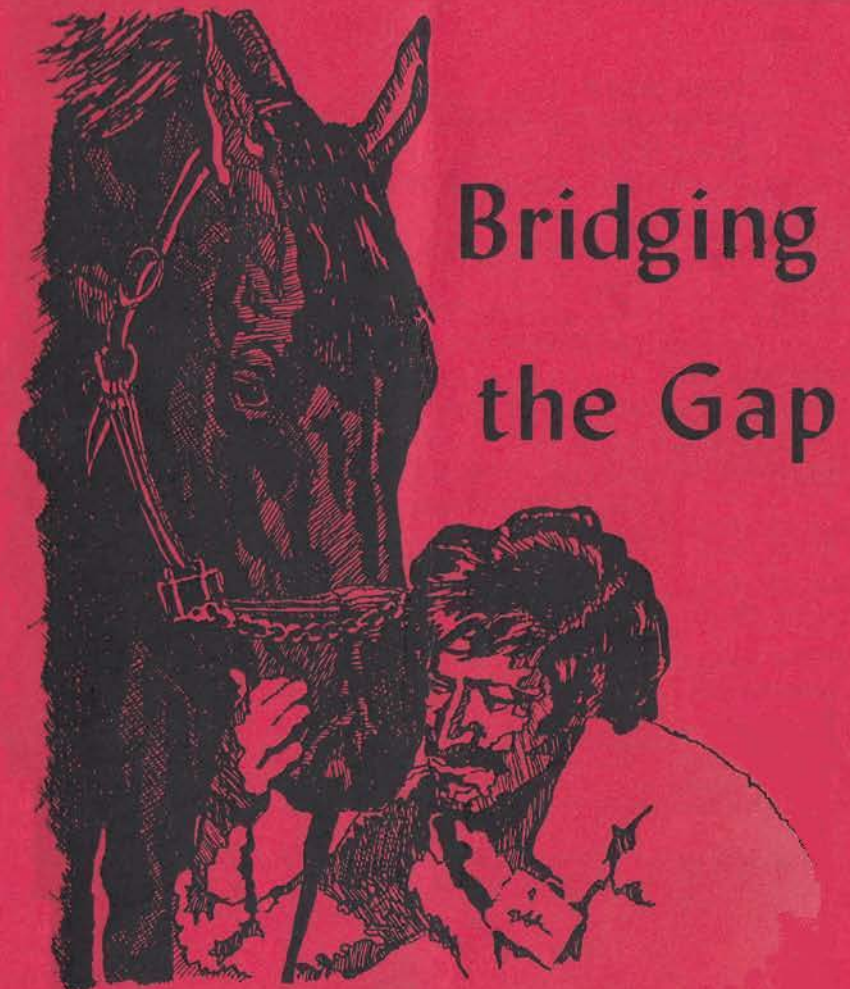


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**My Gratitude Speaks
When I Care
And When I Share
With Others
The N.A. Way.**





THE INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF THE FELLOWSHIP
OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

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What is Narcotics Anonymous?

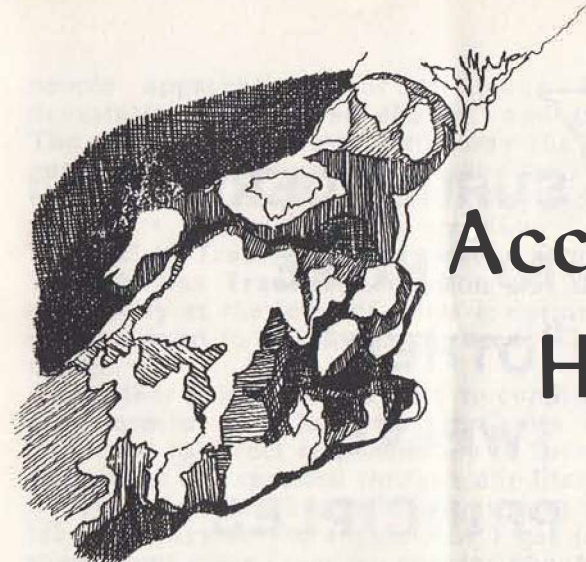
N.A. is a worldwide Fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other to stay clean. It doesn't matter which drugs you used, or what you have done in the past. We are concerned only with how we can help addicts recover. It costs nothing to be a member of N.A.—there are no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. 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*. For more information about the N.A. groups nearest you, write us at the address below.

All members of Narcotics Anonymous are invited to participate in this "meeting in print." Send all input, along with a signed copyright release form, to: The N.A.Way; World Service Office, Inc. P.O. Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409

THE TWELVE STEPS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

- 1 *We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.*
- 2 *We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
- 3 *We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.*
- 4 *We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
- 5 *We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
- 6 *We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*
- 7 *We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*
- 8 *We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*
- 9 *We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
- 10 *We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*
- 11 *We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out.*
- 12 *Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

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Accepting Help

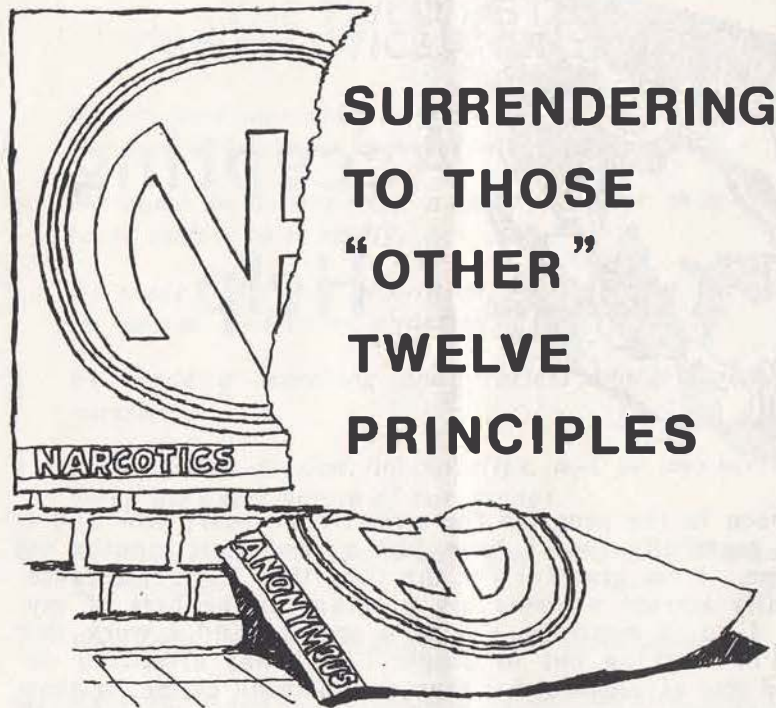
I've been in the program for almost four years now and I can say gratefully that I have just a few short months of clean time. I am grateful for the time that I have, because I've finally started working my program to the best of my ability. I go to meetings, I have a sponsor and I work the steps. I'm reaching out to people like I was afraid to do before. I was afraid of what they would think of me, or that they would reject me, or think of me as a loser. I can't tell you how wrong I was, and how that false fear has taken so much from my life.

I remember reading and hearing from other addicts, that to get an addict into action takes a great hurt, or loss, or in simple terms, to hit a bottom. I hit my bottom finally with a divorce, which left me unable to see my child when I wanted. I lost these two things that meant the world to me because I didn't mean the most to me. I know I hurt, and I was angry, but I never reached out for help.

Well I tell you, and I kid you not, that if you're in the program and you're hurting, the place to be is in the company of another addict. I most often want to be alone to do it on my own, but I've learned that if I want what I see others having, like a smile on their face, a warmth in their heart, or just an ear for listening, I have to reach out and get it from them, because they may not give it to me until I ask for it, and ask them how they got it. I've found that there are no other people who can help me except those right here in N.A., and I am forever grateful to them and to N.A. for giving me the chance to live again and experience life for itself. Thank you for lending me an ear, N.A.

T.N.
North Dakota

P.S. I'm home!



SURRENDERING TO THOSE "OTHER" TWELVE PRINCIPLES

When I first took a risk, motivated by desperation, and began to live "just for today," without any mood-altering chemicals, I thereby surrendered to the spiritual principles known as the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. Thirty-nine months later, I realize I am also powerless over my addiction, not just drugs. Addiction is a disease which includes the symptom of my futile efforts to manage or control other people, places and things. So I try not to do that "just for today." But I have opinions... (smile), and one of those is that we need to surrender to those "other" twelve principles--our Traditions.

It's New Year's Day, and I just returned from a party attended by 200-250 recovering addicts--nice way to start the year. But when I came home I opened a catalogue from a publishing house which sells and distributes recovery oriented literature. Browsing through it, I was saddened by what I read. I am not expressing any opinion on what people or organizations outside of N.A. write about N.A., or what they distribute after we write and approve it. I am concerned about what we "self-will" as individual members of N.A., be it for profit and prestige or as a misguided attempt to carry our message.

Two items in the catalogue caught my eye and bothered me. One was a film, showing people claiming to be N.A. members with no attempt at concealing their faces. These misguided

people apparently offer testimony in the film to the devastation of "cocaine abusers" and their recovery in N.A. The ad's caption rationalized away the Eleventh Tradition by guaranteeing anonymity to anyone who *claimed* its protection, but that these members (in the film) had waived anonymity in some sort of Twelve Step sacrifice. Apparently, the word "always" in Tradition Eleven does not mean "always" to them. This obvious Tradition violation was done by claiming that anonymity at the level of films is optional. It sounds like the stories I used to tell my parole agent when he suspected me of using.

Another pamphlet professed to contain the experience of an N.A. member and her early struggles with recovery. What happened to direct responsibility to those we serve, and group conscience as expressed through our literature review process?

My experience has painfully shown me that any action I take contrary to the suggestions I get in N.A., whether those suggestions come from my sponsor about the Steps or from the Basic Text and Trustees about the Traditions, is only my self will masquerading as something else. If I chair a meeting and bring in a speaker with a definitely mixed message, or decide that my group need not pay rent because that money might buy literature, or disrupt a meeting to complain about the above two examples, I'm once again running the show, singing, "I did it my way...."

Our Traditions are seldom, if ever, enforceable, but they are also non-negotiable. We do not, hopefully, "police" each other. Instead, I hope, we each work the steps, and that teaches us to become a part of the "WE" of N.A., which means we maintain our individuality but at the same time, respect the group conscience approved interpretation of these Twelve Traditions. I need to do that because my "personal recovery depends on N.A. unity," and on our common welfare. The experience, strength and hope of our Fellowship expressed through our Trustees and other service committees is ample resource for our needs. We are each entitled to express our opinions, but in the end the group conscience vote decides each issue.

Sponsorship was a good place for me to start learning about the traditions and their importance. In my home area, several meetings hold discussions on a step and it's corresponding tradition (i.e., First Step/First Tradition), as a dual topic each week. These are very helpful and reduce the number of "oh no, not a tradition being discussed tonight" complaints. Of course, the final answer, as always, lies in my continuing to stay clean and work the steps. By doing that, I cannot help but respect and acknowledge the "other" twelve principles, therefore choosing not to violate them. Just for Today. Love you all.

T.B.
Pennsylvania

The Traditions Really Work



In the time I have been in the Fellowship, I have attended numerous service meetings where we were trying to determine group conscience. Many times I have voted my conscience after asking God for direction. Never quite sure just who it was that was voting, God or me. My rationalization for that was that the Second Tradition with regards to group conscience reads: "A loving God as He may express Himself," which to me meant that it was possible he wouldn't.

Well, I'd like to share a recent experience I had concerning group conscience that has given the Second Tradition a whole new meaning for me.

As a result of an upcoming convention in our region, we, the convention committee, had to decide which of two cities we were going to hold it in. Feelings had been running high for quite some time over the issue, and it was apparent that the day of decision was not going to be an easy one.

Well, the committee met in an out of the way coffee shop (halfway between our two cities) during a surprise blizzard, and we proceeded to go to work. After lengthy discussion, we were no closer to a solution than we were two months before. It appeared that whichever way the vote went, we were in a situation where we were all going to lose. The committee, the region, even the Fellowship as a whole, since personal recovery depends on N.A. unity.

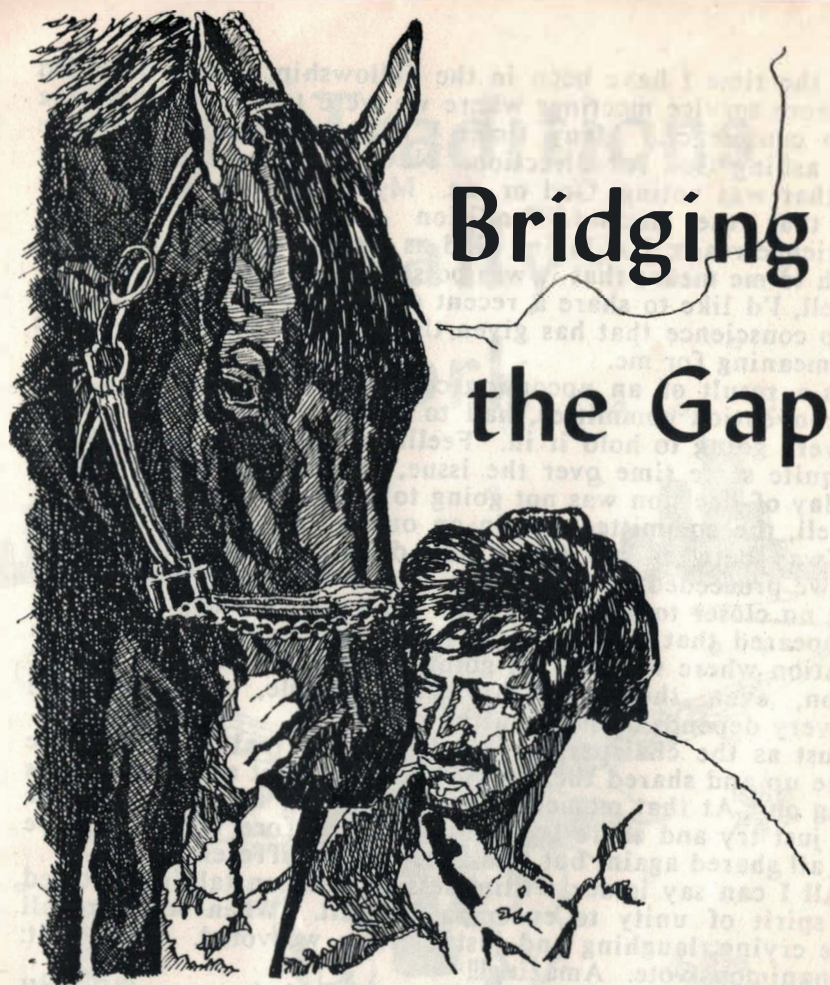
Just as the chairperson called for the final vote, someone spoke up and shared their personal discomfort about what was going on. At that moment I decided to put my decision aside and just try and share from my heart. Before we knew it we had all shared again, but this time it was different.

All I can say is our willingness to keep on talking allowed the spirit of unity to encompass us all. When we were all done crying, laughing and just sharing, we voted. The result: A unanimous vote. Amazing!!!

Even now as I write this, I can still feel the power (as well as the goose bumps) of that moment. To all my brothers and sisters on that committee, thank you for helping me understand the First and Second Traditions as never before. We spent a day together I'll never forget.

So now I can share from direct personal experience that if we are willing to listen, a loving God will choose to express himself in a way that benefits us all.

In loving service,
Anonymous
Colorado



Bridging the Gap

"I can't picture you crazy like me. You're not that type of person. You're so serene, so easy going." I wasn't sure whether the sponsee who spoke those words to me was complimenting me or not. I had to chuckle at my own reaction. I wanted at first to defend my familiarity with insanity. If he only knew the extent of that familiarity... But here I am today living the principles of the Narcotics Anonymous Program to the best of my ability, and insanity has become an insignificant part of my life. Spiritual principles have a way of taking care of that. Still I have to laugh at myself when I panic for a second in the absence of my old image--you may not believe I'm really a "dope fiend."

By the time I was ready to surrender to the Narcotics Anonymous Program and seek the help of a God of my own understanding, I was whipped. I had tried living the "party animal" life, and instead of giving me sustained excitement and happiness, it had led to a grey, painful isolation. I was

still functioning, but my life was draining. I had tried in every way I knew how to "use drugs normally" (if I could only figure out what that meant) or to quit using. Any success I had at either of those was short lived. The insanity of wild and crazy partying had given way to the insanity of using drugs against my own will, to the despair of everyone who cared about me.

But I finally made it to N.A. At first the lure of the lights and glitter of the hearty party life still had some pull. I was still somewhat a victim of the delusion that maybe somehow, some day I could have that. Fortunately, though, I had been bludgeoned just enough by my previous attempts to ignore the reality of my disease. I knew I could not use drugs safely. Whenever I tried I always became obsessive and compulsive and still couldn't satisfy the insatiable desire. The desire to get high always turned into a desire for oblivion, and for me oblivion always left despair in its wake. The members of N.A., by sharing about themselves, helped me to keep enough perspective to stay clean "just for today." Eventually the desire to get high went away.

At first I wasn't sure just what I was surrendering to, though. Was my life over now? Would there be no more good times? Would my life be boring and dull? The sparkle in the eyes of the N.A. members was just enough to keep me hoping for the best. I secretly felt that this Fellowship was great for people like *them*, who got into this sort of thing, but I really didn't fit very well. Still I stuck around for awhile, just in case it might work for me. I was strongly attracted to it on the one hand, and fearful that I couldn't fit in on the other. So at first my surrender didn't run too deep.

I soon found that recovery could be great fun. In the small community where I got clean, the N.A. members were always partying at someone's house, or at an N.A. dance or something --without drugs. That was the first level of understanding, the first glimmer of a vision of a happy life without drugs. Fun is fun, clean or loaded. I found that once I got used to being clean, my friends and I had more fun clean than I ever had loaded. My interests began to broaden now that drugs weren't a part of everything I did, and I really started to enjoy life.

As I began to apply the Twelve Steps in my life with the guidance of a sponsor, another dimension of enjoying life emerged that I hadn't been able to predict. I had thought of a good time before only in terms of a certain level of excitement or euphoria, so I had a very narrow view of what it meant to enjoy life. I really didn't have a glimpse of what it would mean to calm down and experience some inner peace so that I could fully appreciate many of life's more subtle pleasures that were out of my reach before.

I came to N.A. with lots of pressing questions, and two things happened. I got some of the answers and I forgot some

of the questions. The pressing urgency went away. Similarly, I came here with fears about what life without drugs would be like, but I was trapped in my limited perspective. I found out that I couldn't truly evaluate, from that diseased state of mind, what life clean could be like. The steps have unlocked a whole new level of pleasure and enjoyment that I couldn't have envisioned before.

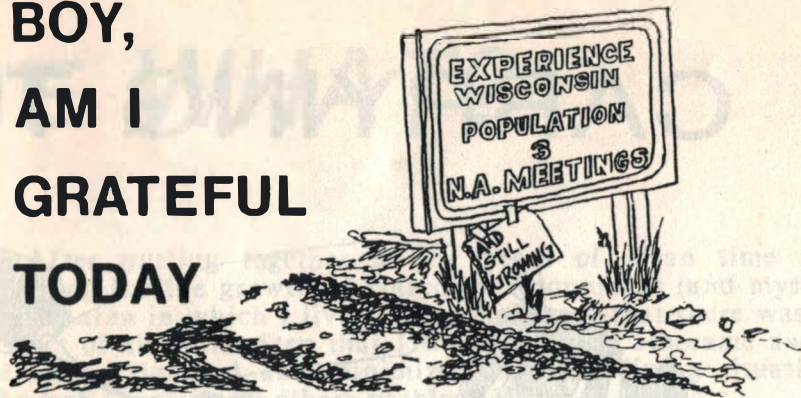
So many times along the way I was asked to take a risk and venture into the unknown. At Step Three I had to learn to suspend cynicism about God and trust the unknown, unseen. At Steps Six and Seven I had to trust in the promise that as my character defects faded and my personality changed, the changes would be positive. (I had trusted drugs to change my personality before, and got burned.) My most fervent prayer at that time was "God, Please don't make me weird." Throughout the process of personality change, of spiritual awakening, called the Twelve Steps, I have been challenged to trust and go forward. I have found that each time I met the challenge, a greater level of freedom was on the other side.

But how do you say all of this to the newcomer who thinks someone with "your kind of serenity" couldn't possibly relate to what he's going through? I'm reminded of something the Sunday morning speaker at the World Convention in D.C. said. She said that newcomers in this Fellowship are like race horses coming in after the final stretch. When your horse is panting, still in a lather, trying to come down from the intensity of the race, what do you do? Critique the race? Start practicing for the next race? If you're a good trainer, you walk with her, talk to her, brush her down and make her as comfortable as possible. There will be time for preparation later.

That's what we're trying to say when we say "keep coming back," and "more will be revealed," and "it gets better." Almost before you know it you find yourself looking into what feel like your own eyes saying, "Just stay clean for today; things will work out okay." Whenever I say things like that I can only pray that some spark of hope gets through. I can only hope the addict won't give up before the miracle happens. And every time I'm in that situation I feel very deeply that this kind of exchange is the heart and soul of my recovery. As long as I stay alive and vital, striving to make recovery make sense to the new person so he can understand that this good stuff is his for the asking, as long as we're focusing on the steps together to bridge that imagined gap between us, there's a full life in store for both of us.

R.H.
California

BOY, AM I GRATEFUL TODAY



I would like to tell you just a little bit about N.A. in our city. Narcotics Anonymous started up here somewhere around 1978 or 1979. I have been told that there were only a few addicts interested in N.A. at that time.

This meeting struggled for quite some time. Never really having a format that worked, nor did they use only N.A. literature. It changed locations a number of times. At one time I even heard of addicts being voted in or out as members! Another scary thing that was revealed was that for awhile addicts were being beaten or harassed for attending, I guess because someone thought these addicts were learning how to be narcs.

I understand that these addicts were trying to carry some sort of message. A few of them even tried to get outside support but were shut down by group will. I guess the Traditions, they thought, were only for trusted servants.

The meeting itself stopped and started up again several times during this period.

When I started attending this meeting they still used other literature and were confused about N.A. as a whole. In February of '85 someone called an addict involved in area service and asked them for help once again. A strange thing happened, the meeting started to change, little by little.

This concerned addict kind of took us under his wing. They helped us with a format, electing trusted servants, taught us about the Traditions, but most helpful of all they shared their experience, strength, and hope.

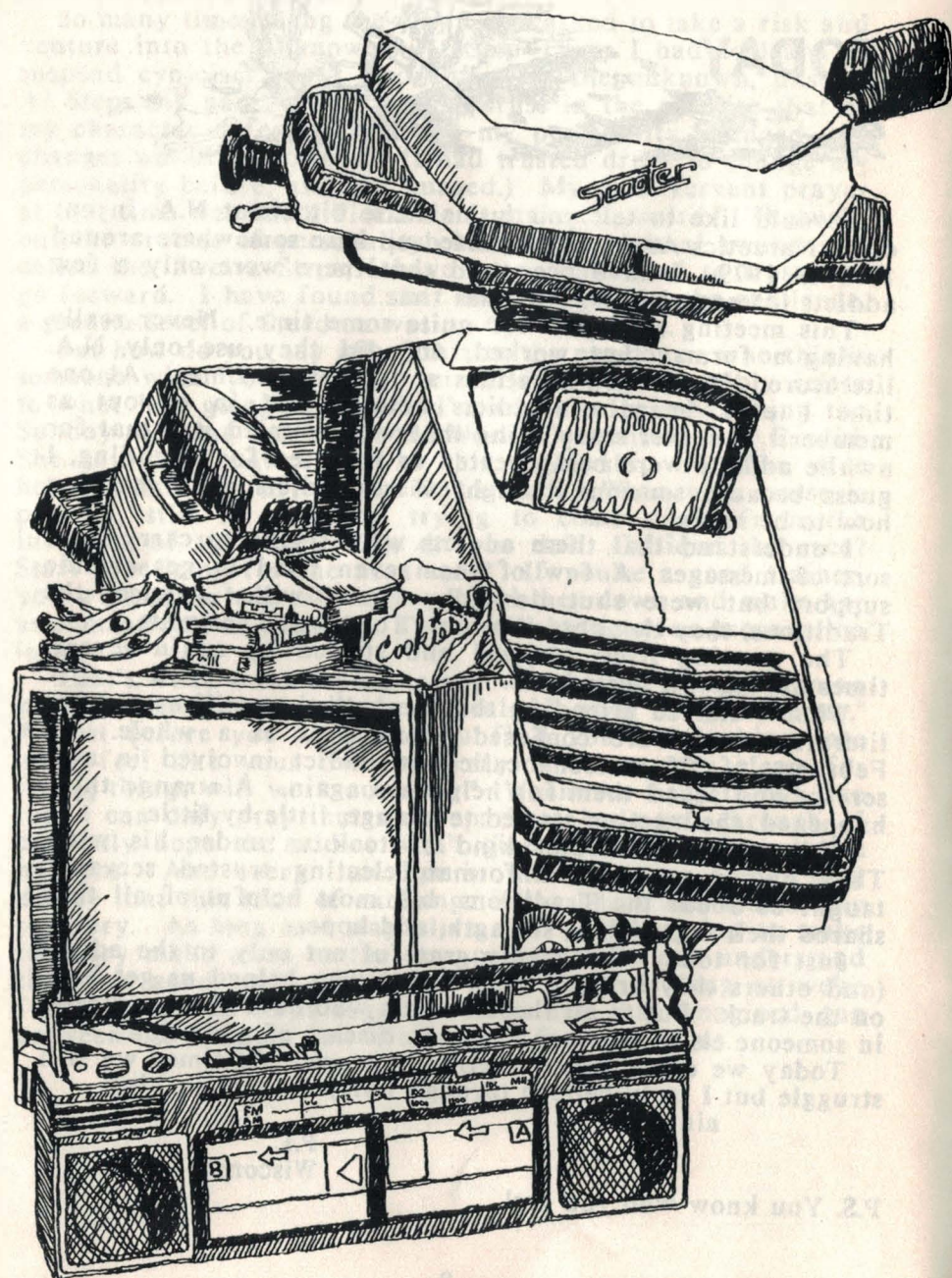
Just for today, I'm deeply grateful not only to the addict (and others they brought with them) who helped us get back on the track. But to all those addicts who have shown interest in someone else's recovery from the disease of addiction.

Today we enjoy three meetings a week. At times we still struggle but I truly believe through unity we will survive.

P.L.
Wisconsin

P.S. You know who you are!

CARRYING THE WHAT?



After putting together a few years of clean time and working for the growth of Narcotics Anonymous (and myself) in the area in which I lived, I became aware that there was an aspect of the First Step that I was avoiding. I became aware of how I ignored and minimized my own living situations through focusing on others problems.

I had gone through a multitude of other symptoms before this, I put down the drugs and picked up a fork. After gaining "enough" weight (20 lbs. in 28 days) I began to look at that symptom. Then came relationships with men. Sitting in a meeting with, lets just say "several" men I was currently dating gave me a much needed insight into that symptom. Reading (just one more chapter) was next on my list to cause me trouble. What was happening in the novels I chose to read was much more interesting than what was--or wasn't going on in my life. Television, radio, stereo, motorcycle riding, then even (of all things) jogging, each took their place in the ongoing unmanageability of my life as in turn I directed my obsessive self toward them. Then I started to get better. Understanding and applying the program helped me obtain some serenity, and I wanted to share it.

And did I carry on, trying to carry the message. I found that in the name of doing Twelve Step work I could focus on YOU and avoid dealing with me! While believing I was "carrying the message" I got into "carrying the addict" (just fell into it, "naturally.") Of course, during the time when this symptom was most obvious and doing the most damage to my once precious serenity, I was not sharing with my own sponsor, although I insisted the YOU contact YOUR sponsor REGULARLY. I insisted that YOU concentrate on YOURSELF and apply what you heard to YOU, and I concentrated on watching you to make sure that you did during those meetings.

Obsession, compulsion and self-centeredness. When I become obsessed with ANYTHING it sets up that same pattern, the compulsion to have MORE becomes unbearable, and many times, without realizing it, my disease takes over in this way.

That's when my home group "sticks their noses into it," thank God," and works as my "eyes and ears." The steps and traditions are the program, and the fellowship, you help me apply the program to myself, and to recover.

Anonymous

SPECIAL FEATURE

Dear N.A.:

I have been trying to quit using drugs for years, but I cannot stay clean. I have been through treatment centers and detoxes, jails and psychiatric hospitals, but nothing works. I can stay clean for a while, but then I always go back. I read an article about N.A. and looked for a group around here, but I can't find any. Can you help me?

Letters such as this are received at the World Service Office daily from all over the world. Sometimes these people can be directed to a local N.A. group, or one in a nearby city, but often they cannot. In many places around the world N.A. doesn't yet exist. What can we do to help? Could you stay clean without N.A. meetings to go to?

Dear N.A.:

I have recently moved to a different city, and found that there are no N.A. meetings here. I am trying to start one, but it's not taking hold very well yet. I need contact with Other members. I have been clean for awhile now and I want to stay that way. Do you have any suggestions about how to get N.A. started in an isolated area?

Trying to carry the message to geographically isolated N.A. members, or potential N.A. members, can be puzzling. At our meetings we hear over and over about the need for sponsorship and for ongoing contact with other recovering addicts; we hear of the importance of working with others, putting into practice what we are learning. Can this be done when you are the only N.A. member in your area, perhaps in your country? Listen to this story from an N.A. member who just recently returned to the U.S. after living for a time in a foreign country:

Gifts of isolation: Having just returned to my home area after spending the last eleven months in isolation from the N.A. Fellowship, I found myself after the meeting talking to a

STAYING CLEAN IN ISOLATION

fellow member and the newcomer he was sponsoring. Recalling the moment now, I reflect back to the evenings I spent in another country yearning for the sight of a newcomer and that healing laughter and love I had found three short years ago. There were nights when I was alone fending off the ever lurking self pity, wondering what God's plan was for me, how would I recognize it, and would I be ready to follow it when it was revealed. It was during moments like these that I would try to visualize past meetings, conventions, late night coffee shop conversations, campouts and ski trips--anything I could conjure up in my mind to bring the powerful love of the Fellowship to me.

I had been frustrated in my efforts to start an N.A. group, due in part to my own inability to speak the native tongue, to archaic drug laws that prevent the addict still suffering from being truthful about his or her personal addiction, and political denial the addiction problem that is rapidly becoming prevalent throughout all classes of Mexican society.

This brings me to the gifts I received while I was isolated. I received the gift of inner peace that comes with a personal God of my understanding. Even when the earth began to shake with what would soon be known as the Mexico City earthquake, I knew God was there with me, true again when I was involved in a near fatal car accident. I received the gift of love I felt when I began receiving mail from fellow members from all over the continental United States, Hawaii, Scotland, Guatemala, and other countries. Without fail these letters arrived when I really needed them. They were my meetings! I received literature, newsletters, convention flyers and precious tidbits of local area goings on. All this allowed me to feel "a part of" while so alone.

There was the gift of the beautiful three year medallion I received from a fellow from Washington with whom I have since lost contact. The mail service was a hit and miss proposition where I was at. I received the gift of my experience when I celebrated my N.A. birthday in Cancun Mexico on the Caribbean Sea. I had the opportunity to reflect back and realize how far I had come from a short time ago

when, in a dirty shooting gallery in a California barrio, I thought my life was over.

I received the gift of loving support from the World Service Office who anonymously gave of themselves, sending literature in English and Spanish, including letters of encouragement, the *Meeting by Mail*, newsletters and other N.A. materials, letting me know N.A. was alive and well.

I received that special compliment that you receive when an acquaintance asks for a Twelve Step call for a friend or family member. Knowing they trust and believe in the program of Narcotics Anonymous.

I also received the inner knowledge of knowing the program of Narcotics Anonymous works anytime, anywhere, in any circumstances. And now upon returning home the gifts continue. When I was asked to share my experience by writing about it, I reflected on the great responsibility we have as members of the Fellowship to be ready to carry the message so that any addict seeking recovery need not die.

The program of N.A. was given to me freely by a recovering addict who believed that one addict helping another is without parallel. I am grateful for the freedom I have gained. I pray that I'll always be able to keep sight of the gifts I have received as a result of Narcotics Anonymous.

Anonymous
California

THE MEETING BY MAIL

All of the above letters are examples of the need for the Narcotics Anonymous Loner Group. This group holds no meetings where its members can actually see one another, in fact it has no meeting place. Its members live all over the world. They communicate with one another through the mail, and as you can see by this story, they celebrate birthdays, give keytags and medallions, and generally demonstrate all over again that "the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel." Once every two months *A Meeting by Mail* is published and distributed to everyone on the loner mailing list. This bimonthly bulletin lists names and addresses of loners who wish to be listed, as well as those of N.A. members who are not isolated, but who wish to be involved in this group in a sponsorship capacity. In this way loners and sponsors can communicate with one another directly, with no need for the WSO to forward their correspondence to one another.

As always, sponsors are needed for this effort. If you wish to get involved in writing to geographically isolated addicts, or if you are yourself unable to attend N.A. meetings, write the WSO, attn. Loner Group.

OPENING UP

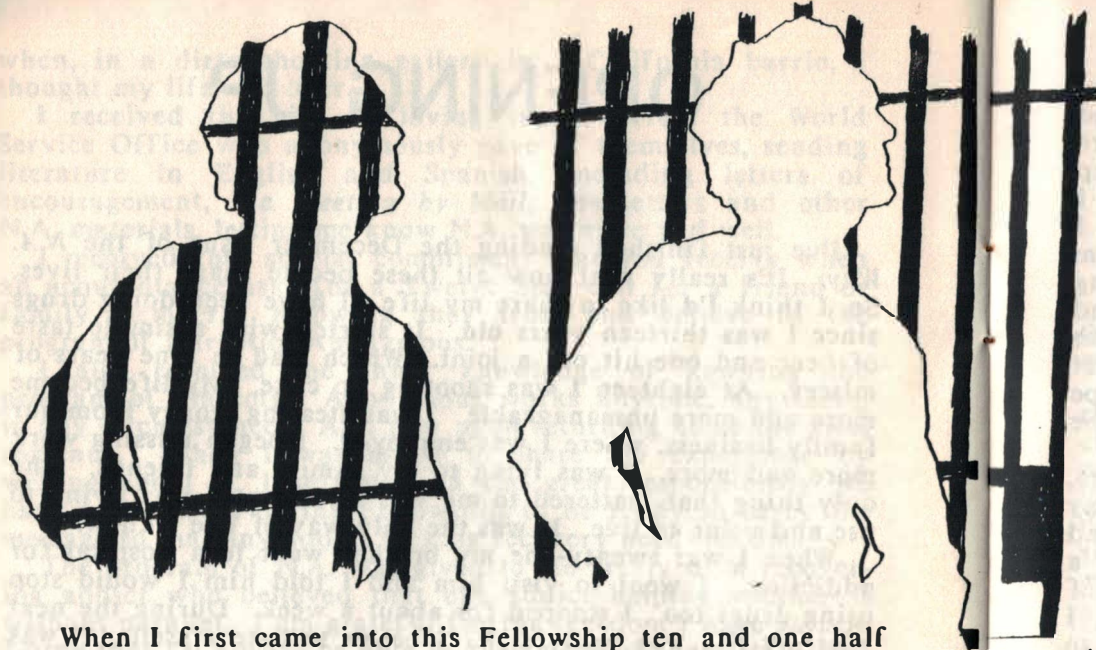
I've just finished reading the December issue of the *N.A. Way*. It's really neat how all these people share their lives. So, I think I'd like to share my life. I have been doing drugs since I was thirteen years old. It started with a simple taste of beer and one hit off a joint. Which lead to nine years of misery. At eighteen I was shooting up coke. My life became more and more unmanageable. I was stealing money from our family business, where I was employed. I began missing work more and more. I was lying to my family and friends. The only thing that mattered to me was my drug. I was living to use and using to live. It was the only way of life I knew.

When I was twenty-one my brother went to a hospital for addiction. I went to visit him and I told him I would stop using drugs too. I stopped for about a week. During the next year my life was really sick. I began to hate myself. It was like there was a hole inside of me and there weren't enough drugs to fill it up.

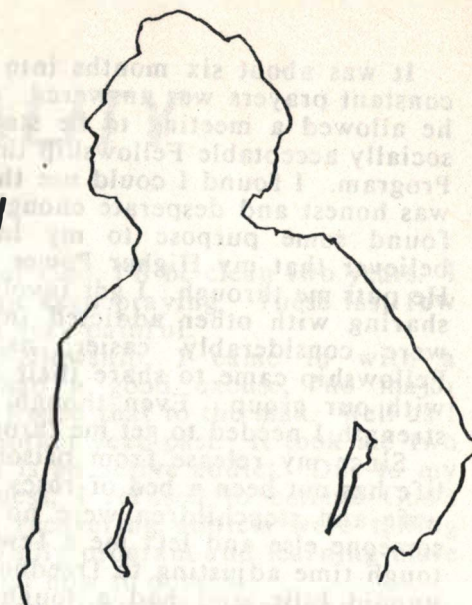
I remember the last time I used like it was yesterday. It was like something inside of me woke up. I sat in my apartment in the same place for two days using heavily all day and night long. I got off of work on Sunday, and Tuesday morning the phone rang, it was my mother calling to see if I was going to work. I could hardly talk; I said, "Yes, I slept late." I then went to take a shower, but I couldn't get clean, I scrubbed and scrubbed, I just couldn't feel clean. I finally got out of the shower, and something made me look in the mirror. I couldn't believe it was me, white as a ghost and my arm all red and scarred.

It was then that I had my spiritual awakening. I admitted myself into a hospital for addiction. Through this hospital, I was introduced to N.A., and the hole inside of me began to fill up. I began to make real friends; I began to like myself again; I think I'm even starting to love. I have been with N.A. for a year, but it is still hard to open up to people because I have been inside myself for so long. I just want to say I've been "shoplifting" my recovery in this Fellowship for a year now, and I think it is time to give something back to N.A. I'm very grateful to N.A. for everything you have given me. Through N.A. and my Higher Power, I'm learning to open up; I'm facing my feelings instead of running from them. You have given me a chance to live today, so I think its time to give instead of take!

L.B.
Louisiana



SUFFERING THROUGH RECOVERY



When I first came into this Fellowship ten and one half years ago, I knew recovery would not be easy; but I never thought I'd find myself having to stay clean behind bars. But that was the price I had to pay for a relapse into active addiction. After three and a half years of recovery, I was arrested after only six weeks of picking it up, and I found myself facing a three year sentence. I completed treatment at a rehab and was placed on parole with a stipulation to attend a meeting daily. My false pride and resentment kept me from coming back through the doors of N.A. Instead I sought to satisfy my parole stipulation by hiding in the rooms of another Fellowship where I could attend large speaker meetings and avoid confrontation and honesty, content with feeling different and isolated.

I remained totally abstinent for two years there, but my disease of addiction continued to manifest itself. By not opening up and getting honest, I found that I could justify illegal actions. I first justified shoplifting and petty thefts, which later led to nightly burglaries after my meetings. I was rationalizing that as long as I was clean I could not get caught. But the inevitable happened, and I found myself back behind bars the week before my second year clean. I had just gotten married a few weeks before (for the second time in recovery) when I was arrested on parole violations and new charges and sent to prison for thirteen months. My prior record, my past, and my disease had finally caught up with me.

I still remember my feelings that day as I sat in a cold, dark, dirty cell and bitched at my Higher Power for turning His back on me. Never in all my life had I felt an obsession stronger than at that moment. My only thoughts were on

getting wasted and then suicide. I reflected, "If this is recovery--who needs it?" There I was, still clean, all alone, looking at a whole year behind bars and away from my new family and meetings. Life at that point didn't seem worth living.

It was at that moment that a spectacular revelation hit me--my problem wasn't drugs, cause for the first time drugs hadn't put me behind bars. My problem was addiction! In desperation I hit my knees that night and asked God for the strength to make it through my ordeal clean. I became determined that no matter how bad it got I was not going to give up the only thing I had left in the world--my RECOVERY!

It was not easy maintaining recovery within such a negative environment as prison. All around me other inmates were getting high on anything they could get; and, as many of us know, there are more drugs readily available in prison than on the streets. I felt so alone and really missed my fellow clean addicts from the program. I began to feel hopeless! If only I could attend a meeting, I felt I might make it. But where I was there were none to attend.

Then I realized I could have meetings--with myself and with my Higher Power. I began to hold nightly meetings in my cell, with myself as chairperson and the written stories of recovering addicts as my speakers. I found that my "speakers" were the best anyone could ever ask for. This was before our Basic Text was printed, however, I was fortunate that someone cared enough to send me in the mail, page after page of the textbook being written. For many months this kept me clean. I also had tremendous support from my sponsor and from my minister, who both came faithfully to visit and share with me.

It was about six months into my sentence that one of my constant prayers was answered. A new warden took over and he allowed a meeting to be started. Though it was a more socially acceptable Fellowship than N.A., it was a Twelve Step Program. I found I could use that program to recover in, if I was honest and desperate enough. It was at that point that I found some purpose to my incarceration; for I'm a firm believer that my Higher Power has a purpose for everything He puts me through. I got involved chairing that meeting and sharing with other addicted inmates. The next six months were considerably easier, as outside members of that Fellowship came to share their experience, strength and hope with our group. Even though it was not N.A., I found the strength I needed to get me through just for today.

Since my release from prison three and a half years ago, life has not been a bed of roses. I came home to find that my wife and stepchildren were no longer mine. She had found someone else and left me a few weeks after release. I had a tough time adjusting to freedom. I also faced a mountain of unpaid bills, and had a tough time surviving. However, I remained clean in spite of all that, and finally surrendered to my addiction and returned to N.A., working hard to climb back a day at a time.

Today I have much to be grateful for. In June, 1985, I celebrated six years of recovery in the Fellowship I helped start nearly ten and a half years ago in Pennsylvania. Why I was given a second chance at recovery and at life I don't know, but for that I am grateful. Also, today I am free--in many ways. My parole is now history, after being on it for over sixteen years (half my life!). I am also free from the insecurities of addictive relationships--I no longer need to use a woman in order to feel like a man. Today I have found my "family" in the Fellowship of N.A. Today I am becoming a responsible, productive member of society.

Yes, I have much to be grateful for today--and it is all because I hung in when all seemed lost. I express that gratitude on a continuing basis by committing myself to service in this great Fellowship. I have the honor to have been chosen as a trusted servant in many capacities today on the East Coast, and I feel I can be trusted to serve, not control. I hope that by sharing the experiences of my recovery found in a cold, dark, dirty cell, I may give hope to another recovering, suffering addict who sometimes may feel they want to quit. I thank God--my Higher Power--and each and every member of this beautiful Fellowship for my recovery, my freedom, and my life.

A Grateful Addict,
"Free At Last"
Pennsylvania

REALITY

Next month, by the Grace of God, I'll be clean two years. I don't like to project, but I can keep praying. These last few months of recovery have been very painful.

When I came into the Fellowship, I came in with a relationship. I thought I had a good excuse, "no major changes for one year," great! I used that to the max. Well as I mentioned earlier, it's now another year past. It took me two years to realize that this man is an active addict. Due to my denial and my self-centeredness, I refused to believe God's signals, and what my fellow recovering addicts were telling me. Today I'm attending a family program and learning more about our disease of denial, and how to detach.

I'm lucky, because when I came into N.A., I had one year to myself, because my "other half" was away working during my first year of recovery. I had three winners in my life, recovering addicts who were clean for two to three years. They took me by the hand and showed me what the foundation of N.A. was. I attended ninety meetings in ninety days, read the Basic Text even though I didn't understand it, got involved in cleaning up after meetings, and tried to work the First and Second Step. At the end of that time, my partner died from another disease, but he died clean. Without the foundation I had built during that year, I could have used behind the issues involved in that relationship. I could have used, but I didn't.

Now I have a sponsor whom I love. We share a lot together. It's been a two way street with us, and she's been my sponsor for a year and a half. But again, I have a hard time with denial and acceptance. My sponsor is suffering. She is sick and in a lot of pain. I know I can be there for her, pray for her and love her unconditionally as she always did for me.

I have been very confused about God, blaming him for all this turmoil. But the bottom line is, it's reality and I used to run from it. I don't today! I go to one meeting after another lately, try to share honestly, call another member every day, and work my steps--the first three, just for today. I'm trying to accept my powerlessness, and I don't want to. But no matter what is to come, one thing I can be sure of, N.A. is here. I know that no matter what, I don't have to use for today. Because if I use, I lose. Thank's N.A. for being there when I needed you the most.

Anonymous,
New Jersey

GAINING HUMILITY THROUGH SPONSORSHIP

In my short time of recovery, I have learned a valuable lesson time and time again: you can never have enough recovery taught to you! I had experienced this mainly through the people I'd sponsored. In early recovery I was taught that someone who had two days clean can share how they got it with a person who has one day clean. Ever since, I've tried the best I can to give away what I have learned. When I was asked for the first time by a newcomer to be their sponsor, I thought I couldn't do anything for them, but didn't say no. I just immediately ran to my sponsor for help!

Since my first newcomer I've heard numerous Fifth Steps, and with the help of my Higher Power and sponsor, I've also shared my experiences with the steps to quite a few other addicts. In return, the program of Narcotics Anonymous takes on a stronger spiritual meaning each time for me. Though my ego has gotten in the way at times, a newcomer humbles me right away! Looking in their eyes, I can feel the pain and confusion, the desire for a better life. This gratification gives me the strength to work my program that much harder, cause you never know when a newcomer will ask, out of desperation, "How do you stay clean just for today?"

**Anonymously
Humbled,
Pennsylvania**

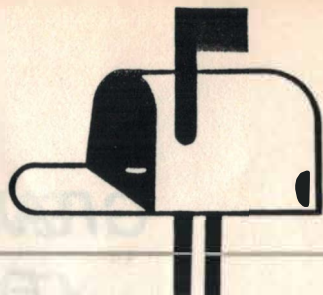
GRATEFUL FOR DRUG DREAMS

We all hear talk about drug dreams and we usually chuckle as the newcomer shares of them. I know for me I grow through my dreams. The first evidence of me obtaining morals, like finally copping to the fact that I was getting high instead of lying to everyone, was through my drug dreams.

I believe this is the God of my understanding talking to me. The only time I'm still for any time is when I'm sleeping. Just last night, in fact, my God reminded me through a dream of the pain of not be able to stop using. Well, I believe that nothing is coincidental anymore. This evening I went out to dinner and I ran into someone who used to be in the program. They were drinking wine (oh of course "just one"). My sick mind wanted to believe in that until I was reminded once again of my dream, which in turn brought me right back to reality. I do honestly thank God for the N.A. program. The Twelve Steps and Traditions and the Fellowship, and I thank God today too for my drug dreams.

**Thank you God
and N.A.,
A continuing-to-
stay-clean addict**

Letters from Our Readers...



A CALL FOR HUMOR

I have been wondering about something for nearly two years now. Since I still don't know the answer, I have decided to ask you! Answers usually come from outside of myself anyway! Even if I find out that I am not the only one wondering, it will help.

Why aren't there any N.A. Jokes?

I mean acceptable jokes--you know, in good taste.

The miracle of recovery is such a wonderful experience! We talk about it, we give it away, we share it with each other, we write about it, we pray about it, and we go to any lengths to achieve it on a daily basis. Sometimes, we even try to inflict it on people who don't want or need it! So, why can't we develop some sophisticated humor from it?

Many of us recall with fondness when we came to our first meetings and noticed that recovering addicts could laugh. The laughter was genuine and usually was connected to something we did in the past which was not funny in and of itself. Perhaps we laughed because we survived, or because we all knew the feelings personally, or because we couldn't cry anymore. I never have understood this phenomenon even though I have experienced it! Anyway, the point is that we do have a sense of humor.

It would be all too easy to come up with jokes about drugs, or using, or sex. My guess is that we all do this, but we do it privately. And that's just as well. Most of those are truly "sick" jokes anyway.

Every other beautiful aspect of life has its own acceptable area of humor. Literature, art, medicine, theater, business, music, food, health--how many have I left out? I hope you get the idea!

The challenge is before you! For anyone who sends into this magazine an acceptable (and funny) joke about recovery, I will add one minute to their clean time!

S.S.
California

Editor's Note: I'll second that emotion! We need good ideas for cartoons for our artist to draw (or finished cartoons), brief humorous notes, sayings etc. I'll see that minute and raise the stakes by another minute.

COMIN' UP

This space has been reserved for coming events anywhere in N.A. If you wish to list an event, send us a flier or note at least two months in advance. Include title, location, dates, contacts.

ALASKA: Mar 14-16; 2nd Annl Anchorage Alaska Conv, Anchorage Alaska Airport Inn, 3333 International Airport Rd, Roger (907) 248-9418

CALIFORNIA: Mar 7-9; 8th Annl Northern Cal Conv, Monterey Conference Center; 8th Annl NCCNA, PO Box 223115, Carmel, CA 93922

COLORADO: July 4-6; WSVC 3, Stouffers Concourse Hotel, Denver, Box 816, Boulder 80306; (303) Janice 388-4777; Pam 893-0580; John 642-3273; Gary 830-2640

FLORIDA: July 3-6; FRCNA V; FRCNA V, Box 14738, Orlando, FL 32857-4738; (305) Richard 677-7426; Karen 281-7307; Tim or Lisa 830-0140

GEORGIA: Feb 20-23; GRCNA V; NW Area Marriott, I-75 & Windy Hill Rd, Marietta, 30062; Ed (404) 436-0311; Tom (404) 429-0239; Bob (404) 589-0697

HAWAII: Feb 14-16; Camp Himelani on Island of Oahu, NA Round Up, P.O. Box 23436, Honolulu, HI 86808; (808) Mark 373-9774; Richard 261-1037

LONDON: Aug 28-31; World Convention-16, Wembley/Conference Center; Registration in the U.S.A., Vida (818) 780-7951, P.O. Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409; Registration outside U.S.A., P.O. Box 667, London, England NW8-7JW

LOUISIANA: Mar 7-9; LA RCNA; Bossier-Sheraton Inn, 2015 Old Minden Rd, Bossier City; LA 71111; (318) Bob 686-2270; Marlene 865-0856; Dale 425-7951

MASSACHUSETTS: Mar 28-30; 1st Annl New England RCNA; The Westin Hotel, Copley Place, 10 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02116; Brian P. (617) 452-7875

MICHIGAN: Jul 3-6; RCNA of Michigan; Freedom II; Mich. Inn, Southfield

MISSISSIPPI: Apr 4-6; MRCNA IV; Hilton, Biloxi, MS; Lisa (601) 392-7267; Renee (601) 362-0897; Donna (601) 862-7334

MISSOURI: June 6-8; SMRCNA-I; Henry VIII Hotel, 4690 N. Lindbergh, St. Louis, MO 63044; Show Me Region Conv. Comm., Box 596, St. Charles, MO 63302

NEVADA: Feb 7-9; 1st S. Nevada Conv for NA; Showboat Hotel, Las Vegas; (702) Corby 737-7357; Anita 382-3550; Dave 870-1357; Box 70591, Las Vegas, NV 89170

NEW JERSEY: May 9-11; The Berkley Carteret, Sunset and Ocean, Asbury Park; Kandi (201) 988-9451; Suzanne (201) 325-1143; Joe (201) 623-6352

NEW YORK: Jun 27-29; 1st Annl Northern New York RCNA; Wells College Campus, Aurora, NY; Mel (315) 548-3610; Ilga (607) 273-8884

NORTH CAROLINA: April 25-27; Charlotte Area Conven.; Marie Gibson, 5101 Park Rd, #143, Charlotte, N.C. 28204; (704) Andy 892-3286; Brett 535-3865

OHIO: May 23-25; ORCNA IV Conv; Hollenden House, E. Superior; ORCNA IV, P.O. Box 29517, Cleveland, Ohio 44129; (216) Joe 671-3316 Tommy 352-2042

OKLAHOMA: Mar 7-9; Fourth Annl Mid-America Convention; MAC-64 E. Woodward, Tulsa OK 74114; Sherilyn D., 918-742-1471; Mary Mc. 918-583-3463

PENNSYLVANIA: Jun 20-22; 7th East Coast Convention; Bloomsburg Univ ; 7th ECCNA, Box 211, Taylor, PA 18517; (717) Ron 457-0587; Rich B. 457-9751

2) Feb 28-Mar 2; 2nd Annl Learning Conf; George Wash. Motor Lodge, Route 22 & 7th street, Allentown; (215) Kristen 867-6827; Barry 433-5866; Bill 398-8438

3) April 4-6; 4th Grtr. Phil. Reg. Conven.; Phil. Centre Hotel, 1725 Kennedy Blvd., Phila., PA; (215) Steve 925-7766; Sheryl 624-8516

TEXAS: Mar 28-30; 1st Lone Star RCNA; Austin Hilton Inn, 6000 Middle Fiskville Rd, Austin, TX 78752; (512) Jimmy 443-7215; Vic 448-2144; Tary O. 443-0136

WASHINGTON: Feb 28-Mar 2; First Wash/N Idaho RCNA; Sheraton Tacoma Hotel, 1320 Bdwy Plaza, Tacoma, 98402; US 800-325-3535; Canada 800-268-9330

WEST VIRGINIA: May 9-11; West Virginia Conv for N.A. III; Cedar Lakes Conference Center, Ripley; (304) Paul 342-7506, Danny 925-7088, Phil 292-0896

WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE: April 28/May 2; Airtel Plaza Hotel, Van Nuys; Registration: Vida (818) 780-7951, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

- 1 *Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity.*
- 2 *For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority--a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.*
- 3 *The only requirement for N.A. membership is a desire to stop using.*
- 4 *Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups, or N.A. as a whole.*
- 5 *Each group has but one primary purpose--to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.*
- 6 *An N.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*
- 7 *Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.*
- 8 *Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.*
- 9 *N.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*
- 10 *N.A. has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.*
- 11 *Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.*
- 12 *Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

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