

An Uncommon Drunk: Revelations of a High-Functioning Alcoholic

Jeff Herten, MD

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Reviewed by Paige Lovitt for Reader Views (11/06)

The author, Dr. Jeff Herten, writes “An Uncommon Drunk” from two main perspectives. The first is based upon his own experience as a functioning alcoholic. The second is based upon his experience and knowledge as a medical doctor. The amount of medical information that he provides about the damage that alcohol causes to our bodies is incredible. I have a Master of Science degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and I learned more in this book about the physiologically damaging effects of alcohol than I did during my entire program. The alcohol industry does a lot to make alcohol appear benign, but really it is a dangerous poison for our bodies.

His experience as a functioning alcoholic is scary. He indicates that there are a lot more functioning alcoholics operating in our community than we realize. These people might be medical doctors or corporate leaders. They are in positions that put us at risk. He also notes that a functioning alcoholic can easily switch into a non-functioning alcoholic role. I personally witnessed this when the President of a community hospital system in central California made the transition from being an administrator into being a homeless vagrant.

In addition to sharing his own personal experience with alcoholism, Herten also writes about other peoples’ experiences. It is really sad how many lives have been damaged and destroyed from addiction to this substance. Alcoholism doesn’t just affect the abuser’s life, but also the lives of those around him. These people include spouses, children, employees, and innocent bystanders. It is really an insidious problem.

The information that I gained from reading this book really opened my eyes about an intervention that I needed to do with a functioning alcoholic that is close to me. If I carry this knowledge in me, and don’t tell this person what I learned about the health problems that he has coming his way, then I continue to enable him. At 4:30am, after I caught him finishing up a Bloody Mary, I started talking about how his health problems and weight problems are being contributed to by the incredible amount of alcohol that he is consuming. Unfortunately, the response that I got was a question about what alcohol has fewer calories. I will keep referring to this book for more information to help me wake him up. He needs to realize that if you are grossly obese and can see your liver, you have a problem.

“An Uncommon Drunk” should be read by alcoholics, their families, substance abuse counselors, doctors, future parents, and students. I can’t imagine anyone that would not benefit from this book, except cultures that do not drink. A person in denial would definitely have a harder time staying in denial after reading this story. A functioning alcoholic is a person that drinks frequently, yet still seems to have a good life. It is easier for functioning alcoholics to be in denial, than non-functioning alcoholics. After they read this book, it won’t be so easy.