

Reading Time: 9 minutes

Sunday evening, 9:47PM I get a phone call from my friend. At least I thought it was. I always answered the phone to him in a non-standard way, and this time I answered the phone in German: "Guten Abend, das ist Wil".

It wasn't my friend, but his father. He called to tell me that his son had died from a seizure. A week beforehand my friend had texted me to tell him that he had a seizure at his parents house and was feeling like shit. Because he had some tests upcoming, he thought he wouldn't need to go to hospital as besides, they wouldn't think about that but something else instead.

On Saturday evening, 25 hours before I got the call from his dad, the guy called me himself. He called me a couple of times in the hours before this, but I was busy earlier on in the evening and had to let him know I couldn't talk there and then, and I asked him what was up. The response was short 'Not good'. When I answered his this call the third time of asking, he told me that he was being driven to the hospital near where I lived, and if I could come help him out. I was on my way home, but made sure the dogs could go for their night time toilet break, got their Dentastix, and with a fresh packet of cigarettes jumped on the same bus in the opposite direction.

When I got to the Urgent Treatment Centre, I knew he was in a bad way. He couldn't make it from the car in to register himself, but a paramedic popped him in a wheelchair and did the paperwork, giving him a sick tube at the same time. In the space of 10 minutes, it was full. Thankfully, for a Saturday Night, triage was quick, and we actually saw a doctor within about 50 minutes.

We had an honest relationship. I have struggled with alcohol a ton in my past, and used it as a form of self harm, on more than one occasion to never wake up. He had similar issues for similar reasons, and after his seizure and not being able to feel his arm properly (Plus weakness through not being able to eat), he essentially said 'fuck it' and tried to drink himself to death. It didn't work, but with the level of vodka he consumed in the space of 36 hours, there's going to be some side effects. The effects of a binge and withdrawing can be similar, especially for people with chronic liver damage, and the treatment can often be the same. IV Drip, Pabrinex, Librium to try and mitigate the worst of the side effects. These can include shaking, convulsions, dry mouth, inability to swallow or hold down liquids, and seizures.

For many of us, alcohol and mental health go hand in hand. Alcohol is almost a sedative in its qualities, and for some (Me included), can slow the brain down from 3457 miles an hour to something more normal. Of course, the same way that you can become addicted to pain meds, cigarettes, drugs, heck even sugar, the same is true for alcohol.

You could argue that alcohol is the second most addictive legal substance after sugar. Even more concerning is whilst we have a sugar tax and anti-obesity drives, any, and I mean almost **any** special occasion will see the isles of your local supermarket rammed with special offers. In 2022, I heard a total of SIXTEEN alcohol promotion commercials in a row at ASDA. There wasn't music in between,

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this was a constant loop. You can only buy two packets of painkillers at a time, but you can buy ten bottles of spirits without anyone raising any objection; so long as you're over 18 (And legally, not drunk at the point of purchase).

There are some who see alcoholism as a lifestyle choice, some who see it as a genetic disease, an allergy and everything in between. What it is is a substance that can kill you 500x quicker than cigarettes, but the latter are kept behind a cupboard door in plain packaging. You can get a stop smoking referral in 48 hours, but NHS medical support to stop drinking is severely underfunded and always on a delay. Not always useful when people hit rock bottom and need help **now** as they aren't drinking because they enjoy it, but they want to just give up and in many cases not even wake up again.

Fun fact: Just stopping drinking, especially after a medium - long time drinking constantly is more dangerous than weaning off. It's why people waiting for detox are told to slow down and reduce things slowly, and why groups like AA only require a **DESIRE** to stop drinking, not a requirement to be sober. One of the main causes of deaths in people going through withdrawals, seizures. I'm not a doctor so don't know exactly why, but I assume it's because the body is so dependent on that substance, that it simply cannot function without it.

I had to go home about 1:30AM to ensure the dogs and cats were tucked in bed, had water etc. I told the nurses to call me before anything, as he was too scared to contact his parents. I woke up on Sunday Morning, and made my way back to the hospital via a quick detour to Greggs to get breakfast. As the hospital canteen isn't open on weekends, it seems as though everyone visiting someone was there at the same time as me; visiting starts at 11AM, they stop selling breakfast at 11AM. Go figure.

I called to try and work out where he was. He was in a cubicle, but not sure exactly where. Reception would only give me so much info as I wasn't his next of kin, but thankfully saw the note from the Triage nurse. I get into see him just as he was being told he was being discharged. He was calling me at the time I was heading to him, so have the last part of the conversation on voicemail. It was sad to listen to again. He was what they classify as MFD: Medically fit for discharge. He was still shaking, still had memory issues and the like, but A&E don't do detoxes, and the duty mental health nurse wasn't convinced that he was an immediate danger to himself, despite me explaining overnight how he was telling me that he didn't want to live 'that way', or live [period] anymore.

That's not a slight at A&E. They have a responsibility to think about bedspaces, need and requirements. People who exit A&E are never 'well', but patched up to be at least stable. You don't go in with a broken arm and come out with it healed; you come out with it mitigated as best you can. Everything else has to be done as an outpatient unless it was so serious that you have to be admitted. I know, I've been through those doors enough time trying to end it all.

Our last conversation in person was sat outside the main hospital smoking. I remember telling him that if he still felt ill, to go to New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton, which is closer to where he lived to be closer to work during the week. He was worried that his housemate wouldn't be there in case anything happened, but he wanted to go back to Wolverhampton as he didn't want to ruin his parent's Sunday. He said as I was helping him get dressed that knowing him he'd feel so shit that he'd want to just go to the Off Licence. I told him to call me before he did that. I had things planned

that day, but you know something's important if someone calls more than twice in a row.

The last time I saw him was getting into an UBER. About three hours later, I got a text that his bank card had been stolen / cloned, and people had gone on a shopping spree, basically clearing out his card. On one hand the cynic could argue that at least this way he couldn't do his Off License plan, but likewise, what if he needed to go to hospital again, either in an emergency / for the outpatients appointments he had that week. I text him asking if he needed any help with the Fraud team as I myself had this issue back in August of last year. I never heard back.

I don't know if he was alone when he passed, but regardless, a seizure is a horrible way to go. My biggest regret was not pushing for him to have a CT scan after having a seizure a week prior and him feeling similar to how he was before that a week prior, but hospital equipment has it's own wait times, even in A&E. Would it have helped? I have no idea, as I'm still not a doctor! But *maybe* it may have shown something. We'll never know.

When someone truly hit's rock bottom, it's not what you think. It's like dragging a couple of old school suitcases in either hand, with a burgan topped up to the brim on your back, down a dark tunnel not knowing just how much further it is to the light. There becomes a point where alcohol will fuck up your body so much that there will be irreversible physical and neurological damage. I know, I was that close to it. So often, as we're trudging along in this pit, we reject any form of help until it's too late. Pushing people away, falling into oneself, and losing any semblance of who we were. I know, it happened to me. Sometimes that cry for help is in time. Sometimes it's not. Sometimes someone or something decides that It's time to end the misery, for better or worse.

This guy and I initially bonded over Linkin Park. As I finish typing this, The Catalyst came on my Homepod. The lyrics sums up this situation perfectly:

God, bless us everyone

We're a broken people living under loaded gun

And it can't be outfought

It can't be outdone

It can't be outmatched

It can't be outrun, no!

I'm gonna miss this guy. We often find hope in each other's struggles, and befriending him certainly helped me. When people are at their lowest, they don't always need a lecture, being abandoned / ignored, they just need someone to hear them speak. It's not the words that matter, but the way they are said. The urgency, the pain, the complete hopelessness. Listening can be a powerful thing, sometimes better than any treatment or pill.

If you know someone struggling, be it with depression, substance misuse, addiction, hopelessness, anything. Sometimes being an open door is all they need. They may not take it immediately, but if you don't put a time limit on that door closing, sometimes at the most obscure of times, they may open up. We may not have the answers, but level headed advice, signposting or even just listening can make a world of difference.

If you are struggling, make that phone call. If it doesn't help, make another. If you have to, 116 123. If you really have to, 999. There will always be someone there if you really need it. It's not something to be ashamed of, and you don't need to do it alone. I always say the best conversations I have are with a cigarette. I always know when someone **needs** a cigarette. They don't want to smoke, they're trying with everything they have to have someone's ear. No one deserves to die alone.

Godspeed Luke. I hope you get to meet Chester on the other side, and are now at peace. You've been a great friend, and I won't forget you.

Until we meet again, because goodbye is always so final.