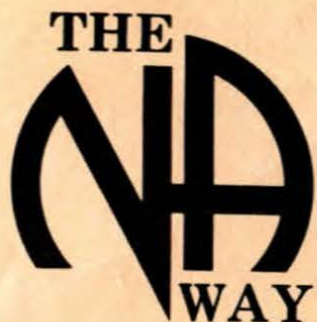

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N.A.

N.A. is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering 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*.

THIS BOOK
DOES NOT
LEAVE THE
LIBRARY

Abused or Abuser?



One Mother's Experience

As I continue in my recovery, it becomes increasingly clear that the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous are applicable to, and need to be practiced in, every area of my life. As a parent, these steps and principles are teaching me how to nurture and care for my children, when to protect and when to let go, how to be both responsible for them and responsive to them.

It hasn't always been this way. One of the symptoms of our disease is the inability to face life on life's terms. To me, that admission became terrifyingly clear. I discovered I did not know the first thing about being a mother to my children. I was, in fact, totally unprepared and powerless in that area.

I had always deluded myself into thinking that I was a good parent. As the oldest of nine children, I was held responsible for their actions, and the punishment for failure to control them was always a beating, at best. I was cast into the role of "little mother" but never taught how to care.

I escaped my abusive home via Haight-Ashbury, psychedelics, and a young rock musician. When I became pregnant, I promised myself that my children would not be raised as I had been.

I tried to keep that promise during their infancy and early childhood, but I had learned well the lessons of my own childhood. My dad had vented his alcoholic wrath upon us in the form of repression and punishment, and I was repeating this pattern of uncontrolled rage. I resented my parents for abusing

me, my husband for failing me, and my children for needing me. I lashed out and blamed everyone else for situations in my life which I had either created or could not control. Finally, filled with despair, I abandoned the boys completely.

During my first year of recovery I was plagued by guilt and fear. The more my sponsor urged me to write about my role as a mother, the more I procrastinated.

Rather than dealing with the patterns I had perpetuated, I spent that first year preparing externally for the return of my children. I rationalized that things would be different now.

I was wrong. Ten years of my temper tantrums had not endeared me to them. My older son, particularly, was not overly impressed by my "transformation." He resisted my anxious attempts to create an instant, loving, perfect family. Both boys were afraid of me, and my doubts about being able to take care of them were reinforced by their apprehension. I reacted to their uneasiness by making up more and more rules, trying to force them into obedience and respect. My misguided ideas of what a parent should be encouraged the restrictive atmosphere in our home. I had ignored my kids for so many years, but I was attempting to glue back the shattered pieces of our lives in one day. I began to feel more and more like a failure when I couldn't control their actions or their feelings. I had stopped taking drugs, but my disease continued to thrive.

Four months after they returned, our tension-filled house exploded. My older son walked into his bedroom closet and tied a rope around his neck. He could no longer cope with my persistent beratings and reprovals, and being too afraid to fight back, had simply chosen to get away from me any way he could.

His suicide attempt was not successful, but it shocked me into an awareness. That was a turning point in my recovery. I could no longer deny the patterns of abuse I had subjected my kids to. I had recreated almost exactly the destructive home I had run away from.

In this past year I have had to learn, one day at a time, to accept that my children are children, and not miniature adults. I have had to live by the principles of the first three steps, admitting powerlessness and unmanageability as a parent. I am now willing to earn their love and respect, rather than demand it. I am learning not to displace my own frustrations on them, but to practice my sixth and seventh steps.

I am also learning how to forgive my own parents. My amends to my children are meaningless as long as I harbor resentments; as long as I remain the abused "child," I am not accepting responsibility for my actions as an adult and a parent. My amends to my children must be practiced every day. It is not enough to say, "I'm sorry," and then continue the pattern of denial and abuse. I am learning to practice patience and tolerance in the areas where I have been most negligent of these principles.

It is an ongoing process. I have to constantly be reminded that I am not going to get well overnight, but as my sponsor teaches me about unconditional love, I am learning to pass it on to my sons. God willing, one day at a time, we are slowly healing the wounds. Today I am enjoying my kids. They are not perfect, but neither am I. They are no longer the burden I thought I was saddled with. I am no longer the self-created monster they feared and despised. We are learning about care and trust, for the first time in all of our lives.

C.K., California

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FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTERS

These are a few of our Fellowship Newsletters. In addition to subscribing to this Magazine, you might enjoy subscribing to one or more of these Newsletters.

Carolina Express	Memphis Miracle
Route #2, Box 205	P.O. Box 41323
Green Pond, SC 29446	Memphis, TN 38104

MORE ON PAGE 8.



Changes

I got to this program in 1977, at the age of twenty three, more dead than alive. I had spent the last ten years of my life taking everything I could to cover the hopelessness I felt and to fill the hole inside. I took anything from anyone to cover feelings; I took drugs and they took back. They took material, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well-being, leaving me feeling more hopeless and helpless. When they no longer created the oblivion I needed, and I despaired of not being able to die, I found Narcotics Anonymous.

In the NA program, I learned that the hole inside could be filled, that I was directly responsible for the content and quality of my life, and for the degree of fulfillment I chose to enjoy. I was taught that in order to keep something, I had to give it away; I'm realizing just how much that means to me. I began my recovery believing I had to hold on tight to anything I wanted to keep. That concept has been reversed as a result of practicing the Steps and Traditions of this program. The things I thought I needed became less important. Today I have a need for freedom from resentment, envy and jealousy, and the ability to care for others as much as myself.

The twelfth step promises us a spiritual awakening as a result of working the previous steps. I believe this is what happened to me and what allows me to enjoy my life as much as I do. I try to practice these principles in all my affairs and to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers (not just the using addict—any addict.)

Working, or practicing, the Steps have forced me to continue looking inside myself for answers. I could no longer blame you for my problems. I used to feel that if I wasn't getting what I thought I wanted in my life, it was because someone else had too much, and I became resentful. I was told that in order to be relieved of resentments, I should pray that the person I resented would get everything he or she wanted from life; that, in so doing, I would be free of resentment and gain peace of mind. However, I found myself praying that the person would get what he or she deserved—and I meant it maliciously. That was the best I could do at the time. I became willing to change my prayers, however, when I realized the impact that prayer had on me. Just like a boomerang, I got the bad things I had wished on others. None of the relief, peace of mind or other gifts I was expecting seemed to come until I changed my thoughts and prayers for the other people involved.

When I wrote inventories, I was forced to continue looking inside myself for the solution to my problems, because I was learning I couldn't make other people change to suit me. Just as resenting people and praying for bad things hadn't worked, the hate, anger, envy and jealousy that came out in my inventory didn't seem to work either. The only affect harboring those feelings had was to make me sicker.

I learned that I remained frustrated and confused about not being a good parent as long as I judged your parenting; my relationships kept falling apart as long as I was uncaring about your relationship problems; I experienced financial insecurity as long as I was busy gossiping about how much money you had. Each of these experiences reinforced the awareness that whatever I couldn't allow you to have, I couldn't have either, and whatever I wished for you was returned to me. That change from negative to positive was what finally clicked. I believe it happened as a direct result of working the first eleven steps on a regular basis. Working, each of these steps resulted in ego-deflation and my greater need for dependence on a Higher Power. That Higher Power and a few close friends

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Recovery First



When I first came to NA, I just wanted to stop getting loaded. Every attempt I made on my own had failed. As my addiction progressed, isolation increased. I pushed my family, friends, and loved ones away. In the end I was alone. In my head I blamed everyone else for the way I was. I was incapable of seeing my own part in the broken relationships, shattered plans, and the miserable life I was leading. There was no belief in God left in me; how could there be a God behind such a mess?

When I got to NA, I found comfort in knowing I wasn't alone. I found acceptance and understanding from others who were just like me...miserable, confused, and crazy. So I stayed sick, but not alone. We were all sick together! I dove head first into the Fellowship, surrounding myself with meetings, service work, conventions, and conferences. I just didn't want to get loaded anymore...I'd had enough. I figured the more I got involved in NA, just that much more protection I would have from that next fix, pill, or drink. I read literature, wrote literature, and got to know clean addicts all over the country and the world.

I wanted the best protection there was because I just didn't want to get high again. I saw anything and everything that was not directly associated with NA as a threat to my so called "Recovery." As a result, I had a very hard time of it in the "real" world. I couldn't hang on to a job, because I would get so burned out on all my service work and daily meetings that there was no energy left for living and working. I

stayed away from relationships because they were a threat to my serenity. I lived in houses full of clean addicts. I mean, I was surrounded by NA in every way. After three years, I was still miserable, sick, and empty inside. I was living off the praise and credit those people gave me for "doing so much good for the program." I needed to hear those things to keep me going. When no one else said them to me, I said them to myself. I resented those who weren't doing as much as I was, but who seemed to be getting well. I strongly urged others to get involved in service, and to surround themselves as I had with lots of protection. I knew that addiction was deadly... I just didn't realize that it was still alive and cooking inside of me.

After three and a half years of living like this, it all fell apart. I still didn't get high, but I was now stealing from friends, the program, and from work. I was using everyone and everything I could lay my hands on just to feel good and alive, but it wasn't working. People stopped believing what I said in meetings. They would see how sick I was, but I knew that they were the ones that were sick... I was going to stay clean no matter what!!! Once again, I found myself alone and scared as I pushed everyone away from me and went into hiding.

There was no honesty left in me...there was no open mind... no willingness...no God in my life. There never was. Stripped of everything, I asked God to help me. I was beaten; then it happened. I went to a meeting, and heard members share about their experience with the Twelve Steps. They were happy. They did not fear their addiction, because it had been removed. I surrendered and asked them to help me. They said, "If you let me." I no longer had a choice, so I let them. They asked me if I believed that what worked for them could work for me. I told them I did, and I really only had a flicker of belief, but it was enough. They suggested I make a decision to let a loving and forgiving God run my life. Just a decision, no more, no less. I made the decision. I was cautioned that if I made the decision sincerely, and if I said this prayer, I would never have to fight addiction again. I didn't believe then, but I made the decision

anyway. I let them take me through the rest of the Steps...there was very little work involved. My sponsors told me to just live my life, and God would take care of all the little things. I tried it, and it worked.

When I got to the eighth step, all that was involved was making a list of those that I had harmed. The list was very long, because I had harmed a lot of people both in my active addiction, and during the period where I had been clean but still sick. The list was not hard to make. It was just writing down the names of everyone who had ever been close to me, because they had all gotten hurt in one way or another, as a direct result of my addiction. As I wrote down the names, some I was willing to make amends to, I had to pray to see beyond whatever resentment I still had, and I had to forgive them in my heart for whatever harm they had done to me. In most cases where harm had been done to me, it was done only after I had done harm to them. I couldn't see that until after my resentment was removed. After this, my sponsors suggested that I was ready for the ninth step.

I took the Ninth, and am now taking ten, eleven and twelve daily. I no longer have to fight anything or anyone, and my life is better than it ever was. My only protection today is God, and that's enough.

Reprinted from Philadelphia
Newsletter - Cleansheet, September, 1984

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Continued from page 3.

Clean Sheet	Rainbow Connection
2133 E. Huntington St.	890 B. Atlanta Road
Philadelphia, PA 19125	Marietta, GA 30060

The View Newsletter	Miracles Happen
P.O. Box 5620	P.O. Box 9063
Wellesley St. Auckland 1	Pittsburgh, PA 15224
New Zealand	

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One Is Too Many, A Thousand Never Enough

Last November I received a letter from my first sponsor who had moved to another state. She shared a lot with me that I didn't fully comprehend until recently. I told myself, "She's right; I'd better do something about staying away from men in the program and start going to meetings for what they're for, to help the addict who still suffers, including myself." I guess the bottom line was I hadn't inflicted enough pain on myself to surrender this area of my addiction. I was abstinent, but I wasn't changing (I wasn't willing to work the sixth and seventh steps).

Here are some excerpts from the letter she wrote me. Please read it and use what you can:

"The first thing I need to share with you is what I've learned about our hometown fellowship since I've moved away from it, and can look more honestly at it. This has been hard for me to accept, because of the great love for my friends there. The truth, as I've been able to see it, is that we are so small a fellowship there that we hang on to our old self-centered ways. We put too much into fellowship and not enough into personal programs. Addicts are self-centered people. It is only through recovery from addiction—living the Steps—that we are freed from this aspect of our addiction. Step one brings abstinence, steps two through five bring a little peace into our personal lives. It is steps six through twelve, though, that let us become caring, sharing people—part of the world—not just takers. Finding meaning in each of the steps in my own life came from a lot of pain, after trying not to have to really change. Maybe sharing what happened to me will help you see just what I'm saying. I saw the pain in your eyes. From what I saw in your words and actions, maybe you are ready to surrender. This is what it took for me to finally actively surrender.

When I first got clean, I found that just the first step would keep me clean. I didn't share very much,

because I thought my personal issues were "our secret." I found out that all I had to do was just stop using, admit I couldn't use just for today, and make new friends in the fellowship. If I filled all my time up in being with these people and going to a lot of meetings, I wouldn't use! At first this was more than enough; not for long, though.

I could be around others, talk a good talk, and convince them that I was recovering, but inside I knew I was just as sick as before; only now I didn't have the drugs to hide from myself in. This pain motivated me to do a fourth and fifth step. A little help came from this, yet I was still acting self-centered and self-destructive, and I needed more attention than before. Just like when I was using, I could only think of myself; others were there only when I needed them. I really thought of myself as this nice sharing person, yet I was the only one receiving. I knew I was doing all these things, yet I couldn't stop myself. Then I became so demanding that even the people who loved me started to pull away. The more they pulled away, the more I demanded. Round and round it went.

I knew I had to change fast, or I would lose the respect of all my friends. My first sixth step was motivated out of this self-centeredness. I knew I couldn't keep doing the obvious cruel things like thirteenth stepping anymore. I had found that abstinence was easy in a little item, so I simply applied that to sex. It only required giving it up, not alot of active change. It also looked good to other people; they would think I was better. But once again I found that simple abstinence was just not enough for me, if I wanted to get better.

I had heard people talk about "walking my prayers," and I told myself I was doing that by not having sex. Yet in truth I had expected God to do it all. I would take the little effort to abstain, but was unwilling to really actively change. I ran around to every person and place I could find so they could make me happy. It didn't work. I relapsed on sex once more.

Boy, did I ever open my eyes! There had been no real change deep inside, only superficial change to

gain acceptance. I took a sixth and seventh step—a real one. I had to look at the defects in my life that affect others. I actively worked at not being the only person in my world. I actively stopped using people. I actively stopped using the fellowship to carry me through life. I stopped running to meetings every day (that is, I stopped believing that they were the only part of the program that could help me). I learned to use meetings as they were intended to be used. I discovered some great things! I found that when I put the work into changing, if I ran out of steam, I could pray, and God would give me the energy to keep trying.

I finally understood why we tell new people to go to ninety meetings in ninety days—it's because they have no personal program to work between meetings yet! By this time I did, and I came to understand that meetings are not my whole recovery. They are there to share what this program and my God have to offer. Meetings add to, not make up for, my recovery. I found that once I learned to base my recovery in the principles in the Twelve Steps, three or four meetings a week were plenty. I also found that I must guard against using those meetings as an escape, instead of facing life on its own terms and living it. My God gave me this insight when I needed it most. An important part of my recovery is my effort to become a more responsible, productive adult—to grow up and finally take care of the business of my own life.

I pray that you have really read this letter, and accept the love and pain it has taken to share it with you. This may be the only thing of real value I can ever give you. "Work the Steps or die." This has been the only thing of real value that my sponsor has given me. This is what a sponsor is for—not to fix us, enable us, judge or preach to us, but to explain how they live the steps in their daily lives, and share this with us. What we do with it in the end is up to us.

Sent with all my love....."

At the time I received this letter, I had just broken abstinence in the area of sex. I was pretty

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Relationships In Recovery



Women in the Fellowship of NA are very special in my life today. This was not so when I first started coming to meetings. Since then, I've come to believe that God wants us to do more than just survive—He wants us to have victory over our daily struggles, and to have respect and dignity. I've found a new freedom through working the Steps—freedom from guilt, and from that feeling that I owe someone something because they were nice to me. The program gives me a way of dealing with these thoughts and feelings.

I thought that the love and companionship of women was the last thing I needed, but deep in my heart I always longed for a female friend. I think it was partly my own self-esteem that kept me away, and partly the feeling of having to compete for the attention of men.

I came to NA at first for the wrong reasons. I had a sentencing coming up in three months, and I was scared to death about spending any time in jail, so I thought I'd attend meetings to show the judge that I was trying. Never for a minute did I think that this would work for me; that my life would change and I'd be clean. I thought I was unique. The few women I saw at meetings didn't literally live on the streets like I did. They couldn't know the pain I felt. I can remember how the drugs had taken their toll on me physically. I knew about the mental collapse; I was miserable inside. I had no hope, I didn't believe that I deserved anything better than death. I carried these feelings inside me to and from meetings.

It took a few months for me to actually get clean. I had to go back and find out that I couldn't run the street like I did, and I had to experience the feeling of not belonging with old acquaintances, so now I didn't belong anywhere! But the pain of not feeling like I belonged in NA was less than the pain I felt on the streets, so I kept on coming. When I celebrated thirty days, I felt a sense of accomplishment. That was new for me. I liked it, and wanted more. At one meeting someone suggested that I get a sponsor, so right after the meeting I asked a man who sounded good when he talked. He told me he couldn't, and suggested that I ask a woman. There were three, and I asked one after the other. All refused for one reason or another. Finally I found a woman who was willing to sponsor me. She took time out on her job to listen, and to share with me. One thing she told me a few times that stuck was, "Give yourself some time; you owe it to yourself." I held on to those thoughts—even though I didn't really believe it, I trusted my sponsor. Just maybe she was right; she sounded so soft, kind, loving understanding, while I was rough, tough and defiant.

When I had made a decision to try to stay clean, another member suggested that I go to a women's meeting. "Are you kidding?" I thought, "Me go to a women's meeting?" But I went, and I shared honestly for the first time. I listened to some suggestions that were given, and when I went home, I tried to follow them. It was then that I began to understand the second and third steps. I prayed for God's help, and put genuine effort into working them.

After five or six months, I moved on to the fourth step, and then the fifth. Again I prayed for God's help, and with my sponsor's guidance, I got through it. It was almost a year before I moved on to the next steps. During that time I grew more and more aware of my defects. I held that pain inside, letting other people think I was OK. One day, shortly after celebrating nine months, I had an argument with my boyfriend. To my surprise, for the first time, I had a strong urge to use. It was very hard to be honest about that, but after quite a struggle, I opened

up about it. I had to, or I would have used eventually. since that time, I have begun to practice sharing more honestly at meetings. That was difficult at first, but I knew I had to do it.

When I was clean seventeen months, I became increasingly aware of the defects that were stunting my growth. Lust, flirtation, the games that go along with those—I had difficulty accepting that I was that type of woman, so I suffered with these defects alone for three months. The pain then became so unbearable that I became entirely ready to change—to move on to my sixth step. I began to better understand the word "surrender" after asking God to help me, discussing it with my sponsor, and sharing about it at meetings. My faith in God had grown through working the Steps. Now at times I feel almost overwhelmed by recovery, and I'm so grateful to God and to NA.

When I celebrated two years clean, my boyfriend and I became engaged—another commitment that came with hard work. I'm glad we didn't rush the relationship. We didn't shack up or marry after we knew each other just a few months. I see so many relationships in distress because people try to advance too fast, or they allow the relationship to dominate their lives at the expense of other things. With us, recovery has always come first. I thank God we've had the willingness to keep it that way. I've been able to develop those friendships with other women, and to keep those relationships as a top priority. As a result, people respect me today, and maybe more importantly, I respect myself. I know that this is all a gift from the God of my understanding. My part was the willingness to follow the suggestions that I heard in NA. The quality of my relationships in recovery has made it all worth it.

H.H., New Jersey

Nowhere Else To Go



I checked into a recovery house in 1977 because there was no place left for me to go. I had surrendered to the fact that drugs controlled me, and my life was unmanageable. I could clean up, but I didn't know how to stay clean. It remained the only place I had left to live. I learned about the Steps and Traditions of NA, and came to believe that the power in this program might enable me to stay clean. I learned how to apply the Steps and Traditions in each area of my life. They were the only things I knew of that ever worked, and I realized there was still no place else to go. If I want to stay clean and recover from my addiction, I must remain in the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I tried everything else; something was always lacking. I don't fully belong anywhere else. I am an addict, and the only people who know me inside and out are other addicts. Trying to find ways around being an addict was a waste of time. Someone in another Fellowship may have similar feelings, but they cannot seem to help me when it gets down to the nitty gritty of where my drug use took me, and where my disease still tries to take me.

Nowhere else can I, as an addict, become a fully functioning person. Living the steps of NA requires that I practice these principles in all my affairs, and carry the message to the addict who still suffers. In return, the Steps promise a spiritual awakening.

What happens when addicts with three, four, five and six years of clean time decide they don't need or like NA anymore? What happens when we aren't available to share our recovery at NA meetings? I can't live without recovery. I can't recover when the only people left in meetings are all struggling through their first year, still locked into the disease, and looking for someone with more time to offer some experience.

I need NA, and am responsible to help if any addict, anywhere, wants to get clean. I can't help addicts who are referred to NA meetings if I'm attending another Twelve Step Program's meetings instead of NA meetings. I need to stay involved in NA meetings and NA service to be there when the newcomer arrives. I need to be able to share NA experience, strength and hope.

The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting. I need to stay in those meetings and provide an atmosphere of recovery. I need to be sure that those newcomers keep coming back. I need their support as much as they need mine. If addicts keep leaving NA, I die, because I have nowhere else to go.

D.B., California

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FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTERS ... CONTINUED

Clean Times
P.O. Box 33351
Indianapolis, IN 46203

NA Today
P.O. Box 759
Fremantle, W.A. 6160
Australia

The Rolling Paper
P.O. Box 34323
Phoenix, AZ 85067

The Recoverer
P.O. Box 3826
Federal Way, WA 98003

Straight Talk
P.O. Box 720, Sta. A
Vancouver, B.C.
V6C 2N5

My Love Affair With NA



From the time I was a little girl I was always trying to be someone other than myself. I did have parents who gave me love, but the feelings of self-love and self-worth were not there. I searched for those feelings for many years through broken relationships, and I thought I had found the answer in drugs. The time came, as it always does, when the drugs stopped working; I found myself praying for death—it seemed the only way out of the hellish night-mare.

I was put in treatment against my will, but I soon found out that wasn't surprising, because as a using addict, I had no real control over my own life. I was in treatment for three and one half months. During that time I heard the message of recovery. The only thing I was capable of doing first was going to the meetings and not using.

Around six months clean I had the opportunity to go to an NA convention. That was the beginning of a new life for me. I somehow knew that the genuine caring and concern—the real "honest" love—that they had for me and for themselves wasn't any kind of false front. As the addicts had in my home town, they loved me before I could love myself. During that three days a miracle happened in my life—the desire to stay clean and to be a part of this Fellowship was born within me.

I came home and began to share in meetings and reach out for help. I began doing service work by helping set up the meetings and by sharing with frightened newcomers.

NA became my Higher Power. By doing service work I found self-worth and love for myself—the things that I had been searching for all my life!

It was very obvious to me that in order to stay clean I had to decide to give NA the same love and allegiance that I had given drugs. To this very day I have never regretted that decision. Slowly, I began to apply the steps in my life, and through them I found a Higher Power.

The love still burns bright within me for this beautiful Fellowship. I have an NA family, and am secure in the love of this Fellowship. I am proud of who I am today! I just had my three-year birthday, and I realize that the things that applied in the beginning still apply today. I am very active in service work—the backbone of my recovery. Giving has helped my become a part of society.

There are no words to describe the love I have for NA. By living the principles of this program, I can carry to the still suffering addict the message that there is indeed a better way of life. Each day clean shatters any doubts that NA does work. Thank you NA for giving me back my life, and for helping me each day to learn how to live.

C.M., LA.



"As If"

In the winter of 1983 I was introduced to the NA program with but a few convictions, each of which were gifts to me from the courts. Consequently, I was determined to coast through the recovery house in which I was enrolled with as little strain as possible, while acting "as if" I were taking the Steps and working the principles of recovery.

At first I argued with the principles and took delight in finding contradictions and discrepancies in policy and procedure of that recovery house. My plan was to convert slowly—to show reluctance, consideration and then conversion. It seemed to me to be the easiest way to fool everybody, "coast" thru the recovery house, make the necessary phases and complete the program thereby satisfying the court. I knew I would use again, and my stash was waiting. I was a devoted user and saw no reason to quit. Eventually I knew the Steps by heart, but all was pretense to placate my counselors and the people in NA.

Six months into the recovery house, something unexpected began to occur. Some facts were beginning to open the closed door of my thinking. The number of people entering and leaving to use again, and then returning in far worse shape than when they originally entered, was impossible to ignore. The progressive nature of the disease was an active drama being performed before me for my awakening. Perhaps, I too was subject to its "corrosion."

The adventure began for me when I finally recognized that my life focused on and centered around getting and using instruments of my own destruction, drugs. I accepted being powerless. Then I began to see all my acting "as if" as an entryway opened for me by my Higher Power. That made the miracle of recovery accessible to me.

R.M., California

On Becoming A Lady



It seemed for years I knew I didn't use drugs like the other people I hung out with. I couldn't ever get enough. If you would have asked me, I was never high enough. The dope was no good, I needed more, no one ever understood. Neither did I! They could stop for months at a time. I said I didn't want to, really I couldn't have—I tried. Lots of times my addiction took me places I said I'd never go. I wound up with people I never dreamed I'd ever know, but I felt comfortable with them because they got high like I did. Anger—rage was a lifetime companion, and with these people I could act it out.

Then after yet another embarrassing incident, guilt, shame and fear would set in and I would be confused as to why I acted that way. It was like I had no control, like I was crazy. I really didn't want to do those things but I couldn't help it. Being a female wasn't easy. The guilt came from my mother's voice saying that ladies don't act that way. I surely wasn't a lady, and I didn't really want to be either. Ladies were people who drank tea, played canasta, and stayed home all the time acting proper, whatever that was. Meanwhile, I hated myself. My family would tell me I was crazy, and I immediately would fly into a rage and start destroying the house, all the while screaming how wrong they were in accusing me of being crazy. Makes sense, right?

When I came to Narcotics Anonymous my life seemed hopeless; I was full of fear and just broken—really broken. I knew for a long time that I wasn't

normal; drugs weren't working for me and I just couldn't stop using. What a horror! After the drugs were removed and time went by, I took a look at the first step and laughed. Powerless? Not me, then I realized after another addict explained it—yes I was powerless. But unmanageable, that was kind. Unbearable, definitely. So what, that was nothing new.

That second step is the one that really saved my life. "Restore me to sanity" was not the problem. I didn't need restoration, I needed some sanity, period. I don't remember ever having any in the first place. For the first time in my life I had a glimmer, however faint, of hope. Maybe I did have a chance at something besides the technicolor horror movie I had been living for the last 16 years.

Because other addicts shared with me, I believed in Narcotics Anonymous. The group was only four or five people, but they were a power greater than me. I felt so weak, anything would have been greater than me.

Today, the second step is one of my very favorite of them all. The hope that still remains with me is loud and clear. Even though my thoughts are sometimes still squirrely, I don't have to act on them.

Today, the program is still that power greater than me, but I also have a God in my life that can help me get through anything if I just ask Him. I have been given a gift of sanity just for today. I don't use, I try to change and grow, and I work with another addict on a daily basis. I have found hope in this program that I'd never had before. I have become a lady by my own standards. I don't drink tea or know how to play canasta, but I do the best I can to act appropriately rather than react inappropriately. One thing I do know is if I pick up a drug it'll all come back. I make that choice every day.

For this addict, not to use for one day is an act of sanity. My behavior is rational and controlled, and that is sanity. The fact that I care about another human being is sanity. Caring about consequences of my behavior is sanity. My debt of gratitude for the God of my understanding and for Narcotics Anonymous for giving me this way of life, can never be fully paid.

In the four years I've been involved with NA, I haven't been to jail, haven't hit anyone, haven't been to an institution, except for H&I meetings, haven't felt the loneliness, desperation and despair I felt my whole life. Thank you NA, for I am a living testimonial that "once an addict, always an addict" is no longer true. I have found a life second to none, and the oldtimers tell me to fasten my seat belt; I'm in for the ride of my life, one day at a time. Boy oh Boy—I can't wait!

L.G., Florida

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upset with myself. It was with a newcomer, and he relapsed. I know he had a choice about picking up the first one, but I didn't give him a chance to find anything else in NA, like a program to fall back on. I used that new person, like I used other members for my own instant gratification, not thinking about how my actions affect other people.

Until recently, I didn't accept how fatal this disease really is. Another man I took advantage of, in the beginning of my recovery, died due to his addiction. It really hurts that he didn't get a chance to take advantage of this program and recover.

I guess it's time to do more than just talk about changing in this area. The pain of not changing has become greater than the pain of changing. I've been forced to look at the hideous side of the disease—it kills. So next time you see a newcomer of the opposite sex you're attracted to, why don't you give that person (and yourself) a break. Send men to men and women to women. Give that addict a chance at this program, and at life.

L.B., Michigan

Newness

I was sharing with my sponsor that I was really excited lately, and feeling "new" again. "That feeling of newness," he reflected, "isn't that the feeling that comes right after the feeling of oldness?" I had to laugh.

Even though I've been in recovery a number of years, I seem to go through periods of feeling stagnant, wondering, "is this it? Is this all there is?" It's at these times in my recovery that I find I'm not making a conscious effort to work a step or be involved in service work. The key has usually been service—doing something in the spirit of love. Looking back I can say that the "spiritual charge," the feeling of "oneness with the universe," the feeling I searched for through the use of drugs, comes when I am out of myself.

Every time, without fail, that NA has asked something of me and I've done it, I've experienced that feeling of serenity and peace of mind. It would make sense then that I should always be looking into service, right? Well, I tend to slide back into being the "chairman of the universe" at times and have to start the process all over again. I've learned my lesson hard and slow. I spent a few years clean without much involvement in NA service work and my recovery was okay, a remarkable improvement over my using days (naturally, anything would have been an improvement!).

About the time I became a member of NA and implanted in the service structure at the group level, I experienced a surge in my "spiritual awakening." I felt a sense of belonging that brought tears of relief—at last the search was over; I'd come home where I belonged, with fellow addicts. I learned what it means to surrender. For me, it's saying yes to what NA asks of me; it means being willing to help another addict seeking recovery; it means being of service to a loving God.

The thing my life lacked most in my using and first few years of recovery was stability. I believe we need something concrete, always present—a purpose in

our lives. As an addict, I tend to suffer from "wanderlust" and easily slide back into my own little world. My personal connection with my Higher Power seems to be maintained through regular contact with my fellow addicts, which is most consistently done through service work!

It is still difficult at times to keep a balance in my life. I believe that in the same way I maintain my freedom through the Steps, I maintain a balance in service through the Traditions of NA and through conscious contact with a loving God, which becomes my contribution to group conscience. There have been times that I've been asked to serve that I didn't want to or didn't believe I could. I may not always know, however, what's best for me. So far I've been able to trust the group conscience and accept the responsibilities or tasks that are asked of me with gratitude and humility.

I have had the good fortune of experiencing NA service when I've needed it most, when I'm too much into my problems. The result has been spiritual revitalization. So even though the feeling of "oldness," or stagnation, continues to happen, I am grateful, because that means the feeling of "newness" is just around the corner.

T.B., Minnesota

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loved me unconditionally, and truly wanted the best for me. They had learned the lesson of giving in order to receive, and had pushed me to learn it also.

I don't really know exactly why it works—I only know it does. Whatever it is that I want to have or experience in my life, I first must want for others. I truly believe that the miracle of this program is not just that it works that way, but that I, and others like me, become able to have those feelings for other people. I really want the best for others, I can allow others to experience whatever it is they need to without resentment, envy or anger the way I used to. That's a big change for me, and I like it!

D.B., California

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Wisconsin at the Park
East Hotel for
INFO call 414/374-5886

NOVEMBER 21 - 25, 1984
Volunteer Region Convention
Sheraton West, Knoxville
INFO P.O. Box 4443
Chattanooga, TN 37405-0443

JANUARY 4, 5, 6, 1985
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Convention—AVCNA
Richmond, Virginia
The Marriot Hotel
814/264-3910

MARCH 22, 23, 24, 1985
7th Annual Northern
California Convention
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Sacramento, CA 95866

JULY 5, 6, 7, 1985
Central Great Lakes
Regional Convention
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Bay City, MI 48706

JUNE 21, 22, 23, 1985
6th East Coast NA
Convention, Towson State
University, P.O. Box 26513
Baltimore, MD 21207

AUGUST 30 - SEPT 1, 1985
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