

Marin, why are you drinking so much?



Kelsey Knight/Unsplash

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How'd your dry January go?

Mine lasted exactly six days, admittedly a few weeks short of a month. But in those six days, I slept better, I felt better, I looked better (well, maybe) and my pants seemed a little less tight (ditto).

I hadn't set out to do a full dry month; I was just aware that the holiday season brought one too many opportunities to indulge, which I did like so many others, and a reset seemed in order. One day led to another, and I began to like it.

Then a girlfriend and I met for our annual welcome winter Irish coffee at our usual watering hole, a tradition dating back a good two decades, maybe more, and suddenly all bets were off.

Bring on the zin.

But here's one thing that's been happening, even before dry January — my friends and I been talking to each other as well as asking ourselves, why we are drinking so much? Not in the we're-getting-plastered-potential-DUI kind of way, but in the do-I-really-need-a-second-glass-of-wine-or-cocktail? kind of way.

And yet we often do have that second glass, and we struggle to understand why.

We are healthy and happy. Our kids are grown, flown and doing well. We are relatively economically secure, to varying degrees. We have a roof over our head, clothes to wear, cars to drive, organic and local food in the fridge,

time to binge-watch the latest streaming hit series and to hike in nature. We enjoy our work. We have love, from family, from partners, from friends, and give it right back.

Our lives feel full and rich. Let's admit it — we are in so many ways privileged. And yet, we drink. Why?

This we are unable to fully answer.

Of course, there are struggles, some private and extremely challenging, others that are beyond our control. All of us feel a constant low-grade stress by the shenanigans in D.C., the assault on our democracy and women's reproductive rights, the climate crisis, the lack of rain, the ever-present risk of wildfires and the inevitable planned blackouts, juggling health care, child care, aging parents. It's overwhelming, exhausting.

A glass of wine or two just might take the edge off.

The wine's not impacting our lives as far as we can tell, but who really knows? Alcohol is never going to truly enrich our lives (despite the occasional study touting its health benefits). If anything, it's going to help you keep the truth from yourself.

Marin likes its booze. We consistently rate [among the top counties](#) in the state for our emphasis on exercise, and healthy eating and living as well as life expectancy. But it's no secret that when it comes to heavy, even binge, drinking, we are pretty much out-drinking everyone else, coming in 48th of the state's 58 counties.

Why?

A friend who bartends at private parties and fundraisers at some of Marin's toniest houses shares that the booze consumption is astounding. Often, children are in the house.

Our teens have been following [nicely](#) in their parents' footsteps when it comes to drinking. Of course, we do need to keep the next generation of shrinks and rehab experts employed.

It makes me think of the kerfuffle around Shakira and Jennifer Lopez's halftime show at this year's Super Bowl. The pole dancing! The belly dancing! The skimpy outfits! The booty shaking! Many parents were outraged that the 15-minute celebration of fierce womanhood and unapologetic female sexuality, especially older women's sexuality, [wasn't family friendly](#).

Yet, parents don't give a second thought to imbibing heavily in front of their children at all sorts of so-called family-friendly events, from music and arts festivals to the county fair to sporting activities to parties to movies-in-the-park.

What's going to damage them more?

It doesn't seem like we do anything without consuming booze. Why?

"We're concerned about how alcohol is being institutionalized, that it's become such a part of the fabric of the culture that it's expected and accepted that there's nothing you can do that wouldn't be better with a glass of alcohol in your hand," Michael Scippa, public affairs director for the San Rafael-based nonprofit Alcohol Justice, once [told the II](#). *"And that's just wrong, especially for youth."*

Kids are not an issue for us empty-nesters now. We don't have to think about that anymore.

But we are thinking about it, talking about, asking ourselves and each other, why are we drinking?

We don't have any answers yet, but the question needs to be asked.

Vicki Larson's So It Goes runs every other week. Contact her at vlarson@marinij.com and follow her on Twitter at [OMGChronicles](#)