

The Secret Keeper

A Recovery Narrative

Experience, Strength & Hope · The Recovery Files

A profound exploration of the "hidden high"-how the thrill of secrecy and concealment can become as addictive as the substance itself.

HONESTY & INTEGRITY · SECRECY PATTERNS · ADVANCED

The Master of Compartments

Seventy-three days sober and I'm still reaching for phantom bottles. Not because I necessarily crave alcohol—though sometimes I do—but because I miss the thrill of the secret. Hard to admit that out loud, even harder to write it down. My therapist says that's progress.

Before recovery, I wasn't just an alcoholic. I was a magician, an escape artist, a secret agent operating in plain sight. My greatest skill wasn't drinking—it was concealment. Give me a fifth of vodka and fifteen minutes, and I could make it disappear without a trace. Not down my throat (well, not all of it), but into the elaborate network of hiding spots that comprised my parallel universe.

I had a system, naturally. The bottle behind the toilet tank was for emergencies. The one disguised in a mouthwash bottle in my gym bag was for work functions. The flask in the garage was tucked inside an old paint can labeled "OFF-WHITE SEMI-GLOSS - BASEMENT." Nobody ever questions a half-used can of off-white paint. It's like domestic camouflage.

My sponsor calls this the "hidden high." The neurochemical reward of successful concealment. The dopamine release of getting away with it. The secret little universe that existed alongside the regular one, where I alone controlled access. My very own speakeasy, password required, membership: one.

The Adrenaline Junkie

Four o'clock meetings were the worst. That crucial window when proper daytime professionalism began to crack, when it would have been acceptable to suggest getting drinks with colleagues, but I'd already had three secret ones in the bathroom stall. I became an expert at the catch-and-release program of workplace drinking: catch a buzz

in the restroom, release just enough performance at the meeting to seem engaged but not inebriated.

The adrenaline rush of almost getting caught was, if I'm being brutally honest, almost better than the alcohol itself. The near-miss moment when my boss poked her head into the bathroom just as I'd flushed away the evidence. The time I spilled vodka on my shirt and convinced everyone it was hand sanitizer. "Can't be too careful these days," I'd said with a wink, while my heart performed gymnastics in my chest.

On day thirty-four of sobriety, I found myself in the office supply closet, not looking for alcohol, but instinctively seeking that familiar rush of being somewhere I shouldn't, doing something I couldn't explain if caught. I stood there among the reams of paper and staple boxes, feeling ridiculous and enlightened all at once. My body was chasing the neurochemical pattern, the anticipatory high of secrecy itself.

You don't realize how much of addiction is about anticipation until you're sober. It's like discovering that what you really loved about Christmas wasn't the presents but the sneaking downstairs at midnight to shake the packages.

The Performance Artist

I maintained two distinct personas with the precision of a method actor: Public Me and Private Me. Public Me brought homemade dishes to potlucks, remembered colleagues' children's names, and always had an interesting weekend anecdote that somehow never included the part where I blacked out. Private Me kept score of exactly how many minutes until an acceptable drinking hour, maintained strategic relationships with different liquor stores to avoid recognition, and could calculate BAC with the accuracy of a police breathalyzer.

The performance was exhausting, but also exhilarating. There's a perverse satisfaction in being told how "together" you are when you're secretly falling apart. It's like winning an Oscar for a role you hate playing.

In my second week of recovery, I shared this with my group. The room nodded in unified recognition, which was both comforting and deflating. Turns out I wasn't a special secret agent after all—just another drunk with a standard operating procedure. My secrets weren't even original.

"Your brain has been rewired to find excitement in concealment," my counselor explained. "It's not about the substance anymore—it's about the thrill of the hidden life."

The hardest part of early recovery isn't giving up alcohol; it's giving up being the person who's secretly drinking it.

The Risk Calculator

I used to rate potential drinking scenarios on what I privately called the "Discovery Risk Index"—a complex mental algorithm that weighed variables like duration, supervision, exit strategies, and plausible deniability. A family dinner at my sister's house was a 7/10 on the DRI (high supervision, bathroom too close to dining room, sister with suspiciously good sense of smell). A weekend camping trip was a 2/10 (everyone expects weird behavior in nature, endless solo opportunities, coffee mugs that could hold anything).

I became a connoisseur of risk, a sommelier of narrow escapes. The higher the score, the greater the thrill when I managed to drink undetected. The time I successfully maintained a buzz throughout my performance review while my boss complimented my "increased focus" this quarter? That was a 9/10. Chef's kiss. Michelin star secret-keeping.

Now, sixty-some days into recovery, I find myself instinctively calculating the DRI of perfectly innocent situations. Grocery shopping alone on a Tuesday afternoon? 1/10. Why am I even thinking about this when I'm buying carrots and laundry detergent? Because my brain misses the mathematics of misbehavior, the calculus of concealment.

The Identity Crisis

The strangest part of early recovery is discovering how much of your personality was built around secrecy. Take away the hidden bottles, the elaborate coverups, the strategic planning and risk management—and who exactly are you?

I mentioned this identity crisis to my sponsor, who laughed and said, "Welcome to the club. We all thought we were fascinating people until we got sober and realized we'd been outsourcing our personalities to ethanol and adrenaline."

There's a mourning period for the secret self. Not for the drinking—though there's that too—but for the shadow life, the hidden competencies, the entire elaborate infrastructure built around concealment. I was good at it. It's hard to let go of something you've mastered, even when that something is slowly killing you.

My therapist suggests I channel these skills into recovery: "You were creative, strategic, and persistent in addiction. Those same qualities can serve your sobriety." I'm trying to believe her, but planning a sober weekend doesn't quite deliver the same

neurochemical payload as orchestrating a three-day drinking operation behind my family's back.

The Transparency Experiment

Forty-five days into recovery, my counselor suggested what she called a "radical transparency experiment." For one week, I would practice immediate disclosure of thoughts, feelings, and urges related to both drinking and secrecy.

"The antidote to the hidden high is bringing everything into the light," she explained. "The secrecy itself is addictive. We need to rewire those neural pathways."

I agreed with the enthusiasm of someone who has no idea what they're getting into.

Day one: Texted my accountability partner seventeen times. "Thinking about how I used to hide vodka in the toilet tank." "Remembering the thrill of drinking in the parking garage before coming home." "Just calculated how I could theoretically sneak alcohol into a movie theater, even though I don't want to drink and I'm not going to a movie."

Day three: Had a detailed conversation with my partner about how I used to time my drinking when they were in the shower. Their response: "I knew. The timing was too consistent to be coincidence." Seven months of elaborate shower-drinking strategies, and they knew all along. Somehow this was more embarrassing than the drinking itself.

Day six: Found myself in a work situation where I would normally have kept a strategic silence. Instead, I spoke up with my actual opinion. No planning, no calculated effect, just unfiltered truth. The sky didn't fall. My boss actually thanked me for the perspective. I felt naked and strangely powerful.

By the end of the week, I noticed something unexpected. The compulsive thoughts about secrecy had decreased. Not disappeared, but diminished in their urgency and frequency. It was like the air had been let out of a balloon I didn't realize I was holding.

The New Thrill

On day sixty, I had a revelation while walking my dog at the park. A familiar flutter in my chest, a slight acceleration of breath, a sense of anticipation—the physiological signatures I associated with the start of a secret drinking plan. Except I wasn't planning anything. I was just... happy. The sun was out, my dog was being particularly doglike, and my body was producing the neurochemicals of excitement without any secrecy required.

I called my sponsor immediately. "I think I'm experiencing natural dopamine," I said, as if reporting a UFO sighting.

"Keep going," she said. "Your brain is rewiring itself. The rewards will come from new sources if you let them."

I'm finding that transparency itself can provide a different kind of rush. There's a counterintuitive thrill in radical honesty after years of secrecy. It's terrifying, but also exhilarating—like skydiving instead of sneaking cigarettes behind the school gym. A higher-order risk with better returns.

Last week, I found one of my old hiding spots while cleaning. Behind the fake panel in the bathroom cabinet where I used to keep an emergency bottle. It was empty, of course—I'd cleared out all physical evidence during my first week of recovery. But standing there, looking at that hidden compartment, I felt a ghost of the old thrill, followed by something new: relief. Relief that I no longer needed to maintain the architecture of deception. Relief that I could close that panel and let the secret space be just a quirk of cabinetry rather than command central for a double life.

I'm told the neural pathways of secrecy-based excitement will continue to weaken with time and deliberate practice. The hidden high will fade as new sources of reward strengthen. I still catch myself approaching everyday activities with the strategic planning once reserved for covert drinking—but now I redirect that energy toward recovery activities, toward genuine connection, toward building a life that doesn't require concealment to feel worthwhile.

Eighty days in, and I'm not just recovering from alcohol. I'm recovering from the addiction to secrecy itself. From the hidden high that, for too long, overshadowed the genuine experience of an undivided life.

I'm still a work in progress—less of a secret agent now, more of an embedded reporter, documenting the strange terrain of early recovery with equal parts frustration and wonder. Some days I miss the excitement of the secret life. Most days I'm grateful for the mundane miracle of having nothing to hide.

THE MATCHED SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Hidden High Self-Assessment

Secrecy and Excitement in Recovery

1. I experienced a distinct thrill or excitement when successfully hiding evidence of my drinking.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
2. The satisfaction of cleverly concealing drinking-related activities provided its own form of reward.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
3. I felt a sense of accomplishment when others failed to detect my drinking behaviors.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
4. Creating and maintaining hiding places for alcohol gave me a sense of secret satisfaction.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
5. I derived pleasure from knowing I had successfully maintained a drinking-related secret.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
6. The mental planning required to arrange covert drinking opportunities was itself rewarding.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
7. I experienced a sense of anticipatory excitement when developing strategies to drink secretly.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
8. The thought process involved in planning hidden drinking created a noticeable mood elevation.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
9. I found myself engaging in elaborate planning for drinking opportunities even when unnecessary.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
10. The anticipation during planning covert drinking felt more intense than the actual drinking experience.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
11. I felt a distinct rush or thrill from "getting away with" drinking-related behaviors.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
12. Successfully navigating close calls (nearly being discovered) created an adrenaline response I found compelling.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
13. I engaged in increasingly risky secrecy behaviors to maintain or enhance the excitement.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
14. The element of risk involved in concealment added to the overall appeal of drinking.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always

15. I found myself deliberately creating higher-risk situations to increase the secretive thrill.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
16. I derived satisfaction from maintaining different personas (public non-drinker, private drinker).
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
17. Successfully performing "normalcy" while hiding drinking behaviors gave me a sense of accomplishment.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
18. I enjoyed the feeling of having access to a world or experience others didn't know about.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
19. I felt cleverer than others when successfully maintaining drinking-related secrets.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
20. I experienced pride in my ability to compartmentalize different aspects of my life.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
21. The moment of transitioning from public restraint to private drinking created a powerful release of tension.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
22. The release of tension when beginning drinking preparations exceeded the relief from actual consumption.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
23. I experienced a distinct physiological response (racing heart, excitement) when preparing to engage in secret drinking.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
24. The contrast between public performance and private reality created a tension I found stimulating.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
25. I caught myself deliberately extending the tension phase before drinking to enhance the eventual release.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
26. Simply entering environments where I previously arranged secret drinking creates noticeable excitement.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
27. Seeing hiding spots or tools I once used for concealment triggers anticipatory responses.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
28. Situations that remind me of past secrecy (not necessarily drinking itself) activate craving-like sensations.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always

29. The act of planning anything in secret (even unrelated to substances) can trigger drinking-associated excitement.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
30. Engaging in any form of concealment behavior creates echoes of past addiction-related excitement.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
31. Even in recovery, I notice myself being drawn to activities that involve elements of secrecy or concealment.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
32. I find secret-keeping in general more compelling or exciting than others seem to.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
33. I've noticed that secrecy-related excitement persists longer in recovery than actual substance cravings.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
34. Memories of the secretive aspects of addiction remain more vivid than memories of consumption.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
35. I've found myself recreating elements of secrecy in otherwise healthy activities.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
36. I actively work to recognize when secrecy itself is creating a neurochemical reward.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
37. I've identified my personal early warning signs that secrecy-based excitement is occurring.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
38. I can distinguish between healthy privacy and addiction-reinforcing secrecy.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
39. I notice connections between current secrecy-based thoughts and past addiction patterns.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
40. I recognize how secrecy-based excitement affects my physical and emotional state.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
41. I practice radical transparency with appropriate support people about my thoughts and behaviors.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
42. I promptly share secrecy-based thoughts or urges with recovery supports.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
43. I've eliminated unnecessary secret-keeping from my life, even in non-addiction areas.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
44. I'm developing comfort with appropriate vulnerability and openness.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always

45. I practice naming and externalizing secrecy-based thoughts as soon as they occur.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
46. I've identified healthy activities that provide similar neurochemical rewards to secrecy.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
47. I've developed alternative sources of excitement and stimulation that don't involve concealment.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
48. I consciously redirect secrecy-based energy toward recovery-supporting activities.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
49. I've found healthy ways to experience adventure and positive risk that replace the secrecy thrill.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
50. I practice interrupted secrecy behaviors before they gain momentum.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
51. I've modified my environment to reduce exposure to secrecy-associated triggers.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
52. I avoid unnecessarily placing myself in environments strongly associated with past concealment behaviors.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
53. I've created new associations with previously triggering locations or situations.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
54. I practice planned responses to unavoidable encounters with secrecy-related triggers.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
55. I've restructured routines to avoid reactivating secrecy-based neural pathways.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
56. I work to repair relationship damage caused by past secrecy and deception.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
57. I practice building trust through consistent transparency with important people.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
58. I've developed relationships where I can be authentically known rather than performing.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
59. I accept appropriate accountability for secrecy-based behaviors without shame.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
60. I engage in open dialogue about my recovery journey with appropriate support people.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
61. I educate myself about the neurochemical basis for secrecy-based excitement.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always

62. I explore the psychological needs that secrecy fulfilled in my addiction.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
63. I develop healthier ways to meet needs previously addressed through secrecy behaviors.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
64. I practice self-compassion rather than shame when noticing secrecy-based patterns.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
65. I work to integrate compartmentalized aspects of my identity into a more unified self.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
66. I actively work to recalibrate my reward system away from secrecy-based excitement.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
67. I can find excitement and stimulation in honest, transparent activities.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
68. I notice diminishing power of secrecy-based triggers over time in recovery.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
69. I celebrate growth in my capacity for authentic living without secrecy.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always
70. I share my experiences with secrecy-based patterns to help others in recovery.
☐ 1 Never ☐ 2 Rarely ☐ 3 Sometimes ☐ 4 Often ☐ 5 Always

Your scores, and what they mean, are in the app.