

FAREWELL, MY FRIENDS

On June 8, 1990, two days short of exactly seven years from my date of hire, a decision was made by the Board of Directors not to renew my contract. The decision was reached after a recommendation by the Board of Trustees that a change in management was desirable, in order to make changes in the focus and direction of the office.

While the trustee recommendation took myself and the directors by surprise, it was my decision to concur with the suggestion. Some of the trustees and I have not been agreeing very much lately and my opinions sometimes got in the way of their ideas.

The devastation that befell N.A. in the conflict over management of WSO between 1981 and 1983 has always been fresh in my mind. For two years there was a pitched battle between the WSO directors and a large part of the fellowship over how the office was managed and who was really in control. The members who attended the 1983 meeting of the World Service Conference meeting will still recall that the suggestion to hire me as the replacement office manager was made as an alternative to further conflict or opening of an alternate WSO. This conference action, and the WSO Board's concurrence, put the conflict in abeyance so the fellowship could measure the change, if any was to take place.

When I assumed management, the office was quite different than the one I leave. On the day I started work, WSO consisted of myself, one full-time clerk typist, and a part-time shipping assistant. Although there was money in the bank, we were out of stock of many inventory items, and there were orders on the desk for more inventory than we had at the time. It took months simply to bring the shipping and ordering into balance. Over the years we have run out of one item or another, but as time passed, the frequency of that problem diminished. It is a rare happening now.

Over the following few months, we hired several additional employees in order to attack the massive volume of work that existed. But that was also the beginning of an explosive growth. N.A. grew from approximately 2,400 meetings (including H&I meetings) to over 6,000 in the following two years. N.A. has almost doubled the number of meetings every two years since then.

Keeping up with the orders, and providing assistance and service to that growing membership, have been hard tasks to fulfill. For several years, we added more staff members as the demand for service grew and as literature sales skyrocketed. Staff expenditures were only a part of the overall increase in operational costs.

To give newer members some idea of the change, the gross income (total cash received) in the year just prior to the conference action in 1983 was \$87,200. Literature sales grew each year: 1984-\$818,045, 1987-\$2,668,000, and 1989-\$4,033,000. All of the income from these years of operation has gone to provide the literature and services that sustain a fellowship in fifty-three

countries. Literature is now available in twelve languages. Although not everything is available in each language, the list of translated literature grows each month.

As I depart from service to N.A., behind me I leave a dedicated, hard-working staff. They are now quite capable of working right along, providing service and literature to meet the growing needs of addicts around the world.

Departing will be emotionally hard for me. I've grown to love so many people I cannot count them all. And those who have given me their love and support are also without limit. There is no way to thank individually the thousands of members who have offered encouragement or help during these years.

Few people have had the opportunity to be part of an experience like this has been. Some day I may even try to put a little of it on paper so those who want to know how it all happened can find out.

It was my privilege to travel widely for the fellowship to help resolve problems, attend meetings, provide assistance, and learn about the needs of the fellowship. Every place I went, I was met with love, kindness beyond measure, and support for me personally and the staff. Whether it was a meeting in Memphis to conduct a workshop on WSO services in 1985 (five people showed up and we had a wonderful time as they shared about recovery), or listening through translators to Japanese members conduct a public information day in Tokyo for judges, social workers, and medical professionals, it was an experience beyond words.

Members in countries all over the world opened their hearts and homes to welcome me and the work to be done. There were cold rainy days in Dublin, with members eager to share their problems with literature and the restrictive government policies. There were also sweltering days in Phoenix, learning about growth and service problems in the open spaces of the desert southwest.

Wonderful memories I will carry always include discussions in Damstat, West Germany; Medellin, Colombia; and Lisbon, Portugal. There were also wonderful people all over Canada, Australia, and the U.S. And the list could go on for pages. They were wonderful experiences all.

Yes, there were problems along the way. And I plead guilty to my share of large and small errors, oversights, shortcomings, and failures. No doubt I stepped on toes more than I should, but I have few regrets and no animosities. But the door through which I depart will open for the person who will serve the office through new experiences and growth. And the fellowship will grow and prosper. The role of an office manager at the WSO is more than simply that of a shipping clerk or someone to answer the phone.

The administrative office for a worldwide organization, one that desires to fulfill its purpose, is an office that does more than open the doors and ship literature. If indeed a purpose is to help carry the message of N.A. recovery to addicts around the world who still suffer (and it should be), then the WSO is more than simply shipping literature.

Although there are no studies to back up this assertion, I would venture to guess that fewer than one percent of the addicts in the world attend N.A. meetings. Even if the number were as large as ten percent, it would mean that millions of addicts suffer all around us.

In the United States there are probably about 22,000 meetings in a population of over 250,000,000 people. That is one meeting for every 11,363 people. In most countries the ratio of meetings to population is appalling. In France, for example, there are about 25 meetings in a population of over 68,000,000. That is one meeting for every 2,720,000 people. In Mexico there are 45 meetings in a population of over 65,000,000. This represents one meeting for every 1,444,000 people. How is it possible for the addicts in such places ever to find N.A.?

It is easy for the American fellowship to argue amongst themselves over the literature process, or smoking meetings, or who works at the WSO. But we must consider the addict in less affluent countries who struggles to avoid starvation, or labors under repressive systems that imprison addicts, who lives in societies that consider drug users simply morally weak.

It has been my belief that the obligation of the office was to comprehend the full worldwide scope of our purpose to carry the message, and help set the course to give every addict the choice that only N.A. freely gives. The WSO Board of Directors has been unfailing in its support of this perspective. They have absorbed every bit of information they can get about serving addict needs around the world. They have demonstrated leadership and support to the extent that funds provide, in order to move in the direction of giving every addict a choice. I trust that the WSO will continue to be guided by that broad understanding of its role.

A virus exists within the fellowship that has the power to divert the fellowship from its primary purpose from time to time. This virus is the ego, pride, self-righteousness, and need to control that leaps from some members still caught in the stranglehold that is addiction. This destructive virus attacks our unity. It sets members or committees on their own self appointed path wherein they claim a closer connection to our Higher Power, or knowledge of what is right and what is wrong.

Addicts in other countries who see this happen in America are dismayed. They wonder aloud how such things are permitted, while millions of addicts continue to suffer. A long-time member in Germany taught me years ago that the first eleven traditions each address specific issues related to the unity and strength of N.A. The Twelfth addresses how we collectively serve to fulfill those tenets of unity and strength. "Anonymously," he said, "is how we serve to fulfill the spirit of our traditions."

The office staff now in place is vastly different from the single full-time employee of seven years ago. They are a dedicated group of people. They are organized, trained, and capable. They can function very well with little direct supervision. Unfortunately, some members of the fellowship

attack the office and the staff without reason. While I know this is done by a small minority, such attacks are disconcerting.

An effective staff needs the support of the membership, particularly from those with whom they work on a regular basis. At this, a time of change, they need your support and confidence more than ever. I am hopeful they will continue to be used in positive and creative ways, and not relegated to a second-class status.

There is a crisis facing the office that only the fellowship at large can resolve. Gone are the days when the WSO produced excess income from literature sales that could be used for new projects, services, or staff. There are three solutions: cut WSO activity, increase prices, or receive direct contributions from members, groups, areas, and regions. I do not know what solution you will select, but failure to increase the funds available to meet the needs of addicts around the world dooms them to an early death. N.A. is the only antidote, and only you the member have the key to its use.

The conference has occupied a large part of my attention and energy over the years. The regional representatives have, on the whole, been marvelous to work with. They have been interested, qualified, and enthusiastic, and full of new ideas. The officers of the conference have been great companions in the struggles we've gone through to help the conference succeed. They have shouldered responsibility, and demonstrated their leadership and innovation.

The conference system, however, has both a positive and negative side. While it generally serves to meet the needs of the fellowship, it facilitates dysfunction among some members and disruption of progress. The conference has normally mistaken egotistical acting out by individuals as a minority viewpoint. And rather than handling errant members as a sponsor would, the conference lets them divert the conference from essential work and decision making. This could be improved by fellow regional representatives taking a stronger stand with those who are displaying character defects, rather than remaining silent.

Like the WSO, the conference is also facing the same financial shortage. The only solutions here are to increase the amount of money that is contributed to the conference.

The Board of Trustees has occupied a larger share of time and energy in recent years than in the early 1980's. Their activation of a committee system two years ago can produce a creative and stable leadership base. Unfortunately, until recently the Trustees as a group were generally more ineffective than effective. Their new-found strength can be a positive valuable resource to the fellowship.

The Board of Directors has been marvelous to work for and with. They read and understood mountains of reports, letters, and proposals. Their decision making skills have served the fellowship very well. I cannot think of a decision made by the board that was wrong or questionable. Although the Board of Directors seems to have less visibility than some other

service positions, the members are responsible and responsive to the fellowship through the conference.

The procedure used for their selection avoids the popularity contest aspect that permeates the election of trustees or conference officer positions. The Board of Directors election process affords a balance of conference-expressed confidence in a group of members, then leaves to those who really know what the job requires to make the final selection. I am hopeful that the current process will be changed very little.

There is a bright future for Narcotics Anonymous. It has been growing at a steady rate in the English-speaking countries, and a little slower in other countries. As more literature becomes available in other languages, the speed of growth there will accelerate.

There is nothing like N.A. Other organizations and efforts directed at addiction use the law, religion, medicine, or psychiatry, and it is not the same. It is not as effective, as those approaches miss the point that N.A. has proven is correct. Addiction is a disease that can be held in remission through N.A. meetings and working the steps.

As you read this, I will be toiling at a new enterprise. I have moved to Utah and started a small company. Next spring, if it's God's will, I'll start the foundation for a house on the lot I purchased several years ago. The mountains of Utah, its beauty and serenity have long beckoned me and I cannot resist.

I do not say good-bye, as for me the parting is neither good nor forever. I offer my prayers for each of you and N.A., to fare well in your daily lives and in your efforts to carry the message to addicts everywhere.