

Season 3 Episode 8 Kristen

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 – Today we want to welcome Kristen to the Options Save Lives video podcast. Kristen, please take a moment, introduce yourself to the audience and share a bit about what your life was like before you learned about the Sinclair Method.

Kristen – Hi, everybody. My name is Kristen. I'm currently residing in Florida. I'm originally from upstate New York, Pennsylvania, that kind of area. I've been down here about 12 years now. So through childhood and everything and through high school, college, everything was kind of normal. I did suffer from major anxiety which carried through my entire life. Since I was about 11 I had it, but in high school, in college, I drank, you know, normally. I went to parties on the weekends, went to different functions in college. It was very manageable. I didn't even realize that at some point you couldn't have an off switch because to me that just seems so foreign because it was so easy to turn it on and off at that point. And then through the years I, you know, entered into a very stressful career, got married, a lot of life things were happening. My anxiety just kept escalating and escalating. And at that point, I was never properly diagnosed with my mental health issues. And so actually when, you know, prior to COVID I was drinking where, you know, I would go out socially and drink, but I was that person at the bar that always kind of want to have that one more. And when I went home, I always wanted to have that one more or two more. And that's when I kind of started realizing like, why is everybody else like going home and going to bed? I want to go home and drink more. So that's kind of when I started to notice a difference and, not that I thought I had a problem at that point, but that I was drinking more than I should be drinking. And then when COVID hit so in early 2020, that's when everything really hit me.

My, now I know I was diagnosed with severe OCD. So my, not sure if anybody knows a lot about OCD but basically you have obsessive thoughts and feelings and what you do to help them is compulsions. Well, my compulsion started becoming drinking, because by drinking I shut my mind off. I shut those repetitive thoughts off. And in the moment it felt like it was working. But then, during COVID, everything was so weird, you know, you couldn't leave your house. You couldn't see your friends. I now was working from home which I was not a fan of. It completely ruined my structure. My day to day, everything changed, and very quickly, very quickly I became an all day everyday drinker. So it hit me, and when I mean it, AUD, alcohol use disorder hit me like a tonne of bricks. It did not take decades to form. I think it had been there probably about 10 years I guess if I think back, like I was drinking more than the social drinker but it wasn't a problem. I was totally functioning. Alcohol did not control my life at that point. Not that I could say take it or leave it, but I was not physically, you know, addicted to it until 2020. My body became so physically addicted. It was wake up in the morning, have to have a drink, because the withdrawal was already happening. Even though I had only not drank since what six to eight hours when I was sleeping, but my body already wanted it that next morning. So it became this adventure to how was I going to get my next drink. In my world I didn't even understand like, you see, you know, hear stories about people and this happening to them and they start sneaking and lying and I was like that's not me. And then I saw myself and I was doing it. I was doing exactly what all these other people had talked about, you know, that they've done or that their loved one had done. And I kind of looked at myself in the mirror and I was like, Who have I become? And I quickly realized that the Kristen no longer had control, the alcohol had control of me. It was my only thoughts and I didn't care who I hurt or what I did in order to get that next drink. And with my OCD being, you know, I think my OCD is what really led to the onset of the AUD. Not that I always haven't had it because I think I am genetically predisposed to it. I think the OCD really put it in me quick and hard. And because the more I drank the more my OCD spun, so the more I wanted to drink to stop the OCD, and it was a continuous circle that never ended until I was so drunk that I would just pass out. And the next day I would start doing the exact same thing, because I had so much anxiety of what I just did the day before that the only way I thought to cope with that anxiety was to just redo the entire day.

So at that point I was drinking probably about 12 to 15 beers a day, which is, you know, for someone that's, you know, 100 105 pounds, that's quite a lot. And the other problem is when I would get into these sort of binges, I would stop eating. I would get severely depressed. So literally I was just feeding my body alcohol and nothing else. So my body became very weak. My mental state became very weak. Everything was full force, you know, and at that time I was living with my husband, my then husband, we're now divorced due to AUD, and he had mentioned, you know, trying to go to rehab. So, not that it was my first thing I wanted to try, but I had tried quitting, you know, and I would go couple days, maybe a week or two without drinking, but then something would hit me, something in my brain would say Oh, just do it. You know, you can obviously quit, you've done it. And then it would just be the same repetitive thing. It would get to a point where my body would basically just shut down, then I would stop, then I'd get feeling better, then I would start again. So I went to rehab.

This was October of 2020. They had said that they were a dual diagnosis program, meaning that they dealt with mental health as well as addiction. Well, they definitely didn't know how to deal with mental health and I don't even think they knew how to deal with addiction to be honest. Because I, you know, obviously when you go into rehab, you're cold turkey, and I was obviously cold turkey. Well within about 48 to 72 hours of being there I started hallucinating, very extreme hallucinations. Then the delirium set in and I thought people were there that weren't. I had no idea what was going on. I had tried to tell the people at the facility that I was hallucinating. They told me to drink some tea and go to bed. So at one point I was able to sneak and find a phone because, you know, at rehab they take everything away from you, and call on my husband at the time and my mother and said something's going on. I'm hallucinating. And so they were able to get hold of the facility and they said you need to take my daughter to the hospital like right now. So finally they did. And yeah, I was suffering from delirium tremens, which is the most severe type of alcohol withdrawal. I think only about 5% of people that go through withdrawal, get to that extent. And I know I hadn't been bingeing like that for that long, it was only about maybe a year at that point, but still it hit my body and when it I took it away that quickly it didn't know what to do. So I was in the hospital a couple of days. It was horrible. It was frightening. The hallucinations were going on for at least a couple days. And it was during COVID, so of course they won't let anybody see me so I was sitting there alone. I'm glad I was in hospital. Finally someone was actually taking proper care of me because I could have died. You can die from delirium tremens. And so anyways, I get better. They take me back to the facility. At that point I had so much PTSD I just kind of went through the motions and stayed for my loved ones, but when I got out, I didn't drink actually, I didn't drink for about five months. And it wasn't because I was not craving alcohol because I was, horribly. I was white knuckling it to the max. But I was so scared of alcohol withdrawal because of the trauma that I had went through. So I was depriving myself of alcohol because of fear, not because I didn't want it. That feeling never went away.

So about five months later, I relapsed. I relapsed pretty hard in about, from that point, so I say about March of 2021 until October 20. No. March of – Hold on, what year are we in? - Yeah March 2021 to October 2021. So about what eight months there, I relapsed probably a good 10 times. But every time I would have a relapse, I would get to a point where I was very bad. And then I would go back to New York, my parents live in New York. So I would go back to New York and they would help me safely taper. So I would taper off of the alcohol, which is the safest way to do it. And so it might take me a week, you know, but I wasn't putting my body into shock. And I wasn't getting that severity of what had happened to me before. So I would finally get better. And then a couple weeks later, there I was again relapsing. So that happened like I said a good 10 times probably. So then in between that time I tried AA meetings. Never felt like I belonged. The, you know, there's nothing wrong with AA, I know it works for a lot of people out there. It just did not work for me. I felt very, you know, judged. And you know, they put the blame on the person and not the alcohol, when it really is the alcohol that's in control, and I didn't like that. And I also didn't like the fact that if you slipped up and had one drink like everything was taken away from you. It was like punishing you. And so I just wasn't a fan, but I tried it. I also tried acupuncture, I tried hypnotherapy. I tried getting my chakras realigned. I tried everything because I knew that I could beat this somehow, someway, but it wasn't working.

So again in October 2021, I went to another rehab. Again, same thing, so they're dual diagnosis, well, they're not, and so did not deal with my mental health at all, which I now know like the two of them work together. You need to fix both of them or else you're never going to fix either because they're so intertwined. One leads the other, the other leads the other. And so that rehab was basically just AA meetings all day and was not helpful, but again, I stayed there for my family. Got out of there, I relapsed within 24 hours. Hardcore relapse once again. And at this point it was, you know, coming into January of 2022 and I was again back in New York with my parents. At that point, my husband and I were officially divorced so I was dealing with that as well. Couldn't function. I had been off work this whole time because I had told my, you know, company that I needed time to deal with some personal stuff. So I was off work about a year and a half trying to figure this out and trying the best way to fix myself. So back and forth I go between drinking, to not drinking, to tapering, to everything and it was just a constant cycle. Nothing was working.

So I started to research and I found the Vivitrol shot. And so I asked my psychiatrist about it, and he's like, yeah, he's like, I've utilized it with some of my patients, you know, it's in you. Some people like to use it because you can't just stop or not take a pill. So Vivitrol for anybody that doesn't know is basically a shot, injection. It's naltrexone in the shape of a shot, but it's in your body for 28 days straight. Would never, ever, ever recommend it to anybody. It sent me into severe, severe depression where to the point where I was just laying on the floor, couldn't get up, just beer cans everywhere. And the fact is, I couldn't get it out of my body. So I started researching about it and that's when I realized that it was essentially naltrexone, and that naltrexone is used a lot by doctors and you're told to take it in the morning. So told my doctor and he's like yeah, I can switch it to that. Well, that wasn't working either. So then I did more research on my own, and found the Sinclair Method and I was like, What is this? And an article came up like, Too good to be true. And I was like, yeah, that sounds too good to be true. I can still drink but it's going to help cure my AUD. I'm like okay. So I did more and more research and I was like, this sounds like something that could work for me, because the fear of never drinking again scares the crap out of me. I'm only 34 years old. So that's a lot of life to have to stay sober, white knuckle it and now we all know about, you know, the alcohol deprivation effect where at some point, sometime, the lizard is gonna come out and it's gonna bite. So this just seemed awesome. So I told my psychiatrist about it, and he's like, I've never heard of it. He's like, but let me do some research. And he did some research. He's like, this sounds amazing. He's like, I cannot believe I've been in this industry 30 years and I've never heard of this. And so he said, Yeah, let's try it.

So he prescribed me naltrexone. He gave me as much as I needed. And at this point, before I had actually started the Sinclair Method, I found online Deerhaven Gardens, which for anybody that knows was, it's unfortunately has shut down since I attended, but they were the first treatment center in the United States that utilized the Sinclair Method to treat patients. And so I was very fortunate and I owe them my life essentially. I was able to go. I was one of the first six females there, and they taught us everything we needed to know about the Sinclair Method. We actually went through the process of doing it with them where they were giving us our meds, making us wait an hour, giving us fun activities to do during that hour to keep us you know, busy so we weren't thinking, you know, looking at the clock. We were also surrounded by, I was surrounded by five other girls that were actually doing it with me. So we were you know, taking things from one another, and the struggles, or what works for them and you know, kind of utilizing it. Also the doctors at Deer Haven were the first to finally properly diagnose me with severe OCD. And it was like that aha moment where I'm like, Thank you, finally somebody listened. I kept telling everybody there's something else wrong with me, it's not just anxiety. And they had said you're no doubt, you have severe OCD, and you were never properly treated, even diagnosed. And they said let's, you know, start you on this protocol and you need to be doing this specific type of therapy called ERP therapy. Other types of therapy that I was doing for 20 years were not helping me at all. So between diagnosing me properly mentally. getting me on the Sinclair Method, I owe everything to Deerhaven. And after I got out of Deerhaven, we were there about a month or so, during that month obviously we learned a lot about TSM and kind of got into new habits and stuff. But that's basically where the Sinclair Method entered my life.

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Jenny Williamson – It's really interesting that I mean, one of the biggest misconceptions when talking to Addiction Professionals is that everybody who has an issue with addiction has a mental health issue, even though statistically it's about 60%. So it's still more than half but it's not everybody. But if the thinking in the profession is that 100% of people with addiction have a mental health issue, you had multiple rehab stays where they were not equipped to deal with your actual mental health issues that you needed help with, and I just, I find that a little bit astounding considering the attitude within the profession that everybody needs that treatment and that diagnosis. So I mean, was that a surprise to you as well when you found yourself in supposed dual diagnosis treatment centers, and didn't get that care, even the basic care that you thought you were going to get?

Kristen – Yeah, I mean, the first one was very alarming because like I said, they should not have had anybody in there going cold turkey. I mean, they were not equipped to deal with that, clearly. And then the second one, so when I went to the second one I had called, I had my mom call and say, Are you positive that you deal with mental health as well? Because if not, we're not going there. We will find somewhere else. And they said, Yes. Well, as soon as I got there, and I had, you know, my first meeting with my therapist, she said, Oh, yeah, I guess you have some mental health issues, but you're just, you're an alcoholic. So basically, you're just a piece of crap. So we're not going to even look at the mental health let's just get you to stop drinking forever and that will fix it. Okay. So yeah, astounding, and, you know, crazy to me. And I love, you know I'm a highly intelligent person. Like, I can have an intellectual conversation with these people. And I fought for myself and what really aggravates me is that there's a lot of people that go into these places that don't have the ability to fight for themselves. And, you know, I would say no, that I need to see this therapist and you're gonna sit with me four times a week. I don't care. Well, other people were like, No, I'm too scared to say that. I said, No, they're supposed to be here for you. And so that's what it really aggravates me about, and I can't speak for all three rehabilitation centers, but I know a lot of them are like that. They just want you basically to have 30 days sober and then they kick you out and they could care less what happened after. And it's sad, because I do have the resources and stuff to be able to find other avenues and, you know, to approach things like Deerhaven where a lot of people don't, and I hate that you know, I really don't like that and I hope that something comes along one day that will help those people, because just because they don't have the resources or they don't have the voice or don't think they have the voice that they're not getting the help they need.

Jenny Williamson – You mentioned you tried a lot of different things before finally finding the Sinclair Method. Was there anything that you were able to take from, whether it was AA or any other option that you tried, that helped you along your process once you did find the Sinclair Method?

Kristen – Yeah, I guess the community aspect of AA, about going through something together with people that are going through the similar thing, and I found that through my TSM groups, and especially through the five girls that I went to Deerhaven. We still have a group chat, we still talk to this day. It's about, you know, you're all going through the same thing. You're all going to have some down days, you're going to have some days where you maybe drink more than you want it to, but you have that support because most likely they've all did it too. And no one's judging you though. That's the difference between TSM community and AA community. There's no judgment. So but yeah, that aspect of community I did like. Also, you know, all my hypnosis and stuff like that, it helped me, you know. I started doing meditation as well through that. And the meditation has helped me through TSM because it helps me stay mindful. So a part of TSM is being a mindful drinker which I never was, you know, just how quick can I get this White Claw down? Now it's, you know, I thoroughly think about my drink. And you know, when I'm done with it, I thoroughly ask myself, do I want another one? Am I okay without one? So the meditation has helped me to stay in that mindset to better understand myself and my actions, even through TSM, my drinking actions.

Jenny Williamson – And what was the most difficult part of the Sinclair Method for you, other than finding it, because you definitely jumped through every hoop that you could find in order to get the help that you deserved?

Kristen – Habit change. So I'm almost exactly six months into TSM. My drinking is very controlled now. I drink about two, one to two drinks a day, which for me is amazing. I was at like I said, 12 to 15. Fully functional, never hung over, nothing. But it's that, so I think, you know, and I know that there's a debate in the TSM world about what is extinction, and I think it's what everybody's feels for themselves that they've become extinct. And I believe I have, because I think extinction is when you, alcohol no longer controls your daily thoughts. You know, I think Claudia mentioned it like she could drive by a billboard that had a glass of wine on it and she didn't say, oh, I want more and more and more, and that's when she realized. Well now I can, you know, I can go past the grocery store and I can go past the beer aisle and I don't think, Oh my god, how many should I get? And you know, I still enjoy it when I do drink it but it's under a controlled atmosphere. It's totally different.

But it is that habit change because sometimes I feel because I drink my one to two at night, and it's typically and I've didn't start out doing this. I started maybe I tried like going, in the beginning I was starting at like noon. Well now I'm starting at eight o'clock at night. So over the last six months, I've pushed it out which where I push it out, there's less time to drink more. So I think with pushing it out lead to lesser drinks and everything. But it's still that habit of always having to have a drink before bed. And so the habit change. So I recently in the last couple of weeks I've tried to, so I drink White Claw, which is like a hard seltzer. So I always drink black cherry or raspberry. So now I've changed it to drinking flavors that I'm not so particular on like the watermelon. Not my favorite. So I've switched to that one to try to just change the habit of having the taste of what I like. I've also I would always sit on my patio at night and have it. Well now I'm not allowing myself to go out there at certain times. or if it hits a certain time going inside, just trying to change that habit because that has been created for a long time. And so yeah, but that is definitely the most difficult part. But, and I would recommend to anybody going through TSM that therapy does help with this, because your therapist, you know, can get to know you and get to kind of know what your habits are and kind of give you some tips on how to change those habits.

Jenny Williamson – You're still drinking daily. Do you work in any alcohol free days?

Kristen – I have not been able to yet.

Jenny Williamson – And do you think any of that has to do with the trauma that was involved in the forced way that you had to go through withdrawal?

Kristen – You hit down to nose. So with my OCD I'm in a constant fear of overthinking alcohol withdrawal. So anytime I have the thoughts of not having any alcohol my OCD brain starts saying, Well you're gonna withdraw. You have to have that drink even if you don't want it, you have to. And so I've been working with my therapist and psychiatrist on this because my OCD is definitely hindering me having those alcohol free days. Whereas I understand everybody's brain is going to work similar but my OCD brain is so intense that it's like you said, it's the trauma has created this thing in my brain which is making it more difficult to get those days.

Jenny Williamson – And one thing I would like to point out to anybody who is listening is that it's really important and so awesome that you know what your struggle point is. You're working on it. There's no timeline when any individual person needs to start taking those alcohol free days. Trying to push yourself through it when you have a legitimate reason why you are not ready can actually backfire and make it that much more difficult. So please listen to the importance of this and the progress and success that Kristen is having, even though she's not having alcohol free days yet, because I know there are so many people who will look at others and say, Well, they're having alcohol free days and I'm not so this must not be working for me. So it's, I'm so glad to hear that you know what's standing in your way and you're working on it at your own pace with somebody who is helping you work through that

instead of trying to head long exposure therapy yourself into an alcohol free day that might actually set you back instead of helping to propel you forward.

Kristen – I think it's just that exactly because everybody wants that, you know, to say you can do an alcohol free day, and yeah that's great. But I'm like you said doing it too early, I couldn't. So the thing I like about TSM is, excuse me, you're in control. You. The alcohol doesn't have control but you have control, so you have the decision if you want to have that drink. And by somebody telling me you've got to have an alcohol free day, that's taking the control yet again away from me, just like AA tried to do, just like rehab tried to do. Well I don't play that game. And when somebody tries to do that, I usually go the opposite direction. And so, no. If you're in control in whether you're having a drink or two, or even if you're having a couple and you feel in control, then you're succeeding even if you're not having that alcohol free day. But without the alcohol, you know, taking over and you staying like in the driver's seat. Be okay with it.

Jenny Williamson – Yeah, it'll come when it comes. And you'll get there. It's not that you don't want one, it's that you are working toward it at your pace, that's a sustainable pace, taking care of the things you need to do in order to get you closer to that. It's completely different if somebody's like no, I just don't want to ever have an alcohol free day. That a different issue to deal with. But some people who truly want to get there aren't going to get there easily and it's okay. It's absolutely okay. It has to be at your own pace. For anybody who's familiar with Bruce Rose from Alcohol Recovery Scotland, and most people in the TSM communities know who Bruce is. He has told me that in his belief, the absolute worst thing a person can do to their own progress on the Sinclair Method is to force themselves to do too much too fast in a way that's not sustainable for them. Talk about the change in your life now and how your life is different now that you've started the Sinclair Method. You've gotten, it sounds like you've built an amazing support system that has lingered on beyond when you were doing your time of rehab at Deerhaven. So talk about just how your life has changed.

Kristen – My life has changed completely. I mean, I think back, and so a year ago today I was still in my second rehab. November 6 is when I got out and November 7 is when I relapsed. So I think back and I remember that year and I remember so eager to get out, and because I knew like I could get alcohol. So still my thoughts, that was what they were geared towards. And at that point, you know, I knew my marriage was over, you know, which was a hard pill to swallow. You know, we had been best friends for a long time, and so it was a lot emotionally. I was a wreck because I was really trying to work on myself, my AUD, my mental health, but then I was being thrown all this on top of it. It was a lot to handle. And fortunately I have amazing parents that have stood by me the entire time, even when I was nasty to them. You know, because they were trying to help and you know, I didn't want the help at that point. And it was just living day to day wondering how you're going to get your next drink, wondering if, you know, I was going to even wake up sometimes to be honest. And because I have a very tiny body and I was just flooding it with alcohol. And I think there was one time, this was during the Vivitrol depression, that I didn't eat for like 11 days and didn't shower, didn't get out of bed. I just I was so depressed and I just would look around and I'm like, What has my life become? Like, this is awful. Like I, you know, I was at that point where I was like I don't even belong, like deserve to be here. Like I'm causing so much pain to everybody I love. My mom is having physical reactions, you know with her health, because she's so worried about me, and me and my mom are very close. And I couldn't take that I was doing that to her, but I couldn't stop. I wanted to so bad but I just couldn't. And you know everybody kept saying to you, and I know that they don't mean it this way or they don't understand it, but they're just, just stop. Why is it so hard to stop? My dad has really never drank his whole life. My mom's a social drinker, but my dad never drinks so he doesn't understand any of it. And he was so flabbergasted at why I couldn't just stop. And so, you know, a lot of people were but I kept telling them I can't. I really can't. If I wanted to do you think I'd be sitting here in my bed without showering, without eating? Like, it's not fun. I'm not having a fun time. I'm like Cheers. No. It's horrible. I'm literally killing myself in reality, and so I was just so defeated, because like, I explained, like I tried a lot. I was not a person that just sat there thinking overnight it was going to happen. I really tried. And when so many things failed it was just

kind of like okay, I guess this is how I'm going to be until, you know, God decides it's time for me to go.

And now I look back and I was like, Who was that person? And I know that Kristen was in there somewhere, but she was literally flooded with alcohol. And I was not thinking straight. I was not acting straight by any means. Just even the thoughts that I had, I can't believe I thought of. And now I'm so happy. Yes, I you know got divorced and everything but I'm, actually I'm a lot happier. I'm on my own but you know it's okay. And I've got back to my job. My boss was very crucial in this whole thing. He knew everything that was going on, so supportive, kept my job for a year and a half, you know, so I had insurance so I could go and do these things. So he was just one of my biggest supporters and I'll forever be grateful for him, but I'm finally back working with him, doing what I love to do. You know, I did lose a lot of friends and I know a lot of people lose friends through AUD, and I did. You know, I made the apologies that I thought were necessary and that's all I can do. But now I'm thoroughly enjoying the friendships, with especially those people that stood by me. Because there's nothing else like having a friend that stands by you through utterly the worst part of your life. And that's a true friend. And so now our conversations are totally different. They're so more sincere and in depth and now they're coming to me with like questions and therapy and because I just learned so much about myself and through everything you know, I've just learned a tonne. And so now I'm the one voice of reason, while a year ago, no one wanted to ask me anything because who knew what was going to come out?

So it's just, it's a good feeling and you know, doing this podcast and I wanted to do it. You know, I met Claudia when I was at Deerhaven and it was amazing experience. She literally sat down with me for like an hour, and for her to do that just meant so much to me. And just talking with her, we had a lot of the same experiences. And it was just nice to hear somebody, you know, that was there, but she's doing so well and that it worked. And so you know, it was just an amazing experience. So I've continued to follow and I'm part of her Heroes group and then to do her podcasts, you know, it's just, it's amazing because I was where a lot of these people that are watching were at, trust me. I was at rock bottom. I couldn't go a day without drinking copious amounts of alcohol. I wasn't eating. I lost my husband, I lost my house. I didn't lose my job, but I wasn't working. I was making no income. And I literally was at rock bottom but, you know, just six months in, I'm still very early in TSM, and look at me now. I'm thriving. I wake up excited about the day. You know, I'm making new friends. I've already helped some people through the TSM Facebook group, like somebody in Canada reached out to me and her brother was having some issues and we had a lot of conversations and I actually talked to him on the phone. And he's now doing really good. He got his doctor to give him naltrexone and it's amazing. It's an amazing feeling. So I'm hoping that by doing this podcast I can reach somebody and let them know that there is an answer and it's the Sinclair Method, because it works. And I don't care how long you've been drinking, how old you are, how young you are, what's going on your life, you have kids or not, the Sinclair Method can work for you if you just stay compliant, and you really want it. You need to want it because you can take a pill but not really want it and you're never going to change those habits. So if you want it and you stay compliant, you will succeed.

Jenny Williamson – I'd love for you to talk a little bit about how being on the Sinclair Method and getting control, getting the alcohol under control has made it easier to then also focus on mental health issues. Because let's face it, the Sinclair Method is about more than just eliminating or reducing alcohol. It's about building an entire better quality of life. And that includes both physical and mental health. So talk about the difference between trying to deal with mental health issues while also dealing with the alcohol use disorder versus being able to have that alcohol taken care of and trying to deal with the mental health issues.

Kristen – Well, by having the alcohol under control through TSM I'm able to, you know, I have to be on medications for my mental health. Not everybody does, but I personally have to and it's okay. But so now without overpowering my medication, the medication is actually working because before, you know, your medication is trying to lift you up, the alcohol is trying to take you down, and so it was never going to be at the proper level that it needed to be with drinking as much as I was. Also when I actually do my therapy sessions, and I do my exposure

and response therapy which is what I do for OCD, I'm coherent. I'm actually you know, doing them. I'm not, you know, before I was, I'd go to therapy, I'd slug a few beers in the parking lot before going in. Or if it was telephoned, I'd sometimes be drinking during a session. And so I was not fully taking in, you know, the therapy of it, and so now being clear minded I can, and it's working to. So my mental health, not only is my AUD under control, but my mental health is under control. So I'm like I said, I owe it all to Deerhaven and those doctors because they fixed both and that's what needed to be fixed. So, yeah, I mean TSM has given me my life back.

Jenny Williamson – That is wonderful. I mean, honestly, that's I mean, I can't really even comment beyond that, because it is the ideal of what the whole process of recovery is about. It should be because you're a whole person. You're not just the alcohol you drink, you have other aspects to your life and when alcohol is in charge, it becomes the only thing in your life that you define yourself by, and now you just get to be you and a whole person again.

Kristen – Well, it's not just we define us, that society defines us.

Jenny Williamson – That's true. Yes.

Kristen – And that's what's sad.

Jenny Williamson – So do you ever work in non alcoholic beverages or low alcohol beverages in. I know that White Claw to my knowledge does not make a non alcoholic version but non beers and seltzers.

Kristen – Yeah, I've tried some non alcoholic beers. Actually the Budweiser Zero is not bad. I'm strictly a beer girl or seltzer. I don't do any liquor and I'm very rarely do wine. But also with a seltzer I can actually drink, so I forget what they're called, but they're like a seltzer but it's got like lavender in it and like calming effects, and I think one of them has CBD in it. And I'm still getting that bubbly – So I'm not sure if you've had a hard seltzer but it's kind of like a bubbly sensation that you get in your mouth – so they're giving me the same thing and it's technically giving me the same calming effects as alcohol does. It's just no alcohol. So it does train, you know, trick my brain into saying, 'Is that a White Claw or is that?' you know, so I do those more, because I don't think that there's technically a hard seltzer at 0% unless I'm haven't seen it, but you can kind of mimic it with any sort of seltzer.

Jenny Williamson – Yeah, I know there are some that are more like hop infused water, CBD, things like that with various botanicals, as you mentioned. And that's another thing that is so different from the abstinence only mindset that is very anti non alcoholic beers as the gateway to relapse or so. Where we actually on the Sinclair Method, we encourage, have those other things because they help the habit change a little bit in a nice easy way, because as you said, it's the same experience when you drink it. It just doesn't have the alcohol content.

Kristen – Yeah, at Deerhaven actually we would have like mocktail parties. And we had like bartenders come in and we would have like a cocktail artist like party but it would be with all mocktails so it felt like you were. Like I think a lot of people with AUD, I mean at least I did, I isolated a lot because I didn't want anybody to see me and or see how much I was drinking. But with that sort of environment like I finally felt like I could be in public, but I wasn't really even drinking but it felt like I was, you know. So even if you want to go out to a bar and you know, maybe you take your pill and you want to have a drink or two but maybe in the middle of that you have a mocktail. And you know that way you're not getting pressure from people because I know there's a lot of. I mean alcohol is so in everybody's face these days and mainstream. I mean I don't think you can go five minutes without seeing some sort of alcohol commercial. And so I know a lot of people will say something or they feel weird not drinking a lot or someone's saying something to them, well just have a mocktail. And you know if that makes you feel better than do it up.

Jenny Williamson – What would you like to say to anyone who is maybe just starting the Sinclair Method or they're on the fence and they're not quite sure if this is really what they want to do or they feel like they're just too far gone and can't be helped. What would you say to somebody in that situation?

Kristen – Well, you're never too far gone unless you're in the grave. TSM through everything I've read, there have been plenty of people with, you know, better stories than mine, worse stories than mine, and if you really want it and you stay compliant and you make life changes, it will work for you. You have to give it a chance and the thing is no one's telling you that you have to stop drinking. That's the beauty of TSM I think, because that scares a lot of people. And rightfully so when someone says oh, you can never drink the rest of your life. Well, to me that scared me. I think it scares a lot of people. But the thing is, you don't have to, but over time, you're not going to want to drink as much. You really aren't. I didn't know if it was possible, like really, you know, taking a pill and doing this. I'm really not gonna want those 12 beers. Yeah, I don't. I can't even think about drinking 12 beers now. Like holy cow, how was I doing that? But yeah, so you're never too far gone. You can do it and what is the harm in trying it? Really? The harm is, okay, you take your pill, it doesn't work. Okay, then you tried it I guess. But there's no harm in trying it. There's like very rare side effects from naltrexone. It doesn't interact with like other medications unless, you know, they're opioids or something like that. But you know, it's a very mild medication. So really the harm in trying it, there is none. I mean, the worst case scenario is, you know, I know that some people need to stop. Some people have to like maybe add a prescription with it, and that's okay, too. But give it time people. I see a lot of people on our Facebook groups like, Oh, I'm a week in and it's not working and I was like, Oh, give yourself some grace. It didn't take a week to get where you are today, did it? No, you drank for a week straight and you became addicted? No. So it's gonna kind of take some time for that neural pathway in your brain to switch and so don't get hard on yourself if it's not working right away, because it's not a magic pill. If it was then, you know, the makers of naltrexone would be billionaires. But you got to give yourself some time and some leeway and I know also at least it happened to me with some of the people in my life. Trying to explain to them doing TSM was difficult. And some people had said Oh, it's just your, you know, your excuse to drink and I said no, I don't think I need an excuse to drink. If I wanted to, I'm going to drink. So no, but hey, this has worked for 78% of the people that have tried it. Why not try it? And if I'm drinking up, well then I'm drinking, but it's better than the alternative. It's better than, you know, for me it was better than going to what nine more rehabs and then relapsing worse and worse every time after, and spending how much money and it was basically just a detox. I wasn't given the tools you know, to try to make changes and I was just depriving myself of, you know, what my body wanted. And so, like I say, there's no harm in trying. It's if it doesn't work, I guess or you don't want to give it enough time to try to work then that's your decision ultimately, but I think it's worth a shot.

Jenny Williamson – Well, thank you so much for spending time with us today. I really appreciate it and I hope that everybody who sees this is just as inspired by your story as I am.

Kristen – Thank you. It was really nice to be here. I hope so too. If I reach one person, and that's all that really matters so, and just keep up the good work you guys. If I can do it, you can do it.

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, do I have to just have friends who don't drink?

Claudia Christian – No, not at all. If your friends drink normally or in moderation, that's perfectly fine to hang out with them. And if you have heavy drinking friends who haven't reduced their consumption and you're concerned about spending time with them because it might be a bad influence, why not suggest activities that don't involve drinking alcohol. Go to a museum, go to a play, go to a book club, go to brunch, go for a hike, go to the beach, these you know you don't have to drink for everything.

Sara Michael Novia – That's so true.

Claudia Christian – Yeah, and you can see those friends there.