(February 17th, 2026)

If you know someone who would benefit from being an Insider, feel free to forward this PDF to them so they can sign up here.

Note: As an Insider, you can read all prior Insider newsletters here.

Quick Tips for our Insider friends!

It's been an unusual winter this year – absolutely zero snow in western WA! And not even that cold – the last few years have seen at least a week of sub-10F temperatures at Camp Savage but this year just the odd nights in the high 20s. It's almost meant that the bi-weekly maintenance on the machinery at camp (engine start, warmup, and 5 minutes moving around to keep brakes, wheels, tracks from seizing) has been unnecessary – but I do it anyway so I don't get complacent. Talking of regular maintenance, check out the new Curious Case I just wrote…

And the big news is…. we've just released another new training course!

SQLskills News

Joe's second course is now available: AIVSP: Vector Search in Practice!

The course follows on from his popular AIVSE: Vector Search Essentials course and goes deeper into SQL Server 2025's vector search functionality with real-world practical scenarios and production solutions. It's available singly and in a bundle with AIVSE, and the discount code 'newsai' will save you $50 off either course. Check it out, with a long video trailer, here!

Joe's also available for Proof-of-Concept, evaluation, and general consulting work around vector search. If you're interested, let us know [here](#)!

I've lowered all course prices for 2026. I went through our entire recorded course and course-bundle catalog and rationalized and revamped all the prices for 2026, making learning about SQL Server much more cost-effective for your training budgets. For instance, our signature Blackbelt bundle is now only US$1,299! Check it all out [here](#).

Kimberly and AIJoe continue their video podcast with 7 available so far – watch them [here](#).

Book Review

One of the recent books I've read is Elif Shafak's *[There Are Rivers in the Sky](#)*. I picked this up from a bookshop in St Andrews (Scotland) while taking a mental health break one evening from sitting by my sister's side in hospice care in hospital last June, and it's the last of the three books I purchased that evening. Absolutely fabulous book! From the back of the book: "A dazzling feat of storytelling from one of the greatest writers of our time, one that spans centuries and continents, this is the story of one lost poem, two great rivers and three remarkable lives - all connected by a single drop of water." Involving the deciphering of cuneiform and the discovery of the Epic of Gilgamesh - I enjoyed this book enormously - highly recommended!

(And it inspired me to start watching some of The Great Courses I'd purchased years ago… first up? [Archaeology: An Introduction to the World's Greatest Sites](#).)

Ponderings…

Back in early 2023 I wrote a long blog post about my struggles with alcohol and how I'd decided to stop. I made it a few months, and then several times on and off after that, in the classic struggle to actually stop and stay stopped, until February last year, when it finally stuck.

This Friday (2/20/26) I'll be sober for a year.

If you struggle yourself, or know anyone who struggles with alcohol problems, you'll know that a full trip around the sun sober is a major milestone and a significant mental achievement.

Why am I telling you this? I'm not bragging or looking for affirmation. I was public here about my struggle back in 2023 because I wanted people in the SQL community who were struggling to know that they're not alone and it's nothing to be ashamed of (and boy, was I surprised by the number of 'me too!' emails). And now I'm being public about how I failed to stop a few times but persevered and eventually hit on the combination of things that let me stop and stay stopped.

Perseverance was the key. Eventually I figured out:

- A.A. just wasn't for me. I'm not a 'group chat/extemporaneous sharing' person. It was great back in 2023 for the structure it provided over the first couple of months, but later I found myself not looking forward to meetings.
- I needed substitutes. I found Athletic IPA, which tastes just like the real thing, but non-alcoholic and is pretty ubiquitous (along with Heineken Zero) in bars and restaurants. Chardonnay used to be my go-to, but non-alcoholic wine…. <yuck> And I also found Free Spirits 'bourbon', so I can have my late-night 'clinky drink' while I'm reading. And often around 5-6pm I'll go for a drive for a bit, as that was my usual 'start time'.

So far, so good – this is working for me nicely!

Call to action: If you're struggling to meet a goal, don't give up. The horribly-clichéd proverb 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try again' is very true. And if you're struggling to give up alcohol, or any other addiction, don't lose hope. You can do it. And there are people who care that you do.

The Curious Case of…

This section of the newsletter explains recent problems we've helped with on client systems or been asked about online; they might be something you're experiencing too.

Last year Jonathan had a strange case at a client that I got involved in too: occasionally a query on a tiny table would go from a few seconds to tens of minutes! Read about it here…

#TBT

(Turn Back Time…) Blog posts we've published since the previous newsletter plus some older resources we've referred to recently that you may find useful.

I mentioned Extended Events in the Curious Case so that's the theme for #TBT this time. Here are some Extended Events resources for you:

- Jon's two Pluralsight courses: *SQL Server: Introduction to Extended Events* and *SQL Server: Advanced Extended Events*
- Erin's Pluralsight course: *SQL Server: Replacing Profiler with Extended Events*
- Jon's An-XEvent-a-Day blog post series
- Jon's Extended Events blog category
- Jon's article on sqlperformance.com comparing the overhead of trace vs. XEvents
- Erin's Extended Events blog category
- Erin's Stairway Series on SQL Server Central
- My Extended Events blog category which shows how to capture SQL Server call stacks

I hope you find these useful and interesting!

Video Demo

Continuing the extended events theme… Tracking down what's really going on with UDFs can be a frustrating task, but with Extended Events it gets a bit easier. In this video, Erin shows you how to use Extended Events to understand what is really executing with a UDF, and also shows some additional performance data that exists in 2016 and higher. (Jonathan's blog post that Erin references is here.)

The video is about 10 minutes long and you can get it in WMV format here.

The demo code is here.

Enjoy!

SQLskills Training

We have no plans for live, public classes in 2026, but we've already released the first of many new courses coming over the next year! And of course, all our recorded courses from the last few years are still as relevant as ever.

To help your manager understand the importance of focused, technical training, we've also added a few items to help you justify spending your training dollars with us:

- Letter to your manager explaining why SQLskills training is worthwhile
- Community blog posts about our classes

You can get all the details in our shop.

Summary

I hope you've enjoyed this issue – I really enjoy putting these together. If there's anything else you're interested in, I'd love to hear from you - drop me a line.

Thanks,
Paul

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