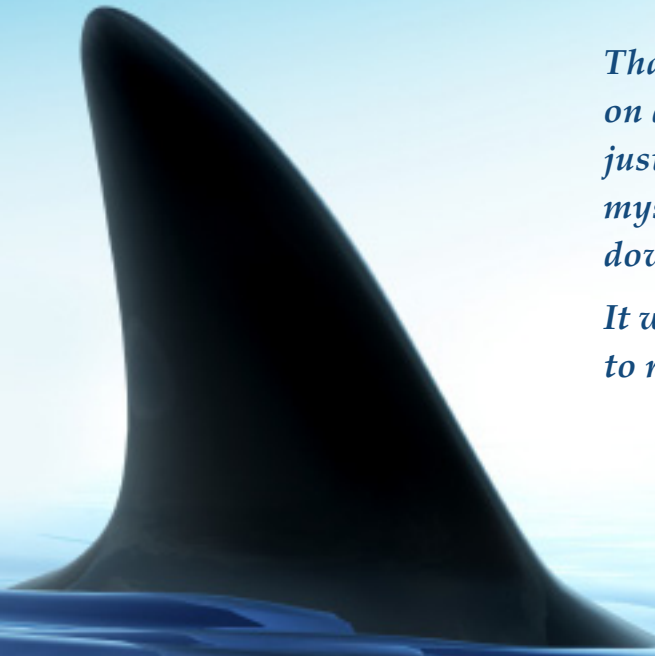


Dangerously Close to Relapse

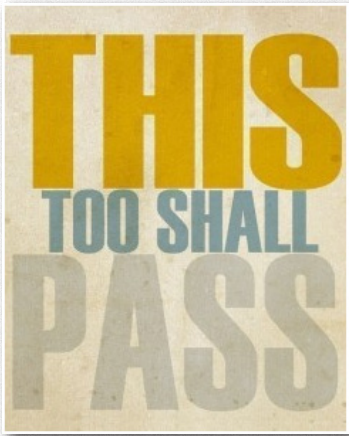


That moment you look back on and think, "What the hell just happened? How could I let myself even THINK of going down that road?"

It was the closest I've ever been to relapse. But I'm still sober.

A Recovery Systems Institute
"Tool for Recovery"
by Sober Chrystal

Dangerously Close to Relapse



Last week it presented itself; that moment you look back on and think, “What the hell just happened? How could I let myself even THINK of going down that road? Who AM I?” It was the closest I’ve ever been to relapse. But I’m still sober.

The Moment

It seems surreal to me as I replay the scenario backward and forward in my head. I wasn’t in any particular mood and I hadn’t had a bad day. I have been living a joyful structured life with a fairly simple routine.

I was getting ready for dinner on a work night at home with my husband, kid and two dogs. As I poured a glass of wine for my husband I had a light-bulb-moment.

“Wait a tick, I think I could handle a glass of wine,” said my suddenly inspired and delusional mind.

I was so very hopeful and optimistic that this revelation could work; I actually started trying to convince my husband of it OUT LOUD!

I had freaking butterflies of nervousness and excitement as I tried to exploit his perceived ignorance, to get him to buy-in. Did I truly believe I could do it in that moment? Well, I had a heaping bag of hope that I could “handle” it, so it was worth a shot, wasn’t it?

“You know you would regret it,” is all he had to say.

BAM!

Reality reasserted itself and there I was, my bubble burst and ego bruised.

Dangerously Close to Relapse

Having experienced and exposed such an irrational, crazy train of thought made me feel so foolish and unsteady – oddly, like **I hadn't been the one in the driver's seat for those fleeting moments.**

*I've since realized that ridiculous and scary moment is now **just a story**. It's SO last week! It has absolutely **no power over me**, as long as I don't let it. I'm still shaking my head in shock and bewilderment, though, so in the interest of transparency and further understanding I'm "writing it out."*

What I Think I Know

We recovering alcoholics most certainly are not doomed; we have the power to make healthy choices for ourselves. I do think it's important to be aware of the forces we're up against however, so we can proactively arm ourselves for any future episodes that may slap us in the face.

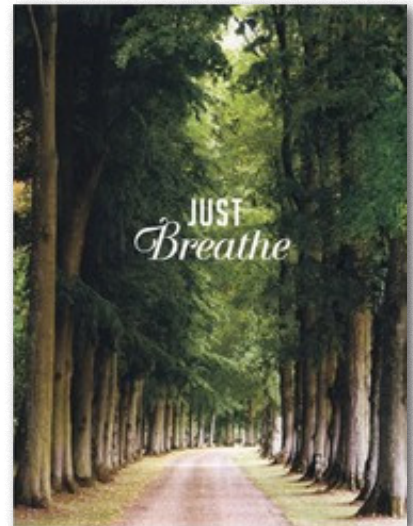
Stress

Science has taught us that stress is a common trigger for relapse. Stress isn't all bad; it helps us to achieve goals and alerts us of when it's necessary to make changes in our lives.

I thought I had been managing my "bad" stress well, until I wrote down a list of a few of my current stressors. Duh!

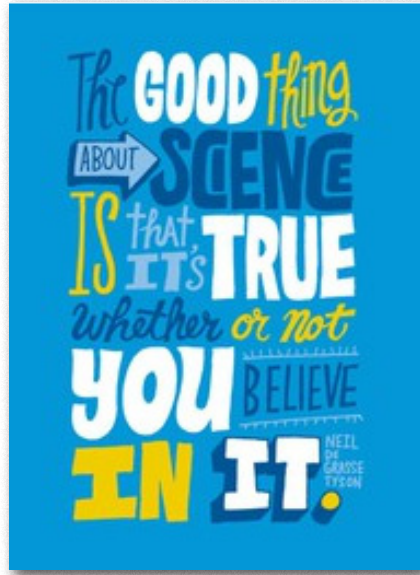
I think managing stress is somewhat illusory, anyway. Life will always be stressful. I don't care who you are, attempting to achieve balance 100% of the time is virtually impossible and unrealistic if you ask me.

Relaxation is just another tool we can throw into our ammunition belts! We're never "too busy", it's all about priorities. This should be at the top of everyone's list.



Just slow down and breathe.

Dangerously Close to Relapse



The Brain

Science also tells us that alcoholism is not a psychological disorder, a spiritual illness, weak will or character defect.

Even though it affects seemingly all areas of your life, it is a **brain disease**. Over time, continuous use has changed my brain structure and function.

Alcohol will always be on the “good list” inside of the “rewards center” in my brain; it has saved a permanent spot for my dear friend, booze.

I can do the hard work to reprioritize and fill this rewards center with healthy, rewarding acts and things, but as science has proven, the memory of the pleasurable effects of alcohol has been engraved in my brain and therefore it **will** attempt to trick me.

No matter how intelligent I think I am, or how life-or-death the decision to drink may be for me, I'm always going to be working against this tricky shit.

I dumbed this down to the point that I've amazed myself; if you'd like to know more about the alcoholic brain you should Google it. There's fascinating information out there and they're learning more and more every day.

Dangerously Close to Relapse

Keep Moving Forward

Don't assume you're ever "safe," no matter how focused you may be. Also, it's one thing **STAYING** sober, but only through personal growth, will you be successful in **LIVING** sober. You want to **LIVE**, don't you?

Be loving

Be patient

Be tough

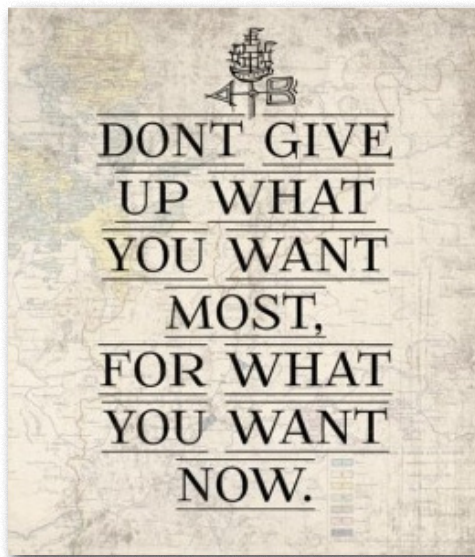
Be ~~BOU~~

Be kind

Be thankful

There is always something to be thankful for. Happiness is the experience of living every moment with love and gratitude; **it cannot be traveled to, owned, worn, consumed or earned.** It just is.

Be prepared to protect your happiness and sobriety. Keep moving forward, be in this moment and take it one day at a time. Living sober is just living.



Dangerously Close to Relapse

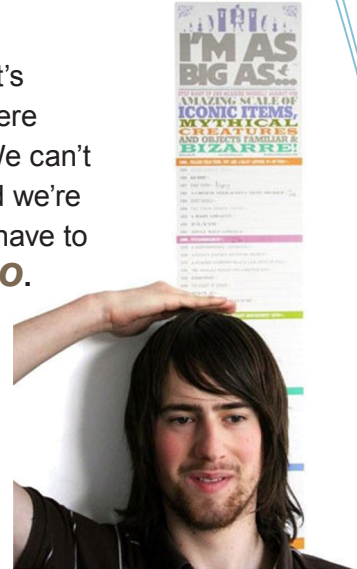
Grow Up

In order to be all we can be we need to join the army. Just kidding, we need to start by growing up a little bit.

Most of **us alcoholics** feel some degree of shame – it's damn near unavoidable – especially in our society where there is still so much stigma attached to alcoholism. We can't control what anyone thinks about a given situation and we're not ever going to be aware of the half of it, so we just have to let it go; not "learn to let it go", just *let the shit go*.

Life is too precious to let such an icky emotion fester when the shame affects nothing but our own beating hearts. In addition to the shame we often *torture ourselves* with, are a number of psychological immaturities we must recognize and work through.

Most of us started drinking in our teens or early twenties, when the frontal lobes of our brains were still maturing – responsible for our reasoning and problem solving capabilities. This is a huge one, people... I don't know that many people realize this. Be accountable and apply the principles of logic to given situations.

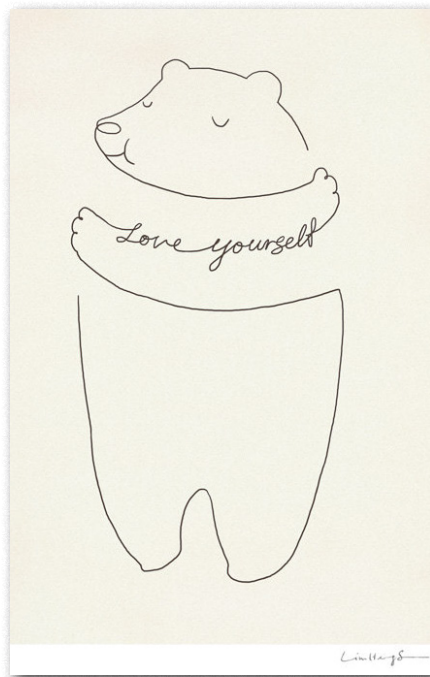


Self-talk

If I had a friend who spoke to me the way that I speak to myself, I would have said, "good bye forever, you evil bitch" in an instant. I might have even pulled her hair out and poked her eyeballs a few times, but that's just the angry drunk in me.

It's ridiculous how vicious I am to my own self when I consider how truly amazing I am.

Dangerously Close to Relapse



It has been a lot of work, but very rewarding as I am learning to recognize the **bullshit things I say to myself** about my worth on a damn near moment to moment basis. And then replacing every destructive thought or emotion with an opposing, positive one that's more powerful.

Start listening to your thoughts.

If you take a few steps back and dissect your reactions to things, they'll most likely come back to a few key "truths" we subconsciously tell ourselves.

My resonating theme seems to be that *I'm not good enough*. It breaks my heart to admit this to the world, but I have to in order to work it out.

It can be a moment as simple as catching someone's eye at the grocery store.

I instantly get irritated.

What's behind the irritation is insecurity – I assume they must be thinking that I look tired, or my hair is freakishly long, or I'm just plain ugly; *I'm not good enough*.

Once I walk through this in my head I replace the thought with:

"I AM good enough. I am beautiful in my own way."

(or whatever makes sense for the instance.)

I don't believe it a lot of the time, but practice makes perfect, right?

Dangerously Close to Relapse

It's really disappointing when my husband has to tell me how immature I'm being sometimes. Not everything is about me, but I sure do react that way more often than I'd like to.

The person I made eye contact with could have been thinking about a joke they were told, wondering what to make for dinner, or trying to decide whether they should fart or go to the bathroom.

No matter what, feeling the need to be defensive is certainly in my control. I've learned to recognize that when I'm defensive or angry, **it's usually because I'm being irrational.**

Slow down and walk through it, however exhausting this may be! This will also help me to think before I speak, which is SO important – Is it necessary? Is it kind? Is it true? Will it hurt anyone?

I sometimes try to accept that I'm one of those people who just sticks their foot in their mouth on a regular basis, but it doesn't have to be that way. **My self-talk controls the way I feel and act.**



Attitude

A bad attitude is like a flat tire, you can't get very far until you change it. My mom used to always say, "Bite yourself and get it over with." If you're feeling icky, just suck it up and stop. Realize the positive in every situation, everything and every person. The power of your thoughts can open any door.

Dangerously Close to Relapse

**BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF.**

Be You

With all of the social conditioning out there, it's easy to forget that this is MY life and I don't need to do what everyone else is doing. I will never fully believe in myself if I compare myself to everyone else. Instead,

I'll compare myself to who I was yesterday.

It may be easier for most recovering alcoholics to NOT be around alcohol, have it in the house or pour it for someone, but avoiding it like the plague won't work for me. This "all or nothing" girl now has shades of gray! Woo hoo!

There's no rule book when it comes to recovery and my decisions are just that, mine. I want to be able to function on my own in the society we live in now, without trying to change anyone or anything. I'm certainly strong enough to do so.

You may think I'm silly for wanting to be able to pour someone's drink, but I don't really give a shit what you think. How do you like them apples?!

I'm excited to report that my husband has recently come to understand that all I really wanted was for him to acknowledge how inappropriate it was to assume I'd be okay to serve alcohol.

Now that my feelings have been validated, respected and better understood, I feel free to make my own decisions about it. **Now it doesn't feel like a compromise to pour him a glass of wine.**



Dangerously Close to Relapse

~~I should be clean,~~ I AM still hot or cold about putting my hands on an alcoholic beverage at any given moment. One moment I can't stand to be near it, and the next I'm enjoying a good sniff.

It's the respect and understanding I now have that gives me this freedom to choose, though. Naturally, my hubby thinks I've lost my marbles, but I don't care! I reserve the right to be bat-shit crazy; I think I've earned it.

Remember that no matter how much progress you make there will always be people who insist that whatever you're trying to do is impossible – and these people are a waste of your time.



Do what you want to do because other peoples' boundaries are not your own.

No matter how much work I put into this on a daily basis, nor how proud I am at times to be so different, there may always be a part of me that comes from deep inside that just wants to fit in and be "normal." I think that's a human instinct, but I believe that the more I accept me for me this urge will dwindle.

The more proud I become of **my choices**, the less others' opinions about them will matter.

Don't ever judge yourself through someone else's eyes.

Dangerously Close to Relapse

Be Nice

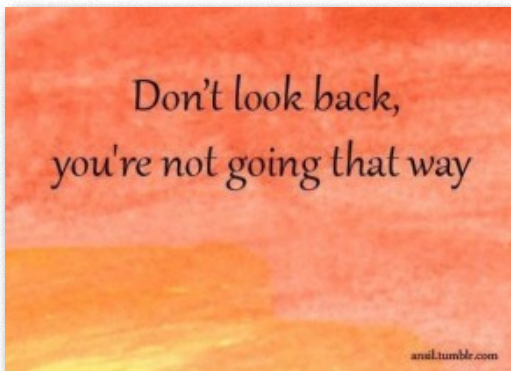
I've always been under the impression, if you're nice to me I'll be nice to you, but that's kind of lame. There have been a few times lately that people have come off a little rude to me, but I've given them the benefit of the doubt and have actually responded MATURELY by STILL being nice. I do believe I helped to turn their days around because of it!

- ★ *Smile at people.*
- ★ *Say hello to strangers, ask how they are doing.*
- ★ *Listen, help, be courteous, be humble and be sincere.*

Forget about the mean people, it doesn't matter why they're mean, they have a long way to go and they'll only bring you down.

Be Present

For me, being present means letting the past and future be. Some forces are simply out of our control, but our attitude is what affects our overall potential.



Anticipating or stressing over something that could happen is such a waste of the present. My scenario driven anxiety sets me back on a regular basis still, but when I concentrate, stop, breathe and let go, it's a powerful and uplifting feeling.

I'm not proud of many things I've said and done, but that's okay. The past can't be erased or changed; only my attitude about it can be.

I am not my mistakes and I have learned from them all. There may be a few people I will eventually apologize to, but for the rest of it all, I'm now banking on the fact that **the past is never where I left it, so move on!**

Dangerously Close to Relapse

Be Prepared

It all comes down to being prepared. No matter where you are on your journey, always be prepared for the unexpected. I wasn't prepared to ever be in the position where I'd consider taking another drink, because I thought I was better than that.

I've considered myself pretty savvy, having saved a collection of inspiring quotes in my phone, but in the midst of that sudden impulse was I really going to have the gumption to go searching for some positive affirmations?

Negative, Ghost rider.

To be prepared, we must be proactive. I might be special, but I'm not invincible or superior on any level. I'm just as susceptible to relapse as anyone else out there. I can't tell you how huge of a revelation this has been for me. **Relapse can happen to anyone. Anyone.**

Aside from the growing up I have to do, I have determined that in order to be better prepared for something like this in the future, I must carry something meaningful to me on my person, at all times; something that supports and celebrates my sobriety. A symbol—representing my life, why I want to be here, where I want to be, and the struggles I've overcome—will “hold the power” for me.

I have an AA coin in mind – I endured an AA meeting just so I could get my 9 month coin. I will make it into a necklace or bracelet. A tattoo would be easier, but that's *not* my style – would you put a bumper sticker on a Ferrari?! 😊

Now that I've determined how I will best be prepared for a future slap in the face like this, **I'm not afraid**, like I was a few days ago. I strongly suggest having something like this for all of my friends who are in recovery out there, if you don't already. **This challenge will likely always exist for us** – carry a physical reminder with you everywhere.

IF YOU DO
WHAT YOU'VE
ALWAYS DONE
YOU'LL GET
WHAT YOU'VE
ALWAYS GOTTEN

ANTHONY MULLER

That's
“anyone.”
As in,
“ANYONE”



Dangerously Close to Relapse

Everyone is Susceptible to Relapse

It used to just blow me away that my dad would relapse, especially after going through treatment and basically having everything to lose. **Now I get it.**

This is monumental, people. I wasn't even going down a slippery slope; I was high on the mountaintop, enjoying the view when this unexpectedness occurred. I was lucky to have my husband right there as my voice of reason, but what if I had been alone? **Now I get it.**

It's not about *weakness*.

It's not about **willpower**.

It's not about **focus**.

It's not about **SUPPORT**.

It's not about **intelligence**.

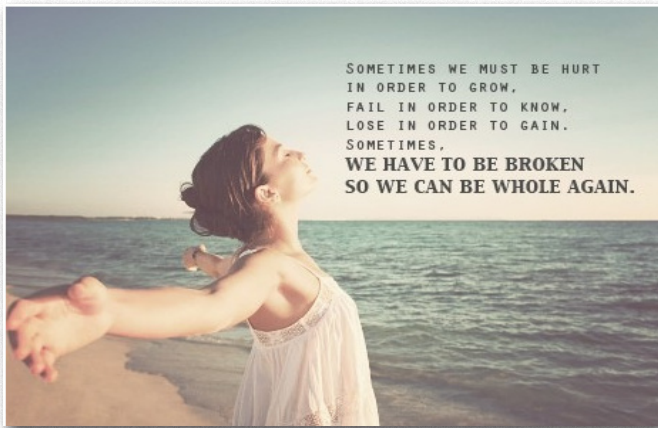
It's not about **love**.

It's about YOU having the right tools to help you make the right decisions. It's about taking care of you, being a good person and continuously growing.

It's about having that physical reminder handy to ward off those demons! The difference between who you are and who you want to be is **what you do**.

**BE PREPARED
AND BE AMAZING.**

Dangerously Close to Relapse



About the Author

SoberChrystal has been sober for over five years. She has kindly allowed Recovery Systems Institute to reprint this from her blog "SoberChrystal" at soberchrystal.com. You can also follow her on Twitter as [@SoberChrystal](https://twitter.com/SoberChrystal).



About Tools for Recovery

The "Tools for Recovery" series of articles and resources for people in recovery (and their families and friends) can be found online on the Recovery Systems Institute website at www.recoverysi.com. You can use our library search engine to search on "[Tools for Recovery](#)."

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Them apples <http://blog.fooducate.com/>

Never sacrifice who you are just because someone has a problem with it - <http://www.quotepictures.net/never-sacrifice-who-you-are-just-because-someone-has-a-problem-with-it-2/>

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