

**My Gratitude Speaks
When I Care
And When I Share
With Others
The N.A. Way.**

THE
NA
WAY

**MARCH
1984**

N.A.

N.A. is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovered addicts who meet regularly to help each other to stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only "One" requirement for membership, the honest desire to stop using. There are no musts in N.A., but we suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles, written so simply, that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that "They Work".



**MARCH
1984**

VOLUME 2

NUMBER 7

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*Please mail all articles, subscriptions
input, questions and letters to:*

The N.A. Way Magazine
World Service Office, Inc.
16155 Wyandotte Street
Van Nuys, CA 91406

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MARCH
1984



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on FAITH

It's like standing at the top of a bottomless pit, pitch black all the way down. I imagine having the faith to jump into the hole, speeding faster and faster downward. At some point, two big, soft, pillowy white hands reach out and catch me. Did I have the faith? I didn't. There I was, a shaking, scared addict, standing on the edge of a pit called recovery. I just didn't have the faith to jump. I had to hurt some more. Eventually I was pushed into the pit; pushed by all the things I ran from. I fell into a Fellowship more wonderful and more loving than anything I could ever imagine. It's not all peaches though. Some days old ideas and thoughts panic me and I scrape the walls. But I'm always progressing. Progressing toward those two big pillowy hands, which I believe are the hands of my Higher Power. Thanks for the place to fall!



An Atmosphere Of Service

Everyone who has attended an N.A. service committee meeting, seeking to serve, has seen the atmosphere of service broken at some point. Suddenly the feeling of opportunity is gone. Reverence and awe of the miracle of recovery and thrill of seeing N.A. grow as well as being a part of such a wonderful Fellowship temporarily disappears. Group pressures supportive of N.A. services can result in a committee coming back to the purpose of the committee meeting even after having been distracted or disrupted.

Increasingly, members attending a committee meeting expect and get consistent results. New members coming for their first time to a service meeting can get into committee work according to their interests and abilities. The door is usually open for any member seeking to serve.

The difficulty of a broken atmosphere of service can be illustrated by considering the troubles many communities have gone through in getting a hotline started to serve their community. They are apt to spend their first few meetings discussing the need, various ways to get a stable phone number to publish and a Twelfth Step listing. In the course of these discussions,

someone will bring up the need for funds and the fact that the area doesn't have enough regular money coming in from the baskets to do a hotline. In a sad sort of way, it sounds good to be so "realistic". Other objections will be raised. The phone can't afford a regular answering service. About this time, someone will make the comment that the whole idea of a hotline, at this point is ridiculous, get up with their friends as if to leave. If the group doesn't break up, they will stay to put a damper on any other positive suggestions the group members may have. Those who come to form a hotline, end up wondering where they went wrong. They may feel slightly ridiculous. They usually have the vision to know that it's not that hard to do really. Raise a little money with a dance. Set the number in someone's home if nothing else; a few calls can get through.

After a few months, it used to be years, the topic will come up again and another meeting will be held. Sooner or later the members who want the answering service will be at some committee meeting and the hotline will be formed. Some paper work will be inovated. Any members who attended the earlier meeting to form the hotline will wonder among themselves why it took so long.

One of the necessary lessons in learning to do effective service work is to be able to deal with members who seem to have nothing to offer but criticisms and negativity. Our disease is real and inevitably shows itself in group actions. Denying and excessive glossing over can create problems which endure for years. Better to have a fearless and thorough group assessment of service needs and how best to meet them.

If the original meeting had been attended by members who's bit in service was to see to it that a hotline would be formed, things would have gone much smoother. The ones who wanted it and were willing to do the work, would have been able to come up with the money, the phone number, the posters, a basic newspaper notice or whatever else was needed.

These days, it is much easier to contact members in other areas who have carried out successful service efforts in H & I, public information, literature, policy, activities, newsletters, finance or forming an area, region or any other area of concern to N.A. members. A lot of answers can be shared this way.

A lot of confusion seems to come from the Ninth Tradition. N.A. is the spiritual moment when the desire for recovery in one addict benefits another addict in some way. There is no way to organize N.A. What can be done is to bring together, in a variety of ways, addicts seeking recovery in a sup-

portive environment and let a Higher Power take care of the rest. Service structure (which supports N.A. meetings, members, efforts for new literature, an answering service for addicts who don't know about us, or traveling recovering addicts, the services which take a meeting into an institution where addicts can't get out to the meetings) needs to be organized to be effective. Lack of organization means the hotline gets cut off, meetings failing to get regular support, money getting lost, groups doing without literature, etc. Fortunately, there is a way to organize our structure without getting so efficient that our members feel dehumanized or afraid to speak their mind. Without the power to govern, our only tools are encouragement to others and our personal enthusiasm for service to Narcotics Anonymous. Organization makes it possible to have a lot of members doing different services supportive of N.A. Part of the pay-off of service work is that it helps us stay clean by giving us insight into the way N.A. works. The other part is the good feeling that at last we have found a way to be truly useful, doing something that no one else in the world can do.

Another way the atmosphere of service can get turned around is to confuse our responsibility to those we serve with our responsibility to those members who support our service effort. If service to addicts seeking recovery, then the more addicts who receive those services, the better. If the service effort lacks emotional or financial support,

then attention needs to be diverted from the service effort to the service committee. The hard fact seems to be that when service sub-committees get support, willing and talented members show up to do the work and the job gets done. When a committee gets caught up in internal affairs, support for sub-committees gets lost in the shuffle and services languish or halt completely. In other words, when a committee fails to give regular support of its' sub-committees, the committee has defeated its' own purpose for being. There is not much point in getting together group or area representatives, go to the trouble of electing officers, doing minutes and hearing roll call unless some services come out the other end. Many members, including this one, did not learn the essential role played by sub-committees who do the work of the service committee when they first got involved in service. I have to admit, it makes more sense now.

A well paced roll call, written motions from representatives and written sub-committee reports can insure accuracy of minutes and preserve the atmosphere of service. Attending members who prepare for the committee meeting before hand don't get lost in discussion of

side issues. Any interruption to the proceedings, breaks the atmosphere. Just as we learn to restore the atmosphere of recovery at our meetings when it has been interrupted by someone who is "out of tune" with the group, we learn to restore our atmosphere of service. Learning days, good sponsorship and preparation before the committee meeting can minimize the interruptions and maximize the services. We did not realize that in the old Blue Service Manual of N.A. and the approved new form only representatives have a vote. This realization has saved a lot of time in discussion and cut down on the general confusion.

Knowledge of the Service Manual and good procedures alone will not insure an atmosphere of service. Only the sincere desire to serve in the group of attending members will do that. Just the same as an atmosphere of recovery is dependent on the prevailing desire for recovery in the room, so the service committee has to be composed of N.A. members with the desire to serve. Just as recovery comes from a Power greater than ourselves, in service, the best we can hope for is to be fit instruments of our Ultimate Authority, a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.



TRUST

How do we begin to Trust when we have never experienced trust? We do not have any idea what Trust is, where we are to get it from, and why we even need to have trust.

Just like Faith, Trust is intangible. We see that every time we buy something at the store - "In God We Trust". I saw that inscription every day the money passed from my hand to the dope man's hand. I suppose I trusted the dope man that I would "get off" on whatever I was being sold. Yet, how many times was I disillusioned? How many times was my trust betrayed when I left my money with someone with only a promise to show for it? I have always known that promises were made to be broken.

We come into the Fellowship with hopelessness instead of hope, lies and deceit instead of honesty, hatred instead of love; there is no trust. We can not even trust ourselves any longer. Too many times have we found ourselves betrayed by our habits and our actions. We are told that if we walked into the doors of the Fellowship that we really did have some hope. We saw people that had been staying clean for a day at a time, some even for years. We were suddenly enlightened that if they could do it, then maybe so could we. We were treated with respect instead of disgust, with caring and consideration as opposed to being kicked around like a wounded dog without a home. Suddenly we found that people

were good to us if we let them be. We were told that we could forgive ourselves through the Steps, and that we would soon be better through surrender. Slowly, and oftentimes through agonizing pain, we saw that they were telling us the truth, we were really feeling better, inside and out. With this truth came trust.

I was told in a meeting once that I would not be trusted if I did not trust. I have also been told that I am what I see in others. I recall the first time someone asked me to participate in a Group as a Trusted Servant. They took the first step towards trusting me with their money. Can you believe that? They did not say, "We are trusting you not to go out and get loaded with our group funds"; they said instead, "You are ready to be a Trusted Servant of this group and the name implies just that, Trusted Servant, we think you will be good." I could not believe it!

I have learned that I must trust to be trusted. If I cannot share my feelings honestly and openly as well as trustingly with those I sponsor, how can they share that way with me?

Trust as I mentioned before is an intangible. You know that it's there or that it is not there. Like all of the many benefits of this program, the best things come from deep inside of us. These beautiful gems of character have always been there, we just refused to face them.

On writing....

Doing my part to help carry our message of recovery from addiction, has been part of my life since I first discovered that I had to give it away to keep it. My God has given me a talent to express myself in writing. I wasn't humble enough at first to realize that I could write. I thought that my talents were part of me. How arrogant. I tried repeatedly to write on my own. My words came out jumbled, unintelligible. No one seemed to be able to understand me. My ego told me that I was so very superior that I was destined to be misunderstood. So, I quit writing. I began talking very slowly, in simplistic language flavored with colloquialism in a false attempt to be humble. Occasionally, however, when I felt very strongly about something, a flood of words would pour out of me uncontrollably. It seemed that something took hold of my mind and tongue.

The first several times I shared my story were disastrous. I practiced. It all came out so phony. Finally, I began to surrender. At meetings I asked my Higher Power to help me before I shared. Again when I felt strongly about what I was sharing something took hold of me and the words were not my own. In the very beginning I was really involved in my area. Eventually, I devoted most of my time to work, and money, and increasingly less to service and recovery. I called that bal-

ance. For sometime I'd heard about "The Book" and how a group of people were writing it. I'd heard that my story was part of it. I'd harassed others to write, but refused to write myself. I was afraid. I had written other things: theoretical pieces, inspired prayers, reports, etc., and sent them in, but never my own story. On the plane to my first literature conference, my conscience prodded me into my first real attempt to honestly share in the written form. It read real phony. I thought to myself, "I can't do this. Why am I going there?" The first day of the conference, something happened to me. We went around the table in meeting fashion, introducing ourselves and sharing what we hoped to accomplish during the conference. Each person introduced themselves differently. Some were addict-alcoholics, dual addicts, and some poly-addicts. Others were cross-addicts, chemical-dependents, etc. I was shocked! Who were these people? I thought that I was here to compile and write a definitive basic text for Narcotics Anonymous. How could we write that, when we didn't even know who we were?

The 1st Step of N.A. had allowed me to abstain and begin to recover. I'd almost died from incomplete surrender. The tired old LIE of powerlessness over substances had

very nearly killed me. My recovery, even my cleanliness, was based on the TRUTH that I had only found in N.A., that I am powerless over addiction, The Disease. This reality had allowed me to surrender, to stop using and begin to recover. These people and their chemical identities threatened my recovery, especially considering that they were going to write the book defining the Narcotics Anonymous Program. As each of them shared their noble goals (from what I considered a position of incomplete surrender, and therefore incomplete recovery), I became increasingly more discouraged and angry. Much of what they hoped to accomplish was the same as what I hoped to see done — basically to have a book of and for N.A. as soon as possible.

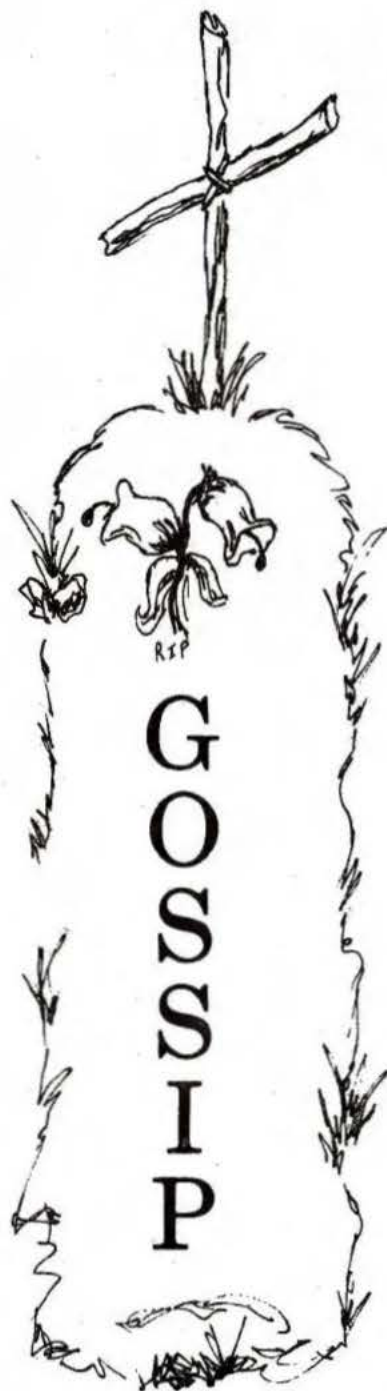
Somehow I was given the ability to see through the words to the meaning behind them. As it came my turn to share, a sense of acceptance and tolerance had come over me. The words poured out of me uncontrollably. My anger and fears of personal and group failure were there, and somehow, a feeling of acceptance and hope, (not my own) was there too. I shared that I didn't know how we were going to write something definitive when we didn't even know who we were. If we did, we couldn't seem to express that consistently in words. I shared what I felt about N.A., how our First Step had saved my life, and how strongly I felt about sharing what we had.

It looked impossible to me. It was going to take a miracle. I was wil-

ling to help but I couldn't write. How could we ever write a book? As I was sharing, the answer came to me. I didn't know it was the answer at the time. It just seemed like a nagging thought...the thought said "Pray". I'm not sure how those people took me. It doesn't matter; I learned, I prayed, we prayed, the miracle happened. Many of us felt as I did, that we couldn't write; yet each of us felt very strongly about N.A. At the end of the conference nearly everyone was very simply, an addict. Most of us were clean, not sober. Most of us had a much better understanding of N.A. than we did before. Most of us found out that we could write after we prayed. I found that my talents are not for me, but gifts of my God to me, that I can only keep by sharing.

Words are important to me. My basic heartfelt understanding of two words have given me life. Those words are addiction and recovery. Word usage, diction, is also very important to me. I don't want to be somber and serious, I want to be happy, joyous, and free. I don't want sobriety, I want recovery from addiction. Narcotics Anonymous is the only program/Fellowship in the world that offers freedom from addiction with the "right" words.

My God has allowed me to be a part of that, and I am so grateful. Today I'm not as arrogant as I once was. I write. I know that my God supplies the words and the talent to express them.



I'm praying for the death of gossip. It's such a destructive means of communication. Can't we learn to simply talk to one another on a regular basis rather than act as if our Fellowship is a soap opera that we have not been watching for a while? Why must people continue to restate each other's words until they get twisted and turned around and become destructive to one's reputation — whatever that may be? I have heard some terrible comments about my friends (which may or may not be true) that could possibly destroy any chance of unity we may ever have. Gossip is one of the most demanding ways to hear about the people I know and love. If they wanted me to know what was going on in their lives, I believe they would tell me. I would rather tell you about myself personally than have you treat me like dirt because you heard something you didn't like through "the grapevine". Gossip must stop or addicts could die, it could be me. It could be you. We could all alienate each other merely by spreading it thick in the local gossip get-togethers. Please let this be the last word said on this matter. We should not have to be reminded that anonymity is the spiritual foundation we stand on. Protect mine and I'll see to it that yours is protected.

*After a while you learn the subtle difference
between holding a hand and changing a soul.*

*You learn that love doesn't mean learning
and company doesn't mean security
and presents aren't promises.*

*You begin to accept your defeats
with your head up and your eyes open
with the grace of a woman not the grief of a child.*

*You learn to build all your roads on today
because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for
planes, and futures have a way of falling down
in mid flight.*

*After a while you learn that even sunshine
burns if you get too much,*

*So you plant your own garden and decorate
your soul instead of waiting for someone
to bring you flowers.*

*And you learn that you really can endure,
that you really are strong and you really
have worth, and you learn and learn
with every goodbye you learn.*

THE DIFFERENCE



Upon first being clean, I was scared and fearful. Denial, having kept me sick for years was no longer working. The need to still cover my tracks and a closed mind was imprisoning me. Finally, through desperation I reached out to others in the Fellowship.

I learned, by watching and listening to others, to "talk the right talk." I learned how to convince others in my local Fellowship of a wellness that was only an outward reflection. I spoke of a relationship with a Higher Power that was, in fact, only a desire for me. The pain and isolation were greater clean than when using.

I clung to being clean with amazing self will; knowing in my heart that to use would be to die, yet living abstinent was painful. The only tools I was working with were a desire not to use and the Fellowship. The Fellowship helped fill the empty time in my days. Alone with myself fear invaded and questions filled my head. Would I be like this forever? Did everyone feel as I did? The First Step was the only truth I accepted. There was a hole in my life as a result.

Overwhelming fear of ongoing insanity led to a handshaking relationship with an inner Higher Power. Each day it became more apparent that my way was not working. Finally, with very little understanding, I developed faith. Still, in times of trouble, I reached out only to the Fellowship. I found it easier to call other recovering members than to reach inward for strength. With another addict, I could receive instant verbal support, and perhaps an answer. It seemed to require too much effort to communicate with a personal God. I still leaned on other people to carry me through life, just as I had in my active addiction.

The day came when the Fellowship was just not there. Living was much too painful to do alone. Suffering a great personal loss, with my physical health poor, all seemed hopeless. Unable to reach out, I finally reached inward. I found my own personal God. At this time, almost two years clean, I thought I had worked through all the steps to the best of my ability. Now, at last, they took on a new and different meaning. Until then I believed that the Fellowship and the program were much the same. Now they had become what they were intended to be. Separate yet interrelated.

Today I must live my program daily. It is the only way for ongoing recovery in my life. It would be easy to hide inside my program and let the Fellowship just slide away. It is difficult to be with other members as we each recover at different rates. Patience and tolerance are still hard to come by. I must share what I have found and receive positive input from others. I can become obsessive in my need for a personal program today, just as I was obsessive in the need for Fellowship before. My on-going prayer is to remember their difference and live in the reality of allowing the proper place for both in my life.

NO LESS...NO MORE

Time to grow up is today,

Time to be free — today.

Broader horizons today — it's time,

Time does not fill up my life,

My life fills my time.

But time is not mine.

I can't stop it or hold it,

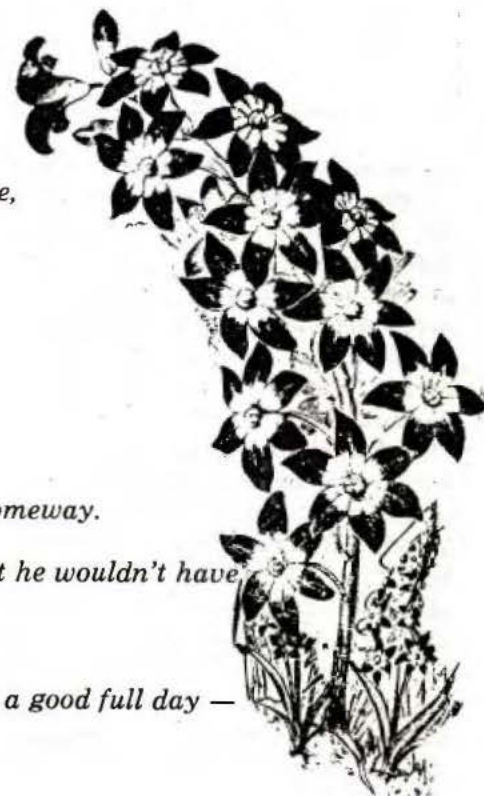
Only use it wisely or waste it, someday.

Time was invented by man so that he wouldn't have

To do everything at once.

There is enough time today to live a good full day —

No less...no more.



OUR COMMON SURVIVAL

As we stand by the principles of our program, which are embodied in the Traditions, so may we fall by ignoring them. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity. The principle of "united we stand, divided we fall" holds as true for us as it did for others. The Traditions of N.A. are not negotiable. If we are to survive as a Fellowship, they must be followed. The only way in which the Traditions can be followed by N.A. as a whole is for each of us to adhere to them individually. If someone else chooses not to follow the Traditions in their own program, we may try to correct them in as constructive a manner as possible, and may certainly pray

for them, but we must not use this as an excuse to forsake the Traditions for ourselves.

Like the Steps of N.A., the Traditions are simple and straight forward, but they are not always easy to follow. They require us to let go of our ego and self-will, and let "a Loving God as he may express Himself in our group conscience" be our "ultimate authority". "The Traditions tell us that "our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." They remind us to place "principles before personalities." All of these principles are ego deflating, just like the Steps are, and we don't tend to like that, although it seems to be an inevitable part of growing in this program.

Because of the ego deflating nature of service, it is easy to go to another extreme and let another person carry the load. After all, who wants to go through all the hassle of fighting other people's ego trips as well as one's own, not to mention all the plain old work. It is just such a drag, and anyway God has lots of agents, right? Well, as the old saying goes, if everybody thinks that somebody will do something then nobody does anything. We all need to do our part of the footwork to keep this Fellowship going and growing. Right now N.A. is growing faster than ever before. Now that the dream of a Basic Text has become a reality, we expect a large increase of newcomers and those who can't pull together might get blown away by the oncoming tide. Don't forget, millions of addicts need what has been given us as

only the dying can. Aside from all of this, the simple fact is that no giving means no receiving and that goes for all of us, not just the newcomers who can only give their need. There are some tough times ahead of our Fellowship and the key to our survival lies in our Traditions. We need our Fellowship and our Fellowship needs us. We have to earn our recovery to feel that it is ours. Our Higher Power gives recovery to us in such a way that it becomes ours through the giving. We all have a right to our recovery but it will not be handed to us without an effort on our part. "We keep what we have only with vigilance..." We have too good a thing going in N.A. to allow it to be lost through egotism or apathy. Let's live the Traditions and work to keep what we have and make it better, for the sake of our common survival.

If you want to use, that's your business
If you want to quit, that's our business.

Even if I forget your name, and your face:
There is no way to forget the love in this place.

In all areas of my life

Why do I want to believe that addiction affects all areas of my life, except whatever it is that I am obsessive about in this very time space! After time in recovery, I am still taken by surprise when the "oh no, not this too" hits me again.

It has become easy to see compulsive behavior in you. After all, it's so plain. To see my own addiction being lived out is so very hard....

I can still justify my actions today; maybe even better than before. Often my disease surfaces in doing good. This time, it's for someone else's benefit, so it must be okay. My denial tells me that obsession and compulsion relate to self destruction, so how could something worthwhile be my addiction? The answer is easy. An addict got their hands on it.

To me, obsession is a fixed idea to the exclusion of all other thoughts or responsibilities. Compulsion is acting out that idea, regardless of the consequences of my actions on myself or others.

Recovery begins when we ask for help, and ends when we stop.

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