely cold semi-naked stranger had never been part of the plan. I am very happy to report that there was no lasting damage, as far as we can tell, and our new friend Beth and her very relieved husband made it to the party to see in the

New Year a few hours later.

The party was an unsophisticated affair held in the marina offices that are currently under refurbishment, meaning, it's just an empty building. Consequently it was a bring a bottle, chair, crockery, food and glass party and was all the better for it. It was another opportunity to get to know a few more of our fellow marina dwellers but also a great illustration of what a resourceful and down-to-earth lot they are. The food was magnificent, the drink copious and the laughter

unbridled. And so started Dry
January.

What was a daunting test of
willpower and abstinence has now,
in its third year, become more of
an annual institution for me.

Rather than fret and worry about
whether or not I would be able to
resist the temptation of the
considerable amount of alcohol we
have on the boat I was more amused
by the irony of the situation. I
was constantly reminded of the Dry
January tradition on social media
as I sat on the boat drinking my
tea and listening to the

torrential rain beating down on the roof. Then to top it all we woke up this morning to the news that the lower of the two marina car parks was under two feet of water.



Tanker putting the water back where it
belongs

It seemed that the heavy rain and
Spring tides had raised the level
of the canal above tipping point
and the car park contained the
overspill. Dry January indeed.

One thing is for sure; I don't
think our new life will be boring.



Looking to the source of that Spring
tide

Count down to what?

Somebody asked me yesterday if I

was now counting down since I am more than half way through giving up alcohol for the month of January. (#Dryjanuary as it has become known.) I think I said that I was, in a way. I have since had time to reflect on the question and I realise that it's a little ambiguous. The real question should be; "are you counting down to the moment that you can have an alcoholic drink?" and my answer to that question would actually be, "no I'm not".

As this month has gone on I have begun to understand that what is

driving me is not going without a drink each day but the bigger picture of the challenge. The goal is to go for a whole month without a drink and to be able to reflect on that and say that I did it. It really doesn't matter whether I have a drink on the 1st of February or not. Whether I get plastered on that day or have a civilized couple of glasses of wine with my Sunday roast. Nor does it matter whether I go on to drink every day or just occasionally after the challenge is over. Well yes it does matter, but it's not part of this

challenge.

Dryjanuary for me is like climbing a set of thirty-one steps. At the top of the landing is a whole heap of prizes. There is the right to brag that I did it. A month of sleeping like a baby. A bundle of money that can be spent on other things. A general feeling of well-being and alertness. And the biggest one of all, the satisfaction of knowing that I am more of an habitual drinker than an alcoholic. The steps themselves aren't important. I don't see gallons of beer or wine waiting

for me at the top. I see a goal. A finishing line at the end of a gruelling race. The peak of a mountain that has taken a massive effort to ascend. It's all about achievement for me. (For anybody reading this that has had a relapse during this challenge just see it as staying on the same step for a day or two. You are climbing those stairs again the very next day you go without a drink.)

So yes I am counting down, but not to a drink. I'm counting down to a victory. The successful accomplishment of a challenge. A

challenge that I have shied away from many times in the past and this will make the victory all the sweeter. As sweet, shall we say, as a glass of red wine with a roast beef dinner.



Victory!

Addict or habit:

#Dryjanuary

There is surprisingly little difference between habit and addict according to the dictionary definitions. They both involve repetitive behavior and they can both be hard to break. Addict tends only to be used in connection with substances that are regarded by society as harmful. Hard drugs, alcohol, sugar etc. Habits on the other hand can be as innocent as reading on the toilet or always watching

the news at 6pm. So, addict bad, habit not so bad in short. I think this partly explains why I have always been worried that I might be addicted to alcohol rather than being an habitual drinker. Not the same at all is it? Also, addicts really only have two options; drink yourself to death or never drink again. Maybe a bit simplistic I know but I have known quite a few people who have been addicted to drink and they are all either dead or permanently dry so the evidence suggests to me that maybe it is quite simple. That is why I have always been terrified

of the idea of being an addict. Being an addict surely means choosing between total abstinence or a battle that never ends, a living hell.

I have always told myself that my drinking was a habit and not an addiction but that hasn't meant that there hasn't been an element of doubt in my mind. What if I'm wrong? What if it turns out that I am addicted and it's only a matter of time before I lose control and am forced to succumb to a slow and miserable alcohol related death or give up drink completely for the

rest of my days. I've never sought out a cork screw or a bottle opener before the kettle in the morning but who says that will always be the case. It's easy to see why having a habit is more appealing than being an addict.

Today is day eleven of the thirty one day Dry January challenge so I am approximately a third of the way through the experiment. I don't want to tempt fate at this juncture but I am quietly confident that what I have uncovered is a habit rather than an addiction. I am starting to get

some distance and perspective on my old habits and to understand why I drink more than I possibly should do. It turns out to be largely down to boredom. I haven't really craved a drink at all over the past week and a half but I have realised that half the time when I open a bottle of wine or beer it's because it's easier than finding something more interesting to do. Alcohol seems to possess the amazing ability to turn the prospect of an evening of mediocre television into a perfectly acceptable way of relaxing for example. Which is fine now and

again, just maybe not five or six nights a week. That's where the habit comes in. It's just so easy to slip into habitual behavior and that's what dry January has revealed to me. It's made me realise that alcohol is great as an accompaniment to a roast beef dinner or a social night in the pub but when you use it to turn something rubbish into something acceptable it's a bad habit that is in danger of one day becoming an addiction. If ever there was an argument for keeping life interesting this may be one of the best.

If you have five minutes to spare
listen to this TED talk on 30 day
challenges, it's interesting.