

Solo-ish

# I got sober for myself. Then I found love on Tinder.

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By Caroline Williams June 29

A loud knock on the door woke me up. My eyes opened slightly. They were swollen from the previous night's pitiful party of tears, cheese pizza and secretive chugs of vodka.

I knew what was happening as soon as I opened the door. My mom walked in, trailed by my best friend, Olivia, and an old man looking at me intently. "Caroline, this is Bruce," my mother said. "He's here with us because we want to help you."

Fast-forward one month, and I'm sitting in a room with a dozen other women introducing myself as an alcoholic. It was hard not to roll my eyes every time I said it.

This was the summer of 2014. I was one year out of college. I had just lost one of my best friends in a car accident, and I was pitiful. I moved to Chicago to start my "adult" life, but had reverted into an entitled, insecure 14-year-old. I left a string of faux-relationships and drunken hookups in my wake.

While in treatment, I wasn't allowed to drink. After everything that happened, I wasn't tempted either. A real drunk wouldn't be able to give up alcohol this easily, I told myself. I would prove that I wasn't an alcoholic by getting sober overnight.

Then the funniest thing happened. Instead of proving to everyone that I wasn't an alcoholic, I proved to myself that I was.

While I was in outpatient treatment, I was casually dating a man I had known for a while. He was nice to me, and he was supportive of my efforts to get sober. Pretty quickly, though, nice wasn't enough. Buying me dinner and an Uber home did not a relationship make. I was getting to know myself — the real me, without alcohol or self-pity —

and I adored her. I wanted a guy who adored her, too, and not just at night when it was dark and he was bored. For the first time in my life, I decided I deserved more — and I walked away.

When you get sober, every day feels like a first date with yourself. When I stopped drinking myself into thinking that certain things are fun and certain people are interesting, I was left figuring things out all over again. I asked myself: What are my real interests? How do I spend my free time? What are my hopes and dreams?

I got a completely fresh start, with a new job and my first solo apartment. I started running, and my new happy hour was spent doing laps around Lincoln Park in Chicago. It turns out that replacing wine with exercise does wonders for your figure and your self-confidence. Most important, I stayed sober. Every day, I felt more clear-headed, more beautiful and more myself. I set my eyes on my first big sober goal: completing my first half-marathon.

I didn't think sobriety would be easy. However, I had an overwhelming feeling that if I could train and complete this race, I'd prove to myself that if I can set goals and achieve them, I could do anything I wanted.

Jeremy asked me out for drinks on Saturday night, the same day as the half-marathon. I told him that I didn't drink, and he didn't miss a beat when he said we could get snacks instead.

On Saturday, I broke my two-hour goal by four minutes, finishing the 13.1 miles with a huge grin on my face. I floated through the rest of the day feeling like Wonder Woman, until I wound up face-first in bed by 6 p.m. I snoozed through Jeremy's "So, are we still on for tonight?" message.

I rescheduled our first date when I woke up. I'm not a religious woman, but my relationship with Jeremy has made me believe in *something*. He came into my life when I was independent, comfortable in my own skin, and truly

open to love for the first time. Yes, I slept through our first date, but that was only because for the first time, I was content. I wasn't desperate to find someone; the prospect of being alone sounded just fine.

People always ask where we met. I wish I could offer a cute story about bumping into each other at a rom-com location like a bookstore or a coffee shop — but we met on Tinder. The only thing that really matters is that we met at a time when I knew what I wanted and what I deserved.

I hate when people tell single people to stop looking, and that's when they'll find someone. I say: Look all you want. Look on dating websites, look on the subway, look at work; look while you grocery-shop. Don't look, however, until you love yourself a whole a lot.

I consider myself extremely lucky that I needed to get sober, because I was forced to reevaluate all my choices and my relationships. I cut out anything — and anyone — that wasn't helping me grow. I had to get to know myself in a way that wasn't always fun. But it was definitely worth it.

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