

## Season 3 Episode 2 Andy M

**Voice over** – Season three of the Options Save Lives podcast is brought to you with the support of our presenting sponsor R Street Institute and is hosted by Executive Director, Jenny Williamson.

**Jenny Williamson** – So thank you so much Andy for agreeing to come onto our podcast and share your story and talk about some of the struggles that you had with alcohol and how you overcome them and moved forward using the Sinclair Method. So why don't we start with, why don't you just introduce yourself and just give a little bit about your background?

**Andy M** – Sure. So, Andy Matheson. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Worked for the phone company, various phone companies for several years. Retired a few years ago. But alcohol was always very present in my family. My father was a Norwegian sailor and so with growing up in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, there was bars on every corner, and that's just what people did. That was just a way of life. So I didn't jump right into that, but over time that became a regular thing to do, to experiment with alcohol, to experiment with beer and other spirits, and so I did that. Not an issue in in the teenage years, 20s and 30s. But it kind of progressed as I got older and working and raising a family and probably more into my 40s and was really into the alcoholic phase of my being if you're will. That's when things really, really took off. And then you become what a lot of people talk about is it's a functional alcoholic. You're able to go to work, you're able to do things and you're not getting DUIs, even though you should be getting DUIs, you're escaping a lot of that. But as the progression of alcoholism continues it gets, as a lot of us know, it gets worse and worse. And eventually later in life, more in the 60s or so, then experimenting but actually drinking starting in the day starting in daytime, so when you start in the daytime and then just kind of drinking all day long, and then alcohol becomes your main focus in life. As Claudia Christian said, "Now the monster has you". The Monster had me and so I struggled with that for a lot of years.

In my 40s my wife knew I had an issue. I did lose a job. I've always bounced back and got other jobs but losing the job, basically it was really alcoholism, alcoholism and padding the expense account, that kind of stuff too. So at that time then I tried AA. I spent a good year in AA, nothing wrong with AA, it was good to stay sober for a while but the alcohol deprivation effect as we all talk about, it leads me back to try drinking again. And then you try it again and maybe it's not as bad but then it kind of creeps up again and so on. So I spent five years in New England with that job, and then moved back to to New Jersey, and then an issue before I retired, three years before I retired. I was drinking with an open container in a car in a company that I worked for. Got pulled over and that open container, I didn't get a DUI, but I got an open container ticket which then led to early retirement, which was fine anyway as I was old enough anyway. And then from there went back to AA for a good year or so too. AA was very good, learning the steps of AA, finding a good sponsor and talking about a lot of baggage in life that a lot of us have. But still the alcohol deprivation effect is there. So I did that for, this was 2020, early 2020 until about early 2021, February, and then I started experimenting online like a lot of us I guess do, trying to find other alternatives to alcoholism. Is there some medication for alcoholism? Is there something else to do?

And then I came across, like a lot of us have I guess, Claudia Christian's tape One Little Pill. Looked at that and then I found out about the Sinclair Method, found out about naltrexone. Didn't tell my wife about it. I kind of wanted to do my own thing. And so I was looking at getting naltrexone over in Europe and places like that because, by the way, I went to my regular doctor and told him about the Sinclair Method and he wouldn't support it. He didn't know anybody who did that and not wanting to write a prescription. Maybe felt he'd be liable for something so I said Okay, I'll go and do my own thing. So I knew it wasn't going to be a problem with getting it here in New Jersey. So I sought out a nurse practitioner that dealt with AUD, made an appointment with that person, went down, told him my story like I'm telling you my story. He had no problem. He wrote me a script for 30 tablets for naltrexone 50mg. And then from there, I came back and I started working that. But kind of not working in the right way, because I was still drinking the way I was drinking which was very heavily. Progressing in life I was drinking two handles of Scotch a week, I love Scotch, and hiding it in my basement.

So starting out with the Sinclair Method, starting with naltrexone, I would take a tablet in the morning let's say seven, eight o'clock or something and then go down in the basement and start chugging scotch, and then doing that all day long. And as a lot of us know, when your drinking right through the naltrexone wall that I learned about later, that maybe I felt a little something but I really wasn't much, so the reduction in drinking wasn't a lot. So that was my secret drinking that I was doing for a good couple of weeks. Going back to the store and hiding it in various places in the basement, to hide in cabinets and so on. But eventually, my wife caught me. She, you do suspect people because you gotta be naturally smelling of alcohol more than I want to do. So she suspected that and then found the bottles that I had in the basement and then exposed the bottles and stood them up on top of the dryer. And I says okay, well I guess the jig is up now, so let me see what I can do and take the bottles out of the basement and then talk to her about what what I'm doing.

So I got her interested in TSM. Told her about the meetings that I was going to, the online meetings and then she spent some time when Bruce Rose was around. Bruce Rose was doing little stunts there, little daily things that lasted for a while for family and friends to learn about TSM, to learn about naltrexone, and she was very interested in that, Bruce describes it as a neurological imbalance in the brain. So to take a good interest in that was very beneficial. Just having a family member, in my case having a wife that can learn about it and believe in it and then support you and it was really vital. So anyway, the Scotch out of the basement and so now trying to drink like a gentleman. I'm trying to now drink a more conscious effort of letting the medication work and then see what I can do. I didn't keep a log right in the beginning but within a couple of weeks I started doing that. But I was drinking, instead of secretly drinking, I was drinking in front of her. In the beginning it was kind of painful because drinking water glasses of scotch and ice but I was still drinking less than what I was doing if I was chugging, which I was doing down in the basement. So getting that out in the open, exposing that, talking to my wife, getting her support with that and this is what I want to do. And she thought it was very interesting and she thought it was a way that will probably work which was very good. And of course then it did work.

I was definitely reducing the intake, but then also with Ria Health and with meetings with Ria Health they mentioned if you'd like to move further along with TSM and alcohol reduction to move to beer or wine. So I had no problem with doing that. I enjoy a good German beer and white wine and so I did that. I got away from the scotch and moved to beer or wine and then that progressed even further. So this was starting in the end of February, so into March and April kind of moved right along, March, April, May still drinking everyday but drinking less. And then listening to Katie Lain's YouTube little ditties that she had last summer, had a lot of those, I listened to a lot of that. Then starting with, probably in the May June time frame, starting alcohol free days. So starting alcohol free days so you start with one a week and then it wasn't too bad and then another week, two. So I was able to move along with that drinking either beer or wine, and I found it very comfortable just to have a couple of beers. It was really, it was really sufficient as I moved along.

So that's yeah, that's kind of my journey. Since then I've continued that for quite a while. I never quit drinking. I still drink but it's really only that, it really only stays within a couple of drinks. It's always good to take the naltrexone and sometimes I don't wait the full hour, but I always take the naltrexone. And then after it being this amount of time, now a year almost, I'm very comfortable with just having a couple of drinks, taking a tablet. I actually feel like a little intoxicated if we're having like a couple of drinks, which is a good thing because that's what regular people feel like. So I've become a what Claudia Christian calls a "normie" I believe. So that's kind of where I'm at. I no longer have a fear of alcohol. I've got alcohol in my house. I've got beer and wine in the refrigerator. And I've still got a really nice 12 year old scotch, but it doesn't call me. I don't wake up in the morning looking for it. I can take it or leave it. I still enjoy drinking. It doesn't take that, naltrexone doesn't take the joy out of drinking. I can still drink. The beer and the wine and the Scotch all taste the same. Some people talk about they have an adverse effect to it, but for me it's been fine. I'm really enjoying this new life. It really is a new life, free of of alcohol, free of AUD. The AUD brain is dormant and the idea is to keep it dormant and stay with this wonderful program. I don't have any, no issues or anything like that from taking naltrexone so I guess I'm just one of the

fortunate people. Maybe God was on my side there, but as I say drinking for so many decades, of drowning myself in alcohol and now enjoying with family and friends which is a good thing because I have three grown up kids and a wife, and everybody drinks, everybody drinks under control. They're all just regular, normal drinkers, so it's nice to be a part of that crowd. I feel a part of that crowd. Before I just felt like an alien. With AA you can't, you gotta, you can't do this because you've got this disease, well they call it a disease.

So now it's a whole new life really. TSM has really, I think saved my life, has given me a whole new outlook. It changes the way you feel about things. It changes your whole, your habits and you develop good habits, and your daily life is not consumed around alcohol and the secretiveness of alcohol and the hiding and all the when can I get my next drink? Let me, here's a party going on, I gotta go back out to the refrigerator in the garage and have another drink because I'm not feeling the way I'd like to feel in that part of the party because I need six drinks to feel part of the party, so that's gone. So it's just, it's delightful.

**Jenny Williamson** – Well that's wonderful. So I want to come back to various things that you've mentioned along your story. So from the time you first started drinking alcohol through you said it didn't become problematic until your 40s, would you say that your drinking now has returned to the way it was prior to when it became a problem or is it even better now?

**Andy M** – No, it's probably even better now because, yeah, my 20s and 30s it was sort of, you know, I wasn't just having a couple of drinks. I was very comfortable having three or four beers. So it wasn't the blackouts, it wasn't the fall down drunk type of stuff. I didn't really do that, I kind of just fell asleep on the couch, that kind of stuff. But yeah, I would say it's returned to probably like in the beginning, like the teenage years, the early 20s where you would just go, and go to a bar or back in the day go to a discotheque or something and then just have one or two drinks and be satisfied with that, just be able to go and nurse a drink. That's what I'm doing now. I'll have a beer or wine and I'm there and I'm still drinking it for a long time. And my wife drinks very slowly and when we go out to a restaurant, she'll be drinking her wine along with the meal and I'll have a beer and the beer will still be there. Just to be able to still be there and the meal is gone already, so it's just a whole different way of – TSM, it just kind of changed my whole desire for drinking. It's not there. All the chugging and all of that stuff is not there. Now we spend time actually just sipping it and enjoying it and having a conversation. So it's returning to before there was ever really a problem with alcohol, so probably going back to a teenager when I used to just watch my father drink. He died of alcohol. He still lived a long life, got to be 85, 86. Yeah, no stranger to alcohol. It's just a way of life as we grew up, but probably Yeah, back to that time frame when I was just looking at other people drinking and then saying, I'm not really going to do that. So that really was the all consuming of life that alcohol was telling me what to do every day. So it was, I don't know if that answers, I'm just yeah back to back to a simpler time, yeah back to before I was 40, 20's, teens.

**Jenny Williamson** – As things started picking up you described yourself in a period of time beginning in your 40s as a functional alcoholic. Now along the way how much of looking back and recognizing that that was when the problems were beginning to escalate is hindsight, and how much of that did you recognize at the time?

**Andy M** – Probably recognized it more as I worked for the phone company and as I was traveling, flying through various places along the east coast and then going to, became a frequent flyer member and then getting into the clubs, in this case it was Delta, and being able to drink for free. So when you're able to drink for free, that's when things kind of really, really take off. And some more just drinking during the evening hours but then the attraction too as you're traveling and you get to a club early in the morning and alcohol is available and then you find, okay let's experiment with something like a Bloody Mary. Then you go, it's not like you're doing it all the time, but you're doing that, so you're kind of really crossing this line into heavy drinking. So it's the working, the availability of frequent flying and free drinks, the attraction with that, the allure of that, I think that was the beginning of really crossing and so did I recognize that. Yeah, I recognized that. But then I enjoyed drinking heavily.

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**Andy M** – I had a lot of fun drinking even though, it's the interaction, I guess, you know, with my wife with that in the evenings isn't the greatest because alcohol has kind of taken over your life. So that's SPF, I recognized it, but I just, that's when the monster had me. That's what I wanted to do.

**Jenny Williamson** – And how long would you say went between when you thought that there might be something concerning about your drinking and actually trying to do something about it?

**Andy M** – Yeah, no the only time I sought to do something about it actually was when I lost that job that I had when I think I was about 46, padding the expense account, doing fraudulent things. So with alcohol, have a problem with that and have an issue with that probably, because you're doing things that you shouldn't be doing and you're using alcohol as a crutch to to get you through that. Okay, so it's not so bad, let me have another drink and I'll look to forget about that. And then from there when that happened, and then going to AA and so then with AA that's when you're arresting your alcoholism for however long you can stay there to do that. So that's, it was always really job related, losing that and then going to do that. Yeah, definitely my wife realized you have a problem with alcohol, but she kind of went along with that, not enabling me but she let me go because all those years because you're always, you have a job, you're still raising a family, you're a functioning alcoholic.

**Jenny Williamson** – Did you ever feel like, other than AA, you just didn't know what else to do about it? Do you feel like the lack of viable options for treatment that include either harm reduction or abstinence, did that lack of options cause you to feel like you delayed seeking help?

**Andy M** – Yeah, I didn't know of any other options besides AA. That's all that people did. I didn't experiment with looking at, didn't know about naltrexone, didn't know about any other. That's the world we live in, kind of still live in if you will. So yeah, I didn't, I just chose to continue to drink. I tried AA. AA was good. Things got better, bounced back, get another job again. Everything's – I told my wife, going back to drinking, she wasn't of course wild about that. And then that kind of takes off again. It's kind of a progression from not drinking as much but then over time it keeps on going, as we all know.

**Jenny Williamson** – So let's talk a little bit about the impact that your wife's support has had on your TSM journey. Talk a little bit more about how she was able to help you along and how did she support you on this process?

**Andy M** – Yes, as I was saying yes, so talking to her about it, and then we spent, like I had already seen it, but then I got, I showed her Claudia Christian's TEDx tape. Let's look at the TEDx tape, do that and then after that, then we went and we didn't relax, we just rented One Little Pill and saw that a couple of times. So that was, between those two things that was very interesting for her because she, with the One Little Pill she could see the, it's very good at showing the different scenarios in life, what this person was going through, what that person was going through. There was like four different families so it was very well done. So she thought that was very interesting. And then with finding TSM and then it was finding Bruce Rose. She said she didn't have a problem with getting on with Bruce Rose, and I think that's helped her to learn. It helped us regular participants to learn more too, because he's very informative to talk all about AUD and how it's set up, and how it's a malfunction in the brain, a neurological imbalance in the brain. And how alcoholism led you to a torn path and then how TSM, how naltrexone and drinking over time, for several months, then it reverses that affect on those neural pathways and brings you back to become a normal drinker again. So Bruce Rose explaining that to her and then I kept talking to her as well and she just learned more

about it. And as I talked to her over time, she really understands it. So that was very beneficial for me, for her to take a real great interest in it. And she's still doubtful. Well now she's not doubtful, now it's been a year. She was just still doubtful whether it was really going to take, whether it's really going to go to work.

So as I was saying before, we're watching Jeopardy and whatever, I'm drinking a water glass full of Scotch, but I'm drinking in front of her. But then I start measuring the shots okay, and then go into beer or wine, but always drinking with her. So no more secretiveism. Now it's, now you're together. So that's free, very freeing for me. And it's also, it could be painful, it was somewhat painful for her because you're seeing in the beginning like you're consuming, drinking a lot. But I'm saying to myself, I'm drinking so much less, I could have been down in the basement. So with her seeing that and then getting the support from that because she could see the progress. And then she's no longer afraid because I guess as I said the beer and the wine is in the refrigerator and the scotch is out in the living room, along with other wine and stuff like that, but she's not concerned that I'll be secretly drinking and she could see the way we drink now together. As I was saying we go out to a restaurant and drink and I'm actually drinking slower than her which is like that's amazing. But when I go to parties, we go to parties, people pass a bottle of wine around the table, I drink the way they drink. the way that normal people drink wine. A glass of wine and you sip it for an hour or so. You do that. You just, you learn to have this new relationship with alcohol but working TSM, getting naltrexone into your body, changing your brain, it becomes natural. It's not a struggle. You can do that. There's not a desire to chug the drink anymore. You can actually just go in and enjoy the drink. It's wonderful.

**Jenny Williamson** – Talk about how critical communication was between yourself and your wife, as you needed to communicate what you were going through with the Sinclair Method, with the alcohol cravings and addiction, knowing that this was also difficult for your wife to see you continue to drink and struggle, especially in the beginning so talk about.....

**Andy M** - That was very important. Yeah, she was definitely, definitely scared. Definitely looking in the beginning, drinking water glasses of Scotch, so she was fearful. But I was telling her this is what I'm doing. I'm taking naltrexone. I'm waiting at least an hour. I told her the whole process and she knew that, she knew the process, but still it's theory, is it going to work? Is it not going to work? But doing that everyday communicating with her. So here we are having dinner together watching Jeopardy and then I'm drinking. Maybe, she sometimes she's drinking with me some wine and sometimes not, but I'm telling her that I'm working this, and she could see the reduction over time. In the beginning you're filling up a couple of water glasses full of scotch and go back and get another one, but over time it's getting less. And then she's watching me. She's leery of the whole thing and then I started measuring drinks okay. So I'm measuring drinks, so the secretiveness of that is now out in the open and that's in the background, and pouring three shots into a glass, that is actually showing her. So there's the communication. You're pouring a shot and then she'll be asking you, so how many shots was that? One or two? Because she wanted to see me move along with this.

So yeah, the communication, the openness, she saw the desire that I had, the same desire that she had, that this was going to work because she wasn't sure. I wasn't sure either. But just everything out in the open is what really got me on the path, and then moving away from spirits to beer and wine as I said too, that made more and more progress. But just drinking together. I, in the beginning, I was still having a drink and then leaving and coming over to the computer and she said let's continue to drink together. So that communication so that she could see that of getting away from the old way of hiding and all this stuff, and that you're now, you're out in the open, let's do this together, because I think having the support of a spouse was critical. I think I probably still could have been successful with TSM, but it would have taken me a lot longer, especially with, I don't know how it would have worked, you know, secretly drinking in the basement. I don't think that would have lasted anyway over time.

A lot of people do this alone. I really feel for them. It's great to have some support, someone to talk to as you move along. Well what helps of course is all these TSM meetup groups too so you can get to share with all individuals because everybody's in a different position in life, but

a lot of people are alone and they're sharing, this is what I'm doing. But anyway, with my wife it was communicating with her and then she got more and more comfortable and now it's not an issue at all. Now it's really just drinking a couple of times a week. And it's really just drinking with her, or we go out to a restaurant or we meet with friends at a party or something like that. But even when we go to these parties, it's not – The desire is to over drink, but it just doesn't happen. You're just satisfied with a couple of drinks. Just keep on taking, just remain diligent with taking naltrexone every time you drink so that you can keep this AUD brain dormant forever and enjoy this life. As I was saying, the taste for me I'm fortunate, the taste of the scotch, the taste of the beer and the wine is the same as it was before AUD gripped for many decades.

**Jenny Williamson** – And many people along their Sinclair Method journey have ups and downs. Was there any point along the way, I mean it sounds like you had a very short journey to your freedom, February through August I think you said, which many would find very quick. It's pretty average for someone who has a proper support system, but still, some people will struggle for a couple of years before they feel like they finally have that freedom. In that amount of time, did you have any situation that came up where you wondered, oh my god, is this actually working or what have I done in trying this?

**Andy M** - Just felt what you call these early responders. It was just a gradual reduction and then working everything that Katie Lain and other people talk about, the mindfulness. So imagine drinking, you're getting away from chugging like this and let's enjoy it, let's enjoy the drink and go from there. Not having, I know a lot of people talk about TSM and people's lives, they have a lot of emotional issues, things happen, you know, divorces, deaths and families and all this stuff. I didn't fortunately didn't have that going through that. I've a daughter with the infertility issues but that didn't drive me toward, you know, drinking more. It was kind of just to maintain what we have if we didn't have financial issues or life things, things that, stressful things that could lead me towards spiking. Let's get off of this and let's go back to drinking water. See if that's going to solve the issue to make you feel better.

**Jenny Williamson** – So it sounds like you were pretty well set up for success to begin with. You had a clear idea of what you wanted the Sinclair Method to do. You had a base of knowledge of self improvement that you brought from two different go rounds with AA, and you had a great amount of support along with tapping into almost a mentorship with Bruce and Katie and in learning those resources for mindfulness, habit change, and keeping that open communication with your wife. Would you say that, do you think that your journey on the Sinclair Method would have been as smooth if you had not had any of those?

**Andy M** - Oh definitely, it wouldn't have been a smooth ride. Yeah, it was good to, it was excellent to be able to, the timing couldn't have been better. Last summer, kind of got addicted to Katie Lain's YouTube messages because she had talked about so many things. I'm an avid walker, my wife and I Fitbit, we do five miles a day, so we'd always be out there listening to another one of her spiels all about AUD. And so it was, for me it was fascinating, interesting and it kept me motivated to try to move along with this which is, so everything kind of fell into place. Finding Claudia Christian TEDx tape, joining Ria Health getting into that, finding Katie Lain doing that. In fact Katie Lain then steered me toward, I don't know if you heard, but I wound up getting interviewed by the New York Times in an article on AUD so I'm actually there. People go and some people will call me like they say they still don't understand. We're still in an abstinence based world. They're like what happened. I describe it to them but they don't get it. But interviewed by the New York Times in an article, talked about AUD. They took pictures of me and so it's still out there, New York Times, AUD, my name and pictures, so that was good. And Ria Health coming, Ria Health and then TSM meetup groups. I became one of the, not sponsors, what are the people, hosting, so I did that for several months as well. So all of that stuff is very instrumental in keeping you focused, to keep you on the program, keeping you moving along, and then you get to help others. You get to share your story and they can tell you what they're doing. Yeah, there are the old ones like, you know, how did you do it. Well, this is how I did it, and you can do it too, so all of that was pretty good. And I got away from that because other people can come on online and be hosts as well, they don't have to.

As Bruce Rose says, after you get well you don't have to come to these meetings anymore. But I still every now and then I check in with Bruce.

**Jenny Williamson** – And what would you say to someone who is on the fence right now, who is thinking about the Sinclair Method, but they're just not sure. They're not sure if they're ready to change what alcohol is doing in their life. They're not sure if the people around them are going to be accepting of a harm reduction method. What would you say to them?

**Andy M** - Well, I would tell them to to explore, you know, what's out there. To look at Claudia Christian's TEDx tape, see if you can identify with that. One Little Pill. And then from there, learn about TSM. There's a multitude of information there too. We're talking about their drinking behavior. What are you doing? How much are you drinking? How many days are you drinking? And then I would tell them my story. This is what happened to me. I mean, I've got, we have, not a family member, but a close, close friend at the beach and he's pounding away and, you know, I don't know what 12 or 18 cans of beer, you know, every day. He's like around 50 years old. So I told his wife about this, about the whole thing and said I'm available here to talk and that. She's seen my New York Times article as well with that. So I would do things like that. Here's the resources that are available. You can look at that and then we can talk and I'm willing to tell you how I struggled with alcohol for decades and how this has changed my life. And you don't have to wait you get DUIs, until you're a fall down drunk. You don't have to, you can address this before. If you're having six or seven drinks every day. there's something wrong with that. And this can, this TSM can change your relationship with alcohol before it becomes a serious problem.

**Jenny Williamson** - I love that because let's face it for many people rock bottom is death. And there's no reason to let it get that far before because you don't have to. You literally do not have to wait until your life, your relationship, your jobs are ruined before you can make a change.

**TSM Tip Voice over** – This TSM quick tip is brought to you by the C Three Foundation with support from our sponsor, Alcure.

**Sara Michael Novia** - Claudia is a drink log really necessary for accountability?

**Claudia Christian** – It makes people do so much better on TSM, it really does, that's just a fact. But it's also good because you can see your progress. People forget how much they drink in a month. But if you see it in black and white, you can see what triggered you on what day. Oh it was the Super Bowl, I drink a lot. Or also am I decreasing my units?

**Sara Michael Novia** – What were you doing that day?

**Claudia Christian** – What were you doing that day? And it's also just an act of mindfulness like you said, and accountability which is so important while you're on the Sinclair Method. So keep that drink log up to date.