

Dear Marin: You're drunk



By Vicki Larson

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I was at the Hall of Justice at the Civic Center for a DUI. Not mine, thankfully, but for the man accused of running a red light a few weeks ago and crashing into my friend's car, flipping it three times and breaking her back.

I wanted to see what it's like to stand before a judge and have your attorney plead not guilty — because most people who get a DUI plead not guilty — to driving with a blood alcohol level of more than 0.08 percent even though all the evidence is there: the police report, the totaled Prius, and the woman, in pain, unable to work, forced to wear a back brace and depending on friends to do simple things like change her sheets. She's lost her sense of normalcy.

She's lucky she didn't lose her life.

For such a momentous event — he may be facing jail time, she may be facing a life of chronic pain — it was quick and rather unexceptional. But as I looked at him, a 30-something with a somber face, I felt a strange stirring of compassion.

Here's a confession: There are probably more than a handful of times in the 29 years I've called Marin home that I could have been the one standing before that judge. And I'm guessing the same goes for you.

Marin likes to drink. [A lot.](#)

“What can I get you to drink?” is how we greet our dinner guests or friends gathered for a gals night or a book club meeting.

We enjoy a beer or two while watching the Niners or Giants, or at the nearest brew pub after a long Mount Tam bike ride or hike.

We sip chardonnay or pinot at the numerous galas and fundraisers, at art strolls and open studios, and at the movies (next year, at [Fairfax Theater 6](#), too).

Then most of us get in our cars.

And, if Gov. Jerry Brown signs AB 1322, aka the Drybar bill, into law, we'll be [able to have a drink at our fave hair salon or barbershop](#).

That's been a long-standing, albeit illegal, tradition. My hairstylist and I sometimes sipped wine as she fussed with my hair. Let's just say there were enough questionable haircuts and colors to make me rethink that.

If Brown signs the bill, prepare to see a lot more bad hair days around here.

I don't think we do anything without consuming. 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, told the IJ recently. "And that's just wrong, especially for youth."

Too late for that. [Marin's youth aren't stupid](#). They just watch their parents. They sometimes even get their booze from them — "They're going to drink anyway, so I'd rather have them do it here, at home, where I can watch them" seems to be the prevailing parental thinking.

OK ...

Which is why I wasn't all that surprised when police stopped a [party bus with 33 Marin teens aboard](#) and an assortment of booze and drugs a few months ago.

But there aren't many teens getting DUIs here; the vast majority, according to the state's Department of Motor Vehicles, are in their 20s, 30s and 40s.

A few of my friends have gotten DUIs. No one was hurt, thankfully, but still. It's humbling and expensive. A handful are sober; I think about that from time to time.

Marin's DUI arrest rate is going down, according to Alcohol Justice. I don't think it's because we're drinking any less, however. Say what you will about the gig economy, but ride apps like Uber and Lyft are probably why; a Lyft spokeswoman told me that 28 percent of rides in Marin are between 7 p.m. and 2 a.m. Fridays and weekends — prime drinking times — and to and from some of our top hot spots, Terrapin Crossroads and Sweetwater Music Hall among them, and one of our treasured dives, the Silver Peso.

I was not one of the booze-supplying parents, but I know my kids indulged. There were even a few parties at my house when I had to go out of town to attend to my ailing parents. I wasn't happy about that at all, but I was a teen once. It was a long time ago — sigh — but I remember.

We were young and we were stupid. Honestly, I'm lucky to be alive.

But I'm no teetotaler. I like my red wine and my vodka, and sometimes after a long, sweaty hike, an icy beer. A few times, I've had one too many. And, yes, sometimes I've gotten in my car.

Now, I don't think so.

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