

## 686.

It was rainy season, at the time I was there. I had booked myself into a fancy spa hotel, while I could afford it before heading on to Australia. I had never heard anything like it before, the thunderous booms of rainfall outside on the balcony, the rice paddies over flowing into the next, down the hill, to the bottom murky brown river.

I had locked myself inside, my head banging and my body sticky from the late afternoon heat, I switched the air con on and felt the cool blast sting my cheeks, damp from hauling my backpack up the stairs. Knowing an ice cold Bintang was on the way from room service, I had ordered four hoping they would think I was sharing my room. This was my breaking point, I didn't know, until I looked at myself in the mirror.

It all started as a teenager, low self-esteem, like everyone else at that age I suppose. My two best friends were tall, pretty and thin. Attractive, is not a word you would have associated with me. I was the little, chubby one, I *tried* to be "The personality" so people would notice me.

The personality would lead on to be the party girl, masking insecurities with Sambuca. I would go out every night, to see and to be seen. I drifted a lot, selling laughing gas, taking pills in Ibiza and working amongst the fashionistas in Toronto trying to find my worth. But I never truly found people I fitted with until I started working in The Alps. Here personality was king, people didn't seem to care what you looked like, they cared if you were fun. And I *was* fun.

Red wine, white wine, Mutzig, vin chaud, and especially Genepi, these were my poisons.

In my first season I won the award for "biggest pisshead", I was *so* proud of that. I was surrounded by the best people, this was the university I never had. These people were my family, some still are. I learnt to ski and snowboard, all the time with the hipflask in my pocket.

The summers were just a waiting game, waiting to get back out to my home where I was amongst my people who didn't judge me and loved me for me.

I worked in a bar, so I was always there to share a glass with the seasonaires who decided to not go out on the slopes that day, and there was a constant turnover of people and a constant flow of drinks. I was known for my espresso martinis "one for you, one for me". Band nights were always the best, "crowd surf the barmaid!" was demanded by the singer.

I'd had a boyfriend, he was known to the locals as "The Mayor Of Moriond" 6 ft 4 and could drink the Russian navy under the table. He loved being there when I was working. When I was "on show". Problems started when the doors closed. He didn't sign up for that girl, the insecure one that wanted constant reassurance and safety. After a couple of years of frustration, punched walls and broken tables, evenings sat alone, so many evenings sat alone with only a bottle for company. I had to leave, but the mountains always beckoned me home.

Slowly my friends stopped doing seasons, opting for "proper jobs". I would go out and not know anyone, I would compensate by drinking until I didn't know how I'd got home, why the kitchen was in a mess, who were those people in the living room? Why did I have a black eye? A constant feeling of sickness only to be washed away with a lunch time glass of vin rouge and the blissful fuzz softening my head and forgetting the feeling of being stagnant, rotting in the most beautiful place on the planet.

Luckily I had saved up enough euros during my last winter to travel so I headed to Asia and whilst I was trying to drink less and everyone else was drinking more because they were on

holiday, I started to notice how much more I drank than others, no one wanted a glass (or three) during lunch, not that it stopped me, it was cultural to try all the various beers in the different countries.

My breaking point was in Bali, I drank the strongest beer I could get my hands on, one after the other, alone in my room. I could've been in France; I could've been anywhere. I looked at myself and I was sick, my hair was greasy, my skin was pale and sweaty and all I saw was sadness when I should've been having the best time of my life. All the beautiful things I had seen in the months leading up to this moment were forgotten. I had to stop but I was terrified; I won't have a glass of champagne on my wedding day, I won't impress a date with my knowledge of wine, I will never have a vin chaud in front of the fire with friends on a snowy Sunday afternoon, I'll never sit in the sun in an old English pub garden and have a crisp cold cider whilst laughing with my family.

I still think about those things now and again and it still makes me sad, sad that our culture tells us to relax or to celebrate we must drink.

What I've gained from putting down those bottles, from facing myself in the mirror and deciding that I will live every moment and be there to witness and emerge myself in life outweighs any of the missed drinks. I still get jealous of people that can use alcohol to dull the emotions of life, I must ride that train, I have no choice now. I must deal with everything head on. Sobriety has given me everything that alcohol promises, confidence, happiness and self worth. I have done more living in the last 22 months than I had done in the 10 years before, and not because of anything that would look impressive to the outside world but because I know who I am, I know who I am becoming, and I love who that person is.