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# THE N.A. Way<sup>®</sup>

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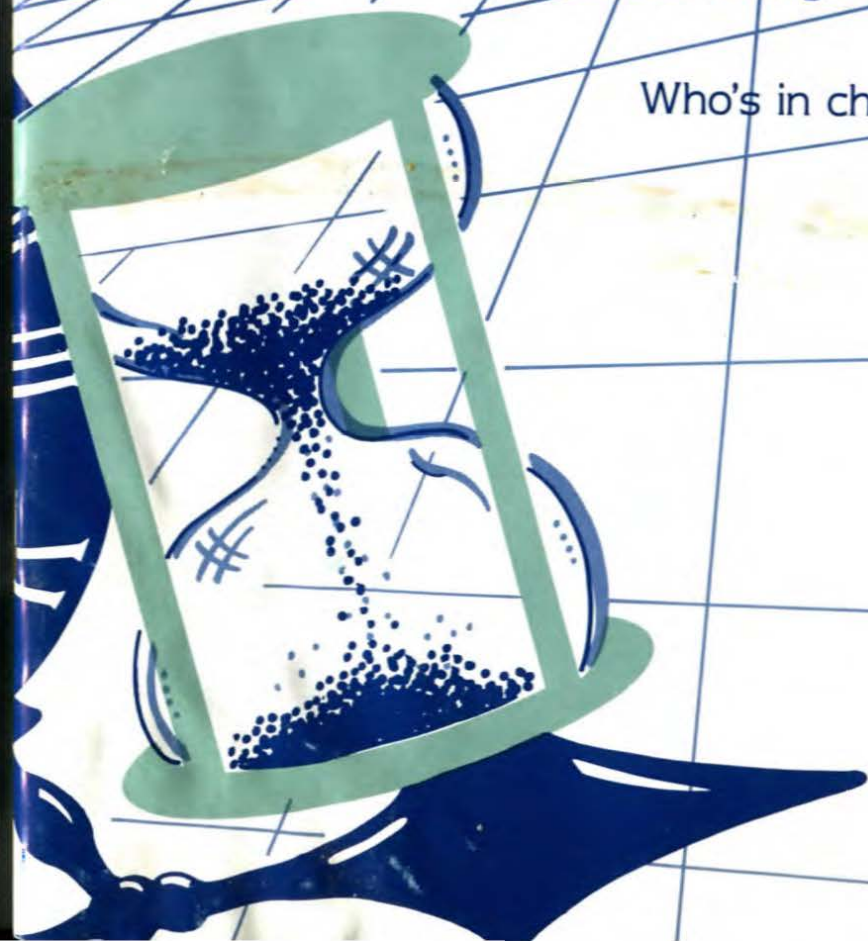
## ANNUAL CLASSICS ISSUE

Surviving service

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Who's in charge?

pg. 2



## 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 these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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# THE N.A. Way<sup>®</sup> MAGAZINE

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volume eight, number three

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## The Ultimate Authority allows me to serve

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**February 1983.** When I first came to N.A., there weren't any meetings near where I lived. I met a person I identified with; we were both addicts seeking recovery, and at that point we both related to the chemicals we had used. We talked about how they had made us feel and what we had done when we had used them. I'd been to an N.A. meeting and he hadn't, so I took him to one.

We began to share some time together. We'd go places and do things with each other, but most of all we just sat and talked. We talked about not using drugs. We talked about how we stayed clean that day. We shared openly with each other.

We regularly traveled together to the one N.A. meeting that was available to us. At one meeting, we picked up a Little White Booklet and took it home with us. Then, when we would sit down together and talk about staying clean, or talk about the sick old things we used to do, we'd read a little bit from that Little White Booklet.

Soon, we decided to start a meeting. We decided to start it on a Saturday

night. We told all of our friends, scheduled our meeting, brought a pitcher of iced tea and some cookies, opened the meeting place, and sat down together—but no one else came. Finally, a woman brought her "loaded" son in, and we sat and shared with them. We shared what we knew about total abstinence. We read a little from the booklet to them. Her son never came back. I think at that point we gave up. We were discouraged.

But, eventually, our spirits lifted, and with the help of some other people who were concerned about us and our recovery, we decided to try again. This time we asked for some help from those folks who regularly attended the meeting where we origi-

nally found N.A. They came and supported us every week. They spoke at our meeting. They helped us *have* a meeting. They helped us put together a group. By the grace of a loving Ultimate Authority, that meeting still exists—it wasn't my doing.

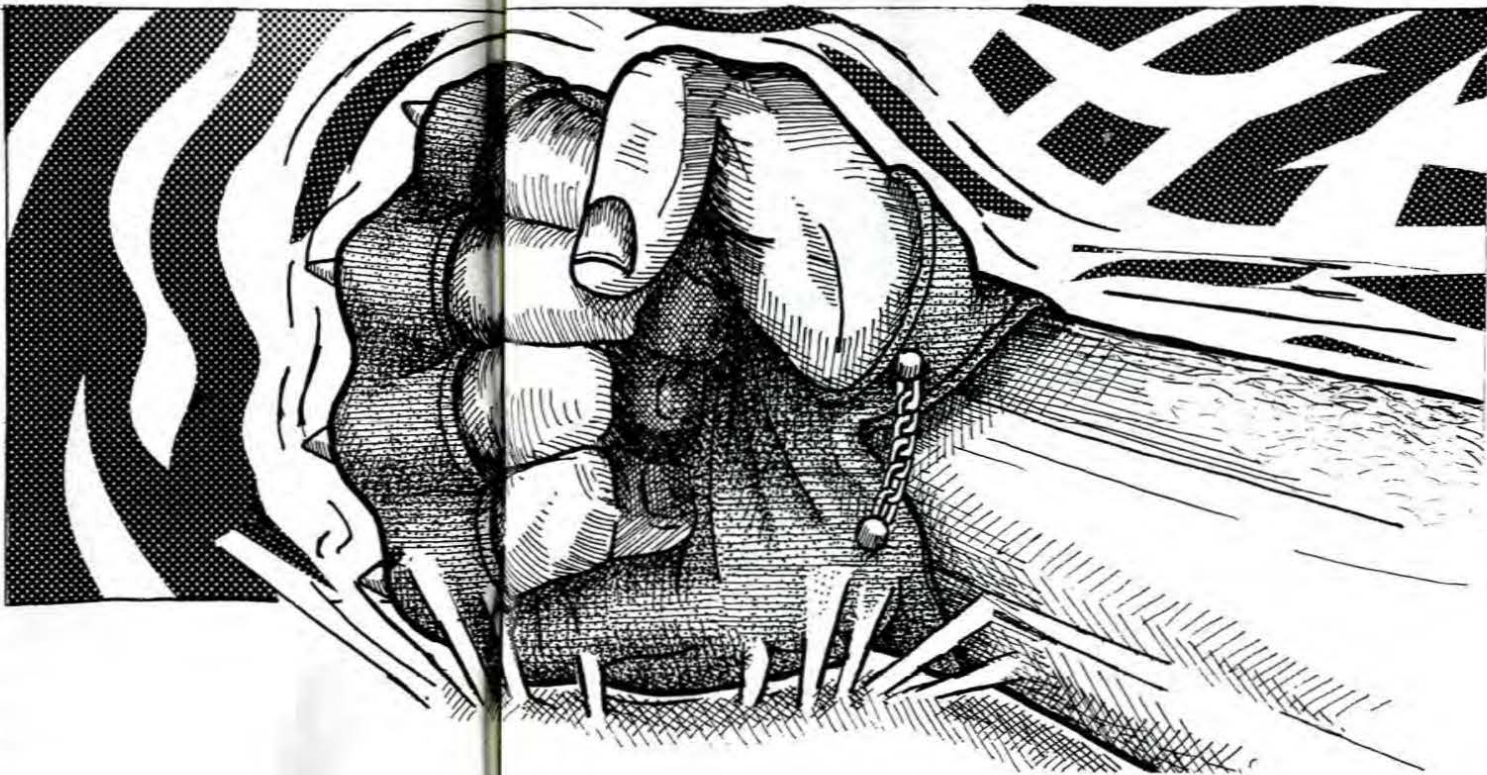
My friend soon moved away, and I was left as the "sole founder." I had my own ideas on what N.A. should be. I went away to "greater N.A." to a convention, and came back filled with excitement, energy, and drive. I wanted for "my" little group what I'd seen there. I wanted *real* recovery for me and the people who came to that meeting.

I'd been hugged into submission. I took the hugs back. I hugged the

people who came to that meeting, whether they wanted to be hugged or not. I told them the things that had been shared with me at that convention. Only I wasn't quite sure about those things and I shared them very, very forcefully. I wasn't quite sure about myself either. I acted like an authority, so that no one would challenge me in my insecurity.

Newcomers came to our meetings. They came hesitantly, frightened, searching for acceptance, looking for hope. I regularly accosted them: "Are you sure you want to stop using? Do you know how to stay clean? I do. Work the steps or die!" Some of them never came back.

I ran the group with a firm hand.





I felt like it was my responsibility. I thought I was the only one who could do it. I didn't share the load. Oh, sure, other people had titles or were trusted servants of the group, but I did all the work.

I came earlier than everyone and set up the meeting. I laid out the literature which I kept in my car, at my home in between meetings. I brought pitchers of iced tea until we had a coffeepot, and then I brought the coffee, and kept the cups. As soon as the meeting was over, I started emptying the ash trays, picking up the chairs and sweeping the floor.

**'I ran the group  
with a firm hand.  
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responsibility.'**

I never asked for help, and all the time looked from side to side—from newcomer to newcomer. I laid out heavy guilt trips in an attempt to intimidate them into surrender. I only wanted the best for my group. I only wanted it to be the same kind of "hard-core recovery" meeting that I'd seen, only better—harder core.

In the group business meetings, I offered my wisdom, my advice, my experience. A few stood up to me, and I shouted them down. When everything didn't go my way, I pouted and cried, conned and cajoled, and assassinated characters until others gave in and did it the way I wanted to do it. In spite of all this, the meeting grew.

Addicts sought recovery in our

group. We had lots of literature, because I had made friends with the right people. The meeting grew in spite of me (but I thought it was because of me). I thought that I'd done a good job. Everything got done. The meeting place was always ready, and was always cleaned up. The speakers were always "good"—after all, I had chosen them. But my phone wasn't ringing as often as it had, and soon it seemed to stop ringing altogether.

One meeting night I got delayed in traffic coming a long distance, "going to any lengths" to make *my* meeting. Amazingly, when I got there, everything was taken care of. The chairs were set up, the ashtrays were out, the coffee was made, the literature was laid out, all the little signs were up, and the meeting had begun. I sat in the back; angry, disgusted, searching the room for the mistakes that I was sure the others had made. I don't remember finding any mistakes. The chip remained on my shoulder. I accosted newcomers with my intimidating sort of sharing that night, and they all seemed to go and talk to someone else.

One evening the next week, a woman in my group called me. She had three small children, and couldn't get away from home to many meetings. She said she had a meeting planned at her house, an informal, impromptu meeting, because she needed to share. Would I come? "Sure," I said, "I'll be there at eight." I got to that meeting on time, and there seemed an air of tension.

We sat around the table. The meeting consisted of several of the regular

members of my home group—my group—as well as my sponsor, who had driven in from out of state. I wondered what was going on. I certainly felt a funny sort of anxiety, an anticipation.

We started the meeting in the regular way, with readings from the White Booklet. The woman who needed to share introduced the topic that she needed to share about. It was the Second Tradition. All eyes turned to me. Each in turn shared what they had seen me do in "our" group. Each in turn shared the intimidation they felt, and I got progressively more an-

**'Whenever I think of  
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gry. I felt they didn't understand. "They couldn't even know anything about N.A. except what I told them."

They were my eyes and my ears that night. They shared their gratitude for me, and they showed me what my intimidation and my forceful sharing with newcomers was doing. They told me of several who wouldn't come back to that meeting because I was the way I was.

They were grateful to offer love and empathy and caring to newcomers, but were concerned because I refused to. They told me how it felt to share love and caring—to share love unconditionally, to care and to share with empathy. I just got angrier and angrier.

"But you don't understand," my denial spoke. "I only want to help. That's what *real* N.A. is like." That's what I had heard at that convention. They shared with me the love and the hugs that I brought back and told me what I had said before my disease got it all twisted around. They told me how much they themselves needed to help with "our" group. They told me that they feared I might relapse if I refused to let them help. They told me they were *going* to help. They told me that, in spite of what I did, in spite of what I thought, they needed "our" meeting and "our" group. And they told me that it could no longer be "mine."

"Well," I decided, "I'll show them. I'll show up right when the meeting begins, and leave right when it ends." I did just that for several weeks, maybe months—and the meeting grew. The group had developed a conscience. The business got taken care of. Newcomers came and learned how to stay clean, and many are clean today.

Eventually, I saw that they were right. I don't know *how* humble I was when I said I was wrong to the group. I do remember the courage it took to go back to that first business meeting after my friends had loved me enough to confront me with my defects.

Today, this experience is clear in my mind. Whenever I think of something in N.A. as "mine," I remember where to find the Ultimate Authority in Narcotics Anonymous: in a group conscience, not in my head or in someone else's.

*Anonymous*



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## Surrendering my will

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**August 1983.** When I came into this fellowship, people told me to keep coming back, work the steps, pray, read the literature, and listen to others. After coming to an understanding of the first two steps and using them every day, I believed in a God but I didn't have trust and faith.

I've been praying to a Higher Power and going to meetings every day. The things I need come in bits and pieces. Usually, only when I've tried every other way do I realize that it is time to surrender.

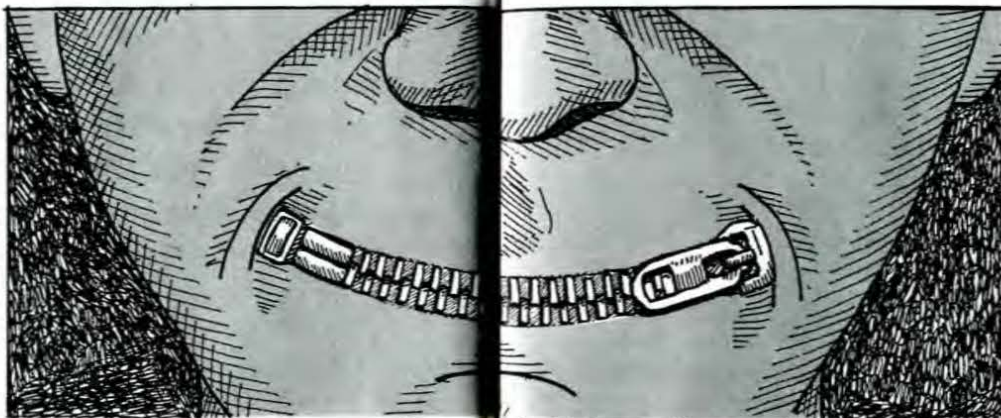
In my understanding of God, all you have to do is ask for help and try not to make the same mistakes over again. When I've done that, I feel a calm happiness in my heart that wasn't there before. Each morning, I turn my day over to my H.P. to do with as He sees fit. Sometimes during the day, I have to turn situations over to Him, so that I may have tolerance, patience, strength, guidance, or whatever it is that I need to do my God's will. It helps me to get a better perspective on things and a better attitude. I can see little things happening to me and others in my life.

My will has been quiet for quite a

bit. I think of others' feelings before I act. It feels good to try to do my best. I feel as if someone's looking over me, making sure I'm not into something I can't handle. I like that. Even though I can't touch it, I believe with all my heart. Even tough times are a little easier now.

I seem to be getting a little more patient and considerate. I don't have to know everything or butt into other people's affairs. But I still have to pray sometimes that my God will shut my mouth for me!

I decided a while back that I wanted to turn my will and my life over to



the care of God as I understand him. It's taken time to trust in that decision, and to put it into action in my daily life. But my thinking is changing; I try not to be so self-centered and self-willed or so "know-it-all." I figure when I know something, I know it; if I don't, I'll keep my mouth shut.

Having some control over my actions is neat, because I never had any before. I didn't use my Higher Power. My H.P. can control me even when I can't control myself; all I have to do is ask—and I ask a lot. This has helped me to stay out of trouble, and

not get into risky situations that I may not be able to get out of.

My God has helped me not only to get clean, but to stop using cigarettes, too. I don't have an overwhelming desire anymore for anything. I can stop. For today, I have surrendered. It feels good not to be dependent on anything but me, H.P., and other clean people.

I feel like I'm doing the right things for myself today. My God's will has quieted mine, and, in turn, my life doesn't have the turmoil and disillusionments that it used to. Life feels good today. Praying feels good today.

Helping others and being a nice person feels good today. Doing my God's will feels *great* today. It works for me today.

Another thing that could be my God's will for me is to share my experience in N.A. with others. I believe it must be my God's will for me to do service work, because it makes me feel worthy of life again. I'm a responsible and trustworthy person that others can care about and have feelings for.

Step Three is a big change in my life. Through trusting, caring, shar-

ing, and being honest, I feel full today, like maybe I might have enough. I feel that with my God's help, I can continue to grow and change and do anything that is His will for me without having to know why and how.

Taking action on words that I say and think has always been hard for me, especially when I might fail. Now I pray about things, prepare, and do what my "gut" thinks is right. I don't just sit around and wait for something to happen in my recovery—I make things happen by going to meetings, using the phone, talking to others, and getting my hugs.

Just for today, I'm not afraid of failing or rejection, because I know my H.P. has helped me through thick and thin. If something doesn't happen the way I think it should, I realize that my way couldn't have been my God's way and that I was wrong. Even situations like that feel okay now.

It is a great feeling, to not worry about trivial things, allowing myself to just move on from day to day. I get rid of what I can, change what needs to be changed, and accept the rest. I'm okay today, thanks to my God's power and love. My God's will seems right for me today. I trust and believe in my Higher Power, and I know that nothing and no one can take that away from me. I'm grateful for the spirit that flows through the people in N.A., the spirit which helped me see truth where before I saw none. It feels good that I have this faith and trust and don't have to worry, just for today. Things will work out for the best, especially if I don't try to push my will into my life—or anyone else's.

*Anonymous*



## The slippery slope

July 1984. In a college philosophy course, I was introduced to a concept called "the slippery slope theory." The idea is that once you take the first step into some things, metaphorically referred to as "slippery slopes," there's no climbing back up. The best one can do is dance madly backward, but, unable to find a toe hold, continue hopelessly to descend.

Such intellectualizations appealed to me at the time. I had learned that, for me, emotions were a drag; think-

ing was more my style. I had retreated into my head in a flight from my gut. That, I learned later, was part of the way addiction affected my personality.

What I didn't know was that even as I was entertaining those wonderful philosophical musings, I was dancing madly backwards on a slippery slope of my own. I was in the grip of the progressive illness of addiction.

For several years before I entered recovery, I was aware that my drug use was destructive. I wanted to find a toe-hold, but instead I was going down slowly into deeper addiction. That meant more isolation, less inner peace; more relationship hassles, less self-esteem. I saw that, and it frightened me. I liked control—powerlessness was crushing my self-concept.

When I was exposed to the program of Narcotics Anonymous, I was one of those who grabbed hold like a drowning man would grab a life preserver.

The mad, backward dancer found a toe-hold. I went for it.

My first couple of years in the program were a time of climbing up a bit, slipping down a bit, and finally learning that not only were there toe-holds here—there were outright steps! Of course I was aware of the steps all along, but I treated them like toe-holds. I was just sort of doing things my way—instead of studying the literature, consulting extensively with happy, successful members with long time recovery experience, and *working* the steps in order. I'm not sure why it wasn't obvious that solid, clear steps were preferable to slippery toe-holds of my own making, but such is the nature of the ailment, I guess.

I have found that the slippery slope of addiction was a process of personality change. From the time that I first began smoking dope regularly and became convinced that we ought to have the marijuana leaf embroidered on the American flag, to the time that I was regularly drugging myself into a sense of paranoid isolation, my personality was changing for the worse.

What I found when I began working the steps in earnest is that recovery is a process of personality change, too. It begins in the first three steps, when we decide to quit tapping a destructive power and begin tapping constructive power. It continues in the Fourth and Fifth Steps when we survey the damages of our previous personality change. It kicks in gear in the Sixth and Seventh Steps when we get ready to let go of the old, ineffective personality characteristics, and rely upon a Higher Power and spiritual principles to develop a new self.

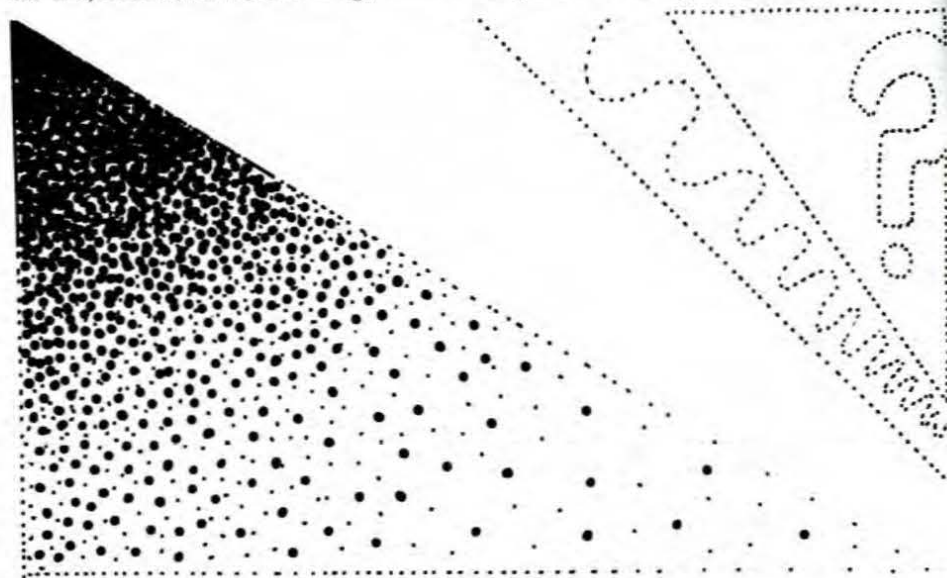
That's where most of us run into a snag. We know intuitively that to do the Sixth and Seventh Steps with complete abandon is to take a step into another slippery slope: spiritual awakening.

Even though spiritual awakening is a slippery slope of a positive nature, the step off the edge was a scary one for me. I used to worry that if I really became ready to let go of my old identity, with all its addictive trappings, and invited God to have His way in my personality, I would become like the "Jesus Freaks" that turned me off so much.

What I have found instead is that, by letting go completely and trusting God completely (to the best of my ability), I was sent on a journey, the likes of which I had never dreamed possible. The Sixth and Seventh Steps paved the way. The rest, through a disciplined approach to Steps Eight through Twelve, has truly been an adventure. All that has been required of me is that I surrender, trust, and be willing.

So far, a few years later, my worst fears about my personality change have not been realized. Rather than becoming more weird and isolated, I have become more down to earth. I feel like I fit today in most groups—I used to feel out of place most of the time. In short, surrender and trust in the spiritual process have produced a consistently positive influence in my personal growth. As I heard someone say recently about spiritual life, "I seem to walk most safely when I don't know where I'm going."

Anonymous





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## Only in the program

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**April 1985.** I believe that only in this program could an egomaniac like me eventually find herself falling to her knees in despair over having uttered a harsh word or having exaggerated the truth "just a bit." These may sound like small defects, but they were eating me up inside. It happened to me when I went through the Sixth and Seventh Steps this time. I used to think those two steps were the easiest of the twelve! I thought that all they required was to recite the words, but I found there is so much more. The profound difference these two steps have made in my life matches or betters anything I've felt as a result of practicing the other ten steps in my life.

After almost five years of clean time, I found myself this year still plagued with subtle character defects. The gross unmanageabilities had seemingly been corrected, but still I knew I did not feel completely clean inside. I felt as if I still roared like a tornado through people's lives. There were many people I still didn't trust, including myself. I found it difficult to believe I deserved the good things in my life, and was convinced deep

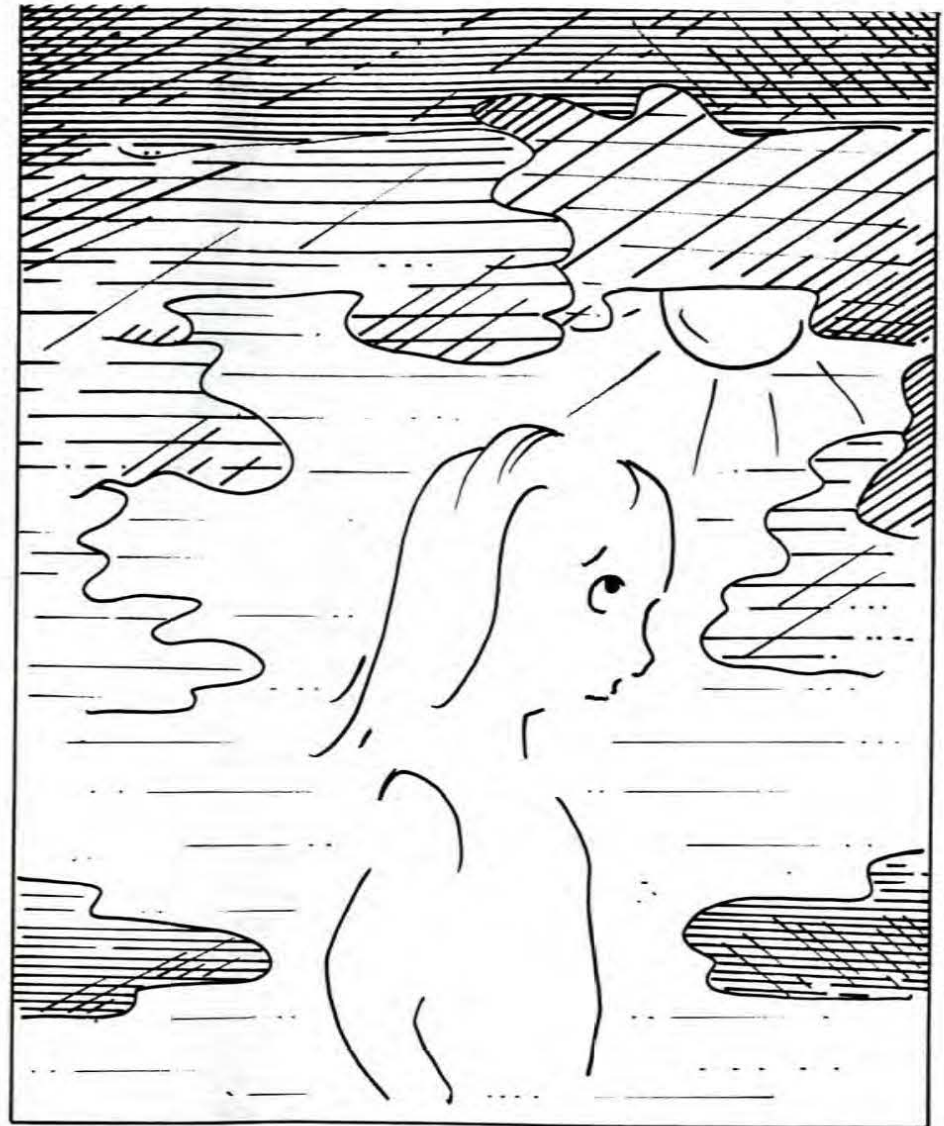
down inside that someday I would lose them, because I knew that true humility was impossible for "people like me."

I could keep up a pretty good act on the outside, but in my gut I was consistently afraid. I was afraid to even try to change, because I was different. I figured I was incapable of such deep-rooted renewal. I thought, "It's easy to change my lifestyle, but I'll forever have to put up with my personality traits because they've been with me for the three decades I've been on this earth!" It sounds cliché, but I prayed that no one would find out what I was really like! I desperately wanted to keep up my act of being Ms. N.A., Ms. Wellness, Ms. Okay.

What happened? For about a year, I could barely keep up the act, although I worked very hard at it. When it became too much for me to handle, I steered clear of the fellowship so that no one would see. Ultimately, however, I couldn't hold out anymore. I became paranoid. I felt I was shrivelling up. I feared I was doomed to practicing the program with half measures, because I didn't know the program had a plan of action for helping self-conscious people like me to find humility. One day, the fog cleared.

I started talking about my fears. I talked about how I still didn't like myself as much as I wanted to. Next, I plunged back into the steps, starting with the first, even though my sponsor and I suspected the answer to my troubles lay somewhere in the middle of the twelve!

I think today that the process paid off. By the time I was ready to take



a look at Steps Six and Seven, I had been made aware of some character defects I had never had cause to look at before—defects such as exaggeration, "white lies," egotism, and perfectionism! I never suspected I was a perfectionist! I thought perfectionists were goody-two-shoes who had a problem with being martyrs, and

finally were pretty close to being perfect! I also learned, for the first time, the pure definition of honesty: the absence of any intent to deceive. It became apparent to me that I had just cause for being suspicious of others' mistrust of me in relationships, because I realized I was not being totally honest with them.



So, in Step Six, when I said I was entirely ready to have my defects removed, I meant I was sick and tired of my own behavior, and I was willing to do my part to change. When I asked God in Step Seven to remove my shortcomings, I meant I was willing to be on the look-out for His instructions on how to change. I learned that the search for humility does not mean thinking less of myself—rather, it means thinking of myself less!

Today, God as I understand Him is teaching me through other people, and through the level of comfort (or discomfort) in my gut. I'm learning

**'One day, the fog cleared. I started talking about my fears. I still didn't like myself.'**

that changing some of my more negative personality traits is not as scary or as drastic as I had feared. I'm more willing to try to change the person I thought I was, because I've found the process is really quite simple.

For example, today I try to speak softly—especially when I think I'm right and others are off the mark—to avoid intimidating the people I deal with. I've found intimidation causes others to retaliate. I try to catch my exaggerating in mid-stream and correct it, because I've learned it's hard for people to trust someone who makes things out to be bigger than life. I try to say only that which is necessary, rather than state my position in detail over and over, because

I'm learning that my desire to provide too much detail is more often an effort to convince everyone that I know what I am talking about. It's often an attempt to pump myself up, at the expense of boring and alienating others.

Does it surprise you that learning these truths about myself, and trying to practice correcting them on a daily basis, has resulted in a drastic change in me? Does it surprise you that I now believe N.A. does not give us a second chance at life, but rather a chance at a second life?

When I learned how simple it can be to change, I was stunned. I felt I had come to know what it is like to walk hand in hand with my Higher Power. Today, together, we really are making a difference in this addict's life!

The result is hope. I am becoming the woman, the employee, the friend I've always wanted to be, but had feared I couldn't. And people are responding in positive ways I've never encountered before. I still have days when I slip back into the old behavior, but since I've been given a plan of action in the steps, I know how I can change. And I'm not trying to do it alone. Truly, there are more good days than bad ones. I've come to believe this is the intent of the program, and I am able to say with more certainty than ever, I am a good person, and I'm headed for an even better life. Both the good and the bad traits come with the package of living. God and N.A. surely are not finished with me yet.

*K.S., North Dakota*

## Contact

**May 1985.** My sole spiritual experience as a child occurred when I was eight. I was sitting in church with my family, letting my mind wander. I saw myself growing up normal, struggling, and, at the end of it, all dying. The whole routine for nothing. What a waste of time! Revulsion shook me. No way was I going to live like that.

Five years later I found a way to successfully avoid life. I started using in an East African country where no

drug laws existed, supplies were plentiful, and prices were low. Within two months of my first joint—rolled in newspaper—I was strung out on pharmaceutical methamphetamine. We returned to the States in 1970, and I got into acid—first dropping, then dealing. Overdoses, bad trips, two arrests, and increasing alienation from everyone piled up on me. By the time I was fifteen, I was ready for a change.

Jesus Freaks were one of the big things at the time (almost as hip as dope fiends). They hit on me until I listened just once to the still, small voice inside they kept talking about. It was real, and powerful, and enough to clean up my act for me.

I stayed clean two years on that kick. Part of it was authentic and beautiful, one of the best times of my life with some extraordinary people.





But my disease killed it. Self-centered, I became "perfect"—meaning, of course, that the rest of the world was going to rot in hell. Living with that attitude toward everyone and everything became pretty oppressive after a while.

In my freshman year of ministerial studies, I medicated the pressure away. I felt so *spiritual* when I was high. As time went on, though, the stuff caught up with me again. I was married, but I couldn't talk with my wife; that relationship wasn't as real to me as getting loaded was. My employer frowned on embezzlement to

'Then I tried a God Box. But it was too neat, too pat. I had some struggling to do.'

support my habit. And my religious friends found it distasteful to see me blasted at a Bible study. Eventually, I stopped claiming to be religious; I was embarrassed to be giving God such a bad reputation.

Maybe you can understand how it was that I came into N.A. with some prejudice against this Higher Power stuff. I felt like I was bad. I had tried to rationalize God away so that the loss of contact wouldn't be such a big deal. Feeling the need for Something greater than myself, I sometimes wove images in my head of some sort of Cosmic Spirit or another. But intellectual abstractions can't love you, or keep you warm when it's cold inside, or do for you what you can't do for yourself.

I spent my first year in N.A. cutting through that insanity. A five-month relapse put me in a place where I could not live anymore, with or without drugs. Where before, I had been able to tell myself that I was "managing" because I was surviving, I could no longer. I did not have the resources.

With that First Step clear—no question—the ability came to take a no-nonsense Second Step. I came to believe that recovery was possible through hearing you tell me where you'd come from and identifying with it; from seeing where you'd come to and wanting it; and from reading "these [steps] are suggested only, but they are the principles that made our recovery possible." My ideas had gotten me nowhere. Yours, or your program's, had given you a life I was attracted to. I began to consider asking this Power in N.A. to care for me.

"God as we understand Him" was, and is, a troubling phrase for me. I didn't, and don't, understand Him. I do, however, know that He loves me without question, that He's capable of doing something about my disease, and does.

One night, a few weeks out of detox, I lay in bed hurting. Life was scary, distasteful, more so than when I had sat in church at eight years old. I didn't see how I was going to get through another day without going crazy or copping. It was the end, I just knew it. So I prayed, "Please, God, whatever You are, help me." There were, to the best of my knowledge, no large trucks in my room that night. I have to assume that the blinding

light that came over me, and the soothing warmth, and the absolute certainty that it would be all right came from my Higher Power. He was doing for me at my extreme limit what I could not do for myself, but had to have done.

In the next few months, I experimented with some tricks for improving that contact. For a while, I made little altars in the desert from stones and bones, demanding that God appear. Finally, I built one on a hilltop by the river. I called out for God, but all that appeared was the large hunting bird whose eyrie I had appropriated, screaming from the sky. So ended my flirtation with paganism.

Then I tried a God Box. I had been told to write down questions and concerns, put them in there, and forget them—I had given them to God, and they would be taken care of. It sounded like a neat idea when it was first suggested. But it was too neat, too pat. I had some struggling to do, and a shoebox wasn't going to deprive me of that process.

I picked up lots and lots of books, ranging from the great religious and spiritual classics to a smattering of twentieth century crackpots. I had been told to keep my mind open, to seek what was useful in every tradition of spirituality. But I came to them spiritually bankrupt. I had no categories, no priorities of my own with which to judge what was valuable to me and what was not. I became a religious garbage can.

I was not going to be handed The Way on a silver platter. I was not going to be provided any further trail-

blazing than the Twelve Steps themselves. I was going to have to find an authentic contact of my own each moment, in each situation asking God's will for me and the power to carry that out, and stifling my ego to become sensitive enough to receive it.

That realization came to me a year and a half ago. Since then I have not been fixed. I don't expect I'll ever be. I have no new Bible, no outline for the salvation of the world, no master plan. I continue to live within the mortal, human limitations of power and perspective, complicated by the disease of addiction.

In order to survive, I must maintain regular efforts to seize the moment, approach a Power greater than myself, and ask, "What is this?" And for that moment, a loving God will be with me and will direct me to places I can't see with strength that's not mine.

What that Power is, I don't know. How that Power behaves in my life, I do. I've been changed from a hopeless, helpless drug addict into a man who knows that sanity is possible. I've seen it happen by working the Twelve Steps of N.A. I know that if I continue to work them, seeking contact from moment to moment with the power I need, that I can continue to live and grow.

That's my experience, the strength I've gotten from that experience, and the hope it's given me for the future. If you can use it, feel free. It was given to me just as freely by those who came before.

Anonymous



## Willing to make the effort to get it

**January 1986.** I'm an addict, and I want to share my story about the use of medication in my recovery. This has been an important issue for me. In my life, I have blamed people, things, and ideas for my using. I have learned some hard lessons about this. As our Basic Text says, I am responsible for my own recovery.

I went in the hospital for surgery on my nose before I had any contact with N.A. When they were operating on my nose, a freak accident happened. The "ground" for the heart and kidney monitors attached to my thigh shorted out and severely burned my leg. I was electrocuted while under general anesthesia. Somehow, I survived this ordeal, and somehow, my leg was saved. The initial electrical shock almost destroyed it; then, an infection almost got it, but they did not have to amputate.

When I got home, my situation was frustrating. I couldn't walk without crutches, my driver's license was suspended for medical reasons, and I was unable to go back to work. A lot dropped on me all at once. I blamed

it on the doctors, and started using more and more, with nothing else to do but stay home and get high. The friends I was using with started to disappear, one by one. My feelings were, "What are they gonna do with a guy like me? They have to drive me around, drag me around on crutches; I don't blame them one bit."

I was lonely, feeling sorry for myself, and staying home (I didn't find out until later that an addict alone is in bad company). After some time had passed, I met a member of N.A. who asked me to go to a meeting. I thought, "You're nuts! I'm no addict." Never mind that I couldn't wait until my nose surgery healed to start snorting again—I had taken off the bandages and re-opened all the wounds. Never mind that my days were filled with staying home alone, getting loaded and sulking. I was no addict.

**'I am hearing-impaired. I can hear slightly, but I mostly read lips.'**

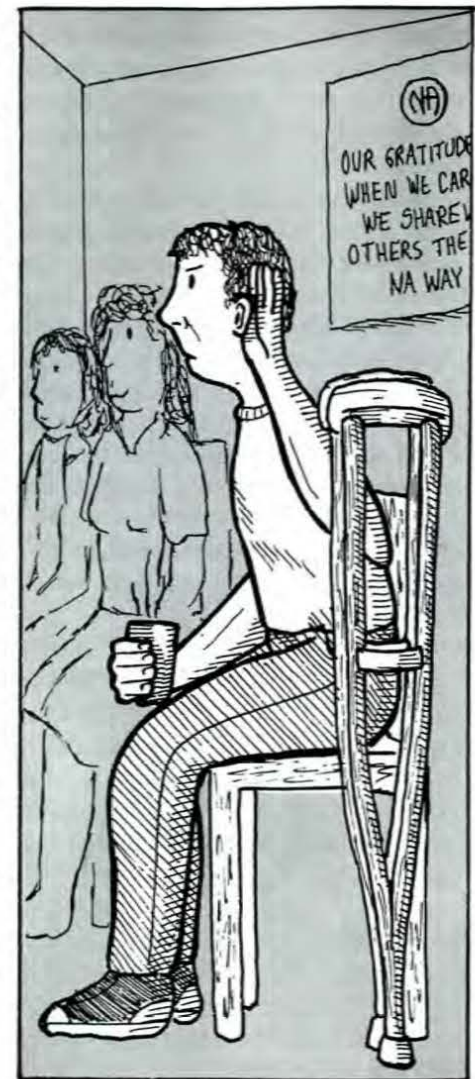
I am hearing impaired. I can hear slightly, but I mostly read lips. As a result of this, I have learned to listen to my inner feelings about things. I really don't know how to describe it, but a feeling began to come over me as I thought about what that person had said. Maybe I should try one of those meetings she was suggesting. As I see it today, I was forced by a power greater than myself acting on the feelings inside of me to go try N.A. And I did.

I was still using and crippled up when I went to my first meeting. I brought all my self-pity with me. I sat in that room, unable to hear. I couldn't concentrate well enough to read lips. I just sat there, bored, smoking my cigarettes, drinking my coffee, waiting to go home.

But still that feeling stayed with me. I have no real explanation for that. For some reason I tried some more meetings. This time I concentrated on what was being said. To my surprise, it paid off! I began to relate.

After going to meetings a while, I got a sponsor—best thing I ever did. He was able to help me understand a lot of the things that were still confusing about the program. I made a commitment to stay clean, and I have been clean ever since. I had nerve damage from the accident that was causing severe spasms in my leg. It would go completely out of control a few times a week, and there was no cure in sight. A few times I passed out from the pain. I went to many meetings, but I was afraid that my leg would start shaking and I'd feel awkward and disgusting to look at.

I had to go to the emergency room sixty-eight times to stop the nerve spasms. I had to be administered drugs to stop the spasms—that was the only solution. Some of them were mind altering, mood changing drugs. There was simply no alternative. I went to lots of meetings, stayed close to my sponsor (he even came with me to the doctor sometimes), read the Basic Text every day, and prayed *hard*. Here I was, walking on dangerous ground again, experiencing some of the symptoms of my addiction as



result of these prescribed drugs, and having no other choice.

The N.A. program is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. Thank God I had my sponsor to share this time with. He helped me to see more clearly that I could stay clean throughout all this. I did everything humanly possible to abstain from drugs, and I stayed as willing as



Possible to work my program. My sponsor's an addict, somebody I trust; I can be confident that he'll know what to do if anything dangerous comes up. That's how I made it through that.

An addict alone is bad company. Even at the hospital undergoing tests (and there were a lot of them, the doctors had never before seen anything like this), this program helped me. One time I got a test taken called a scan. They put me into a tunnel with two inches of clearance; I was enclosed from head to toe. That scared me. I yelled to be pulled out

**'I had to go to the emergency room sixty-eight times to stop the spasms.'**

and got pulled out. My sponsor was there to help me through that. He told me how to meditate. I tried it, and it was like a miracle. I completed the test with no more problems.

After a great many tests and procedures, and after they found one medication that I could take in smaller dosages that would prevent the spasms, they finally found another way to help me. I had been real willing to do my physical therapy, and to work my N.A. program of recovery. I had trusted my Higher Power and my sponsor and the principles of this program. I had found a new way of life that I was not going to let go of. Finally, I was going to be able to live completely free of medication.

Today, I am living drug free, and

growing in the N.A. way of life. I am the GSR of a new meeting of N.A., at which we have a sign language interpreter for the hearing impaired. I am one of the fortunate ones who has been able to grow in recovery in spite of some problems, and I feel really free today. The hospital sent me to a psychiatrist a couple of times through all of this, and he just kept looking at me... "Are you sure you're not depressed? How are you making it through all this with no job, no license, no cure in sight?" I told him I have a program and a Higher Power, so I also have a positive attitude. I think that psychiatrist is taking a closer look at Narcotics Anonymous.

But I do want to say something to N.A. members who have to take medications. During that time I was told that I may always have to take these medicines, and I knew I had no choice. I had surrendered, I had become willing, and I had developed a positive attitude about my recovery. I found a sponsor who could understand this issue, and talked to my friends about it. I was truly recovering. My Higher Power was with me through it all. And I know I'm not special. My heart was in my recovery, that's all; if yours is, you can do this too. I was so tired of my old life, and today all of my energy goes into my new one. No one can take that away from me, or from you.

I pray that all addicts will open up to each other and share with whomever they're comfortable, and I think we all can help each other the N.A. way. I'm living proof that despite obstacles, this program works if you're willing to work it.

*T.S., California*

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## The sixth step—an action step

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**Step Six: "We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."**

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**November 1986.** My first exposure to the Twelve Steps came at a time in my life when I was very dishonest, confused, depressed, fearful, and obsessed with drugs. Trying to apply the steps in my life required a great amount of effort. I put forth the effort only because I did not want to die.

I learned that I get as much out of the steps as I put into them. The First Step applied only to drugs and the immediate situation of coming off drugs the first time I used it. The Second, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Steps all basically applied specifically to drug-related issues and problems for me the first time through also. But my first attempt to practice the Sixth Step brought about powerful results. I worked at becoming entirely ready to have the obsession to use removed, along with the extremely destructive dope fiend behavior and thinking. I

began to find that when I did the Sixth Step, alternatives would arise—solutions to the problem areas. I then had to choose to use these new alternatives as I moved on to Step Seven.

Instead of being like some kind of surgery or exorcism, the Sixth Step led me to something new which would serve to replace the negative with a positive. I had to take action to use these new awarenesses and behaviors.

By the time I reached the Twelfth Step, and began feeling I'd really worked hard at each step, I started getting complacent. I thought, "Now I can coast."

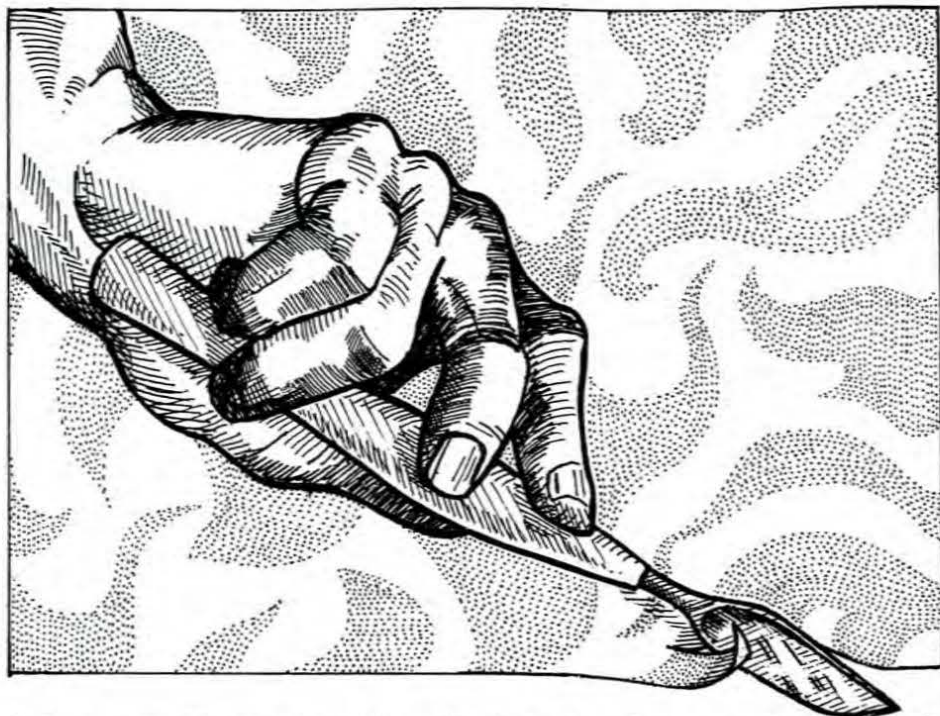
This attitude led me into trouble. Old feelings began to return. I felt isolated. I became critical and judgmental, out of touch with myself, and negative toward N.A. I became manipulative and secretive.

I had to learn the hard way that the steps never end. I learned that, at all times, I have two choices: I can practice the steps and move ahead, or I can *not* practice the steps and move backward. That's it. The only thing I don't know is how fast I'll move.

In either case, I may move very slowly for a while, and I may move very fast. Moving backwards eventually means I'm using drugs. Fortunately, I have been able to learn that part of my lesson by observation. I began to practice the steps again, and to move forward, lest I use again.

The personal suffering and damage I did during my "backslide" led me to check out one part of the Twelfth Step I had overlooked. It said at the end that we "practiced these principles in all our affairs." That little word, "all," had escaped me. Realizing that





indeed, my addiction does affect all areas of my life, I found myself face to face with Step One again. Thus began the process that has continued until today, and hopefully will go on tomorrow. Over and over I find additional areas in which I must practice these principles. The joy of it is that, with practice, it has become more natural to do, and new benefits never stop coming to me.

It seems that Step Six is a turning point for me, because when I become entirely ready to have all these defects of character removed, tools for change emerge. The changes in me and in my life that happen when I use these tools in Step Seven are some of the sweetest miracles in recovery.

Through the years there has developed a long list of areas I have tried to apply Step Six to, and of course,

there have been numerous defects I have had to apply it to more than once. As always, the return I get out of it is proportionate to what I put into it.

The idea I had upon entering N.A., that the steps were there to get me over the tough, early part of abstaining from drugs, has been thrown out. The steps are now my guide to living. Not only do they, along with meetings and support from others, keep me clean, they give the means to solve problems and to grow spiritually.

As I try to practice these principles in all my affairs, I keep getting new challenges and opportunities for growth. Sometimes I find, as I encounter these challenges and face myself, that I have some character defects my pride wants me not to see. I believe I must shed the light of the

steps on these, no matter what. Sometimes it is pain and destruction that drives me to Step Six, to open myself, to release my fears, to take the risk of growth.

I have moments when the need for growth is fuel for self-pity. I say, "Why do I always have to work on myself?" Usually I feel this when I haven't been consistently practicing Step Six. On the other hand, this painful awareness of my defects sometimes brings a sense of gratitude, because I have a choice today if I want to recover.

At the moment, I'm dealing with the Sixth Step as it applies to a resentment I've held on to for many years. This resentment has poisoned my serenity; I've known this ever since I found out through a Fourth and Fifth Step several years ago. Yet, I have maintained the resentment with the thought that I can't let this person off the hook. I felt this person had harmed me, and I've been maintaining this resentment from a vengeful point of view, wanting to make the other party feel guilty.

Today, as I practice Step Six, what is becoming clear is that if I am entirely ready to have this defect of character removed, I must do more than just passively sit back and say, "Okay, God, remove it." I must take action. You see, the resentment is mine alone. It's my problem. For starters, I must accept that. I've always wanted to blame it on someone. I finally had to ask myself, how long do I want to suffer? I've hit bottom on this.

Accepting that my resentment belongs to me only, it becomes clear that

I must act to forgive this person. The forgiving must be done completely on my own, without any conditions. In this case, forgiveness means an attitude and behavior change, not something I say. I must not behave in little ways that are meant to hurt. That is how I have practiced my resentment—just a non-verbal way of relating. I am focusing on my behavior and on me instead of being critical or judgmental towards this person I've resented for so long. I have begun to be able to appreciate and love this individual, who I care about very much, and to see the qualities of

**'Instead of being like  
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to something new.'**

our relationship and the good points of the person concerned. I'm finding that the vast pain is diminishing. I'm learning one of the most valuable lessons of my life, thanks to Step Six. This lesson actually applies to every relationship I have.

This is one example of Step Six as a key link in my ongoing process of recovery. I couldn't have possibly reached it without the five steps before it. I'm very happy and grateful to have found N.A. Thanks to *The N.A. Way* for this chance to share.

*W.L., North Dakota*



## We can make it through anything together

**June 1986.** I've been clean now a few years and have spent a good deal of last year in doctors' offices and clinics. On the suggestion of a respected professional, I went to a city hospital for an AIDS screening because I'd been fearing that disease for some time. I thought I had one of the symptoms, chronic swollen lymph nodes.

The waiting room in the hospital was full of active addicts. Thinking, "I can handle this," I went alone. I prayed before I got there, and I had my Basic Text with me. As I sat there pretending to read, I listened to the conversations going on and thought to myself, "Oh, that's what I must've sounded like too!" How sad, I thought, as one part of me wanted to share recovery and another part of me wanted to feel what they felt. No pain!

An opportunity for me to share came when one of those addicts asked me what I was reading. "This? It's my Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text," I said (as the little girl inside me giggled, "How corny!"). "Have you every



heard of N.A.?" I asked. And I went on to share how I got clean. "That's great," he replied. "I've been off drugs a while too, but now they tell me I have this AIDS thing."

"Clean to me means no meth or any other drug," I told him. Then I asked him, "But you take meth, don't you?" "Yeah."

When I got into the cubicle where the doctor examines you, I felt like a child—wide-eyed, lips parted, and feeling numb all over. Questions were asked, and he examined me. "And how long have you had the white coating on you tongue?"

What coating? I thought... "About a month, I guess."

When the doctor was all finished with the examination, he told me that in view of the fact that I have been drug free for a period of time, I may

not have AIDS, but it was possible that I have ARC (AIDS Related Complex). That day I did not get a normal screening procedure. They did follow-up testing first because I exhibited three symptoms of the disease. Needless to say, when I got home I was in a total state of panic. My faith seemed to have gotten lost somewhere. My God, how could this be happening now? I've been clean four years. Why now?

Thank God I had recently gotten a sponsor. She told me to get with Step One (powerless—out of control). That early recovery desperation came back with brute force. Waiting for the test results was one of the hardest times I've been through in recovery. During that time I went through anger, self-pity, and denial. My prayer life acquired new urgency. I cried to God

about the pain I was suffering. The answers came—in God's time, not mine.

The test results came back like I'd thought they would, but had hoped they wouldn't. I shared about my fear and anger at a few meetings. I needed to dump, but without mentioning AIDS or ARC. I came to realize, through error, that I could not share about it too openly or at open meetings. It wasn't just my own feelings involved—my husband also had feelings. When I married him, I promised to obey and honor him. He had asked me not to tell so many people, so I found another way.

After the final test results came back positive, I was so relieved. No more waiting; my life could go on, and I knew what I was in for.

At times, fear creeps up on me, and I give in to a bit of self-pity. I'm so grateful to God for the foundation I have, the faith that God will help me through this, whatever it is. He always has in the past.

The feelings come and go now. I can accept not just my disease of addiction, but anything life unfolds to me—anything! I'm a survivor, like most people in N.A. All I have is this one day to get through—to help my own recovery and someone else's, to ask for help, and to get it, to put out the hand to the newcomer and share with another suffering addict.

By the way, I found others in N.A. who suffer the same illness, and we share with one another our pain, our fear, our thoughts, and feelings. What a relief to know that we never have to go through anything alone again.

*Anonymous*



## A letter to the uninitiated

May 1987. When I first encountered N.A., I began to immediately hear about a thing called "service work." At that time, the only service committee that existed in this state was the New Jersey Area Service Committee. It met once a month at a small student center annex at Seton Hall University in South Orange.

It was 1981. Early spring. There were about twenty meetings in the state. I remember my first experience



of "area service." All the regulars were there. Two of them were arguing over the number of scoops of ground coffee to put in the pot.

It was hectic! Recovering addicts were all gathered around in a smoke-filled room, jockeying for comfortable seats. I sat on the radiator and mentally took all their inventories.

I was not really sure what was unfolding there that day. Many of these people, only months before in the depths of active addiction, were debating arcane points of parliamentary procedure and vigorously contending about some "agenda" whose every item seemed to hinge controversially on the revealed will of God! *Wow!* I was hooked. It was the most expressive political event I had seen since Krushchev pounded his shoe on the table at the U.N.

I had always been a political person, but never in a way that had any practical application or discernible impact on my life. My idea of political activism was scapegoating Richard Nixon as an excuse for taking drugs. But this was different. Area service offered me the singular opportunity of participating directly in the shaping of structure and policy in local N.A.—a social force as relevant as my next heartbeat.

But what was service all about? The last six years in N.A. have helped to answer this question, yet the story continues to unfold. I'd like to share some of these thoughts with you.

Service work is justified by one simple phrase: "As you have freely received, freely give." But it is not an entirely selfless act, because we know

that as we give away what we have received, more is added to us. We become richer through service. Our recoveries are deepened and secured through the giving.

Service work comes in two different but related forms: personal service and committee service.

Personal service is the kind which we perform spontaneously, informally, and personally. Examples of personal service include picking up ashtrays after meetings, sharing our individual experience, strength, and hope in a meeting, and going on a Twelfth Step call. Sponsorship is also a form of personal service work.

Committee service work, however, arises out of the spirit of the Ninth Tradition, which states, "N.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve."

I have come to believe that personal service is for everyone—but that not everyone is cut out for committee service. That's as it should be. Here's an easy way to decide whether committee service is for you. If your recovery has been sustained and enriched by the efforts of committee service (such as conventions, dances, and workshops), then maybe you owe the fellowship a commitment or two.

Remember, you don't have to be a politician to love Robert's Rules. Come on and join the fun. We're still debating God's will for the fellowship on a regular basis! Where else can you get all that plus free hugs for under a nickle? See you at area service...

L.A., New Jersey



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## Taking responsibility for my own recovery

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**December 1984.** Throughout my seventeen-year drug-using career, I was either attached to some man or temporarily between men. That pattern followed me into recovery. Until recently, I've been unwilling to let go of my latest "flame." Only when I



finally let go did I discover I was using relationships to avoid taking responsibility for my own recovery.

Thoughts of him dominated my thinking. I always wondered when he would call, what he was doing, who he was with. I worried about whether I had said the right thing the last time we were together. I schemed and plotted how I would maneuver to get him to surrender himself to me.

When I talked of him to my sponsor, she told me to stop worrying about him. "The relationship doesn't seem that strong." I decided that she hadn't been in the program long enough, so I got another sponsor. The new sponsor told me to let him go and start working on my own program. Meanwhile, he was becoming infatuated with a new woman that he had brought into the program. I was in severe distress, and almost used over it.

After two weeks of "detachment," I

was still thinking of all kinds of excuses to keep hanging on. As long as we enjoyed each other's company, I figured it was okay to hang out with him. I anticipated that our relationship would evolve into a loving, monogamous one if I could satisfy all his desires and stop acting jealous. I had a car, he liked to drive, I didn't. I would just happen to be going by his house... I had a million good reasons for initiating contact; but I was a fake. I wasn't being myself.

When I heard other women tell their stories, some of the things I heard irritated me. I heard some share about how they had to put their Higher Power and their own recovery first before the men in their lives.

As their words and the reality of daily living began shining through my fog of denial, I realized this relationship was just like another drug—it was another escape from *me*. I had turned my life and will over to this man. I was intent on pleasing him. From fixing his favorite meals to taking him wherever he wanted to go or loaning him money, I regulated my life according to his whims. I didn't have to deal with a supernatural Higher Power, since I had one in the flesh.

Through my acculturation into the N.A. way of thinking, I discovered that no matter what baggage I added to my addiction, I would still be stuck with me. There were no magic formulas to recovery, no shortcuts. I had to learn to take responsibility for my own happiness. No one else could create it for me.

Writing out the first four steps over my unhappy situation resulted in a

revolution in my perception. I went from self-pity to gratitude. I realized I could enjoy solitude. I stopped feeling sorry for myself. I saw I was capable of taking care of myself. Activities such as cooking, reading, knitting, cleaning, and gardening stopped being mere time-fillers. I started living my life in a state of happiness instead of waiting for Prince Charming to make my life complete.

I started praying to be an instrument of God's will rather than praying for what I wanted. I asked to be of service rather than asking to get things I thought I deserved. I became open to suggestion and willing to do the footwork.

The other women in the program have become benign mirrors for me rather than threats. Their reflections inspire me, clarify my own inventory, and help me feel less alone.

I've become grateful for the abundance God has bestowed upon me. Today I have the gift of recovery, so that I can become what I dreamed I could be. Before it would have always remained a dream, a drug-induced haze. Today, I'm learning to let go of my fears of the future and to let God determine the outcome. I'm no longer afraid of being alone, because I know I can take care of myself. Other people come into my life as I become willing to let them in.

Today, I am happy to use my free will to make my own choices so that I can improve myself, help others, and enjoy all the pleasures in my life. I've given up on needing any one person to make me feel whole.

*J.G., Washington*



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## Recovery begins with surrender

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**August 1985.** My name is K.S., and I'm a recovering addict. I'm currently doing time in the Tennessee Prison for Women. I had escaped from this prison in 1982. While on escape, I ran into Narcotics Anonymous (and not by mistake, I might add). The program gave me, and continues to give me, a new outlook on life. I have sixteen months clean now.

When I got to the Ninth Step, I chose to work that step rather than get loaded. I turned myself back in to this prison January 7 of this year to finish my sentence. And things are working out great, thank God. When I got back here, there were no N.A. meetings, so along with a few inmates and myself we're trying to start one. We only have one N.A. book. I'm writing in hopes that you will help us out. Could you send us a starter kit for our meeting?

We've tried to get some outside help, but no luck yet. For the first time in its history, this prison has allowed us inmates to start our own group. We can thank God for that. But we need some help, please, if you can.

I am writing to thank you for the support you have given our group here at the Tennessee Prison for Women. It is greatly appreciated; many, many thanks.

I would like to share some good news with you. Before coming back to this prison from escape, I was facing two years on top of the time I had previously served, but thanks to N.A. and a God that I do or don't understand, I'm going up for parole the 11th of April. Four months is sure a lot better than two years. I've seen a lot of miracles happen in my life and in this prison. Many thanks go to God for that.

Turning myself in to this prison was, I think, the hardest thing I've ever done. But, you know, it seems that all through my recovery, my

painful times have been my growing times. I've been told that, as long as I don't use, the painful times will pass, and this has been very true. I think the hardest time I've had since I've been back was when they put me in max—the worst place here—for thirty days as punishment for my escape. Plus, they would not let me go to any meeting.

At that point I thought I would die, but I turned it over to my Higher Power. Then, for the first time, this prison let me out of max to talk to a lady from the program. They have never done that before. To me, that was a miracle. Plus, out of about five women with escape charges, mine is the only one the D.A. has dropped. I've seen many miracles like that, and it's great. God really is doing for me what I can't do for myself.

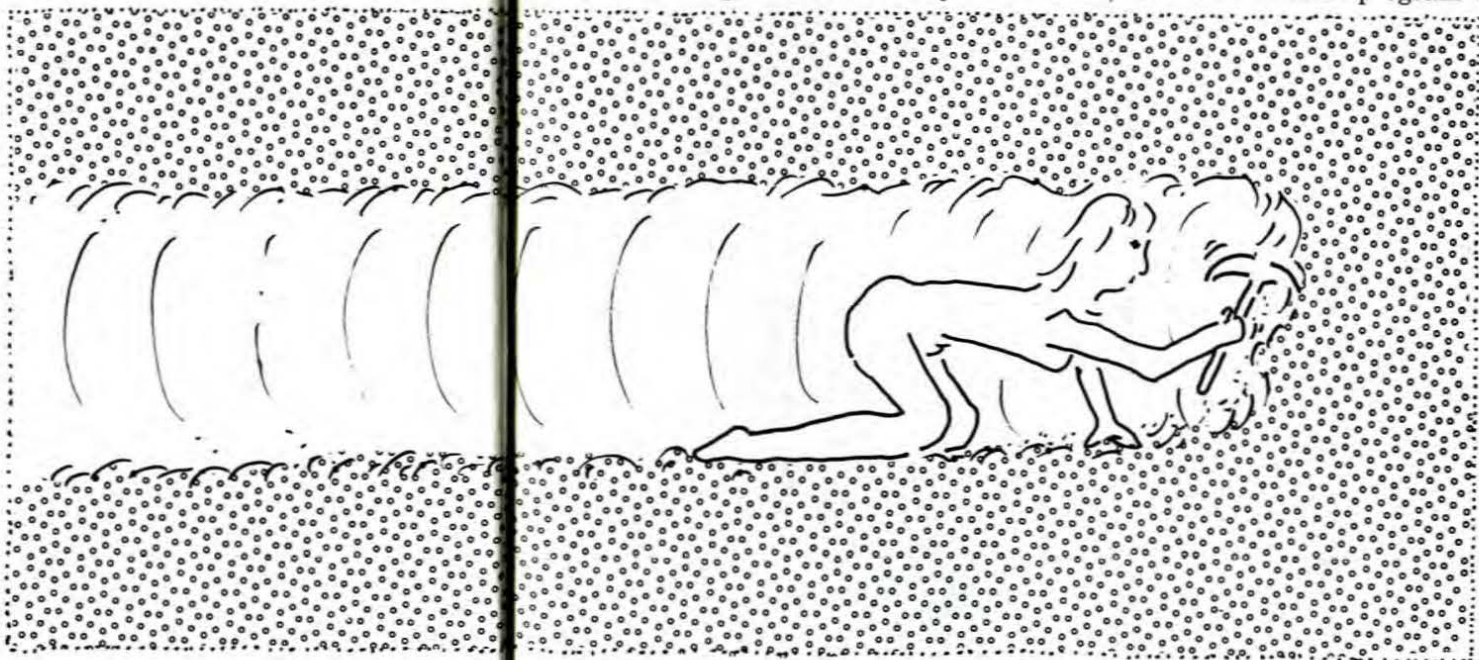
God willing, in five more days I'll

have eighteen months clean—another miracle. My clean time has been the best time of my life, and I'm awfully grateful for it. I have a life today, thanks to the program, that I've never known before; and I'll go to any lengths to keep it, one day at a time.

I am writing to keep you up to date on the development and growth of our N.A. group here at the Tennessee Prison for Women. We held our third meeting today. It was fantastic.

Fifteen inmates were present; we seem to grow by two or three every week, which is great. Also today, we had three visitors from a "free world" N.A. group. They said they would be back every week and would help any way they could. That, my friend, is a prayer answered.

Many thanks to Narcotics Anonymous, for without this program I





would not be clean today. I am as grateful today as I know how to be, but not near as grateful as I should be.

When I first came back to this prison to make amends for escaping and found there was no N.A. meeting to go to, I thought at first I'd never make it. But the second thought was, "Why not start one?" There seems to be a lot of red tape to go through in getting an N.A. meeting going in an institution. So for anyone who is trying to start an N.A. meeting in prison, don't give up. Turn it over to your Higher Power, and do the footwork.

**'When I first came back to this prison to make amends for escaping and found there was no N.A. meeting, I thought I'd never make it.'**

This is what I did here at T.P.W. and I've seen many miracles happen.

The N.A. program has given me a new life. A life of recovery that I truly enjoy today and I'll go to any length to keep it.

**G**reat news! I made parole and will be going home in a week or two. God has blessed me many times over. It's great! It was also great talking to you folks last week. That really made my day. I do appreciate the love and support that N.A. has sent my way.

I believe I'm still in shock from this morning. Do you realize that I was

supposed to serve two years at first? Then it was knocked down to eight months, and now it's only four months. God is working miracles in my life right and left. I can't thank Him enough.

Some other members of our group will be in contact with you as to how N.A. is going here. They are new in the program. They have done a lot of work to help here. I will continue to support this group any way I can. I believe the N.A. group here is a gift from God, and we do appreciate it.

**I**'m a week late in keeping you up-to-date on our group here at T.P.W. Sorry about that. I think my feet have finally hit the ground. Making parole put me on cloud nine. Anyway, I'm back to earth now. The group is doing great. Last week we had chips. It was a great meeting—an emotional one. I thought the roof was going to come off. So many happy faces. Our Higher Power has blessed us tremendously. We had five recovering addicts from the outside, and it was great.

I've been asked to speak at an N.A. meeting in Nashville when I get out, so I'm going to ask the folks to help with the N.A. meeting at the annex and work-release—the worst they can do is say no. I've been taught that I can only keep what I have by giving it away. I just want to do all I can to help.

Many, many thanks for the love and support you folks have sent our way. Please know in your hearts that you're in my prayers and thoughts always. Keep up the good work.

*K.S., Tennessee*

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## Suffering through recovery

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**February 1986.** 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 with 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 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 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 ask for. This was before our Basic Text was printed; however, I was fortunate that someone cared enough to send me 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 nonetheless. I found I could use that program to recover in, if I was honest and desperate enough. It was at that point when I found some purpose for my incarceration—and 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 ended up leaving me a few weeks after my release. I had a tough

time adjusting to freedom, and faced a mountain of unpaid bills. 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.

**T**oday, I have much to be grateful for. In June 1985, I celebrated six years of recovery in the group I helped start nearly ten and a half years ago in Pennsylvania. Why I was given a second chance at recovery and 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 recovery I found in that cold, dark, dirty cell, I may give hope to other recovering, suffering addicts who may sometimes 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.

*Anonymous, Pennsylvania*



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## I'm part of something

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**August 1986.** Shortly after I found the N.A. Fellowship in 1983, I was introduced to service work. I now know that it was at that point that my life really changed course. I went from being an observer of the fellowship to being a part of this fellowship.

I fell into N.A. service in a very natural way. I attribute much of this to the way I was introduced to service work. It seemed that all the people at the meetings were talking about what the area was doing and what projects they as individuals were working on. Everyone seemed to be involved with something. I just assumed that being active in service was part of belonging to N.A.

I had heard it announced that the area service committee would meet that Saturday at a member's home and that anyone could attend. On Saturday I went to see what it was they did there.

As the meeting got underway, it seemed as though everyone had different ideas about what needed to be done and what projects were the most important. Some wanted to write letters to hospitals, doctors, judges, and probation officers. Others felt we needed to start a helpline. Some felt

we needed to do more H&I work, and still others thought we should have a dance.

Someone asked me what I thought we should do. I told them we ought to make an area meeting list. I told the others that it had taken me nearly two weeks of looking to find an N.A. meeting. Counselors and A.A. had sent me to various locations all over the city where they thought N.A. meetings were held.

To my surprise, the other members at the area meeting listened to me. They even agreed that a meeting list was real important, and that we should have a new list printed as soon as possible. I felt great, because they had listened and agreed with me. We would soon have a new list printed for our area.

I realized that service work involves much more than just showing up and stating your opinions. I learned that service involves action. I don't know who I thought was going to do the footwork to get our new lists printed. I just hadn't considered how ideas and decisions become reality. Fortunately, some of the others had some experience in that area. I don't remember any discussion about who should do what on this particular project. I was just given the job in such a matter-of-fact way that I never questioned their decision that I should do it. When I think about it, I am astonished that these people would trust me with such an important project.

When my head quit spinning, it occurred to me that I would need money to pay the printer. I asked the group

about it. Somebody got up, went down to the basement, came back up with a sack, and handed it to me. In the sack was a bunch of T-shirts left over from an N.A. function that had happened earlier that year. I was told to take the shirts to meetings and sell them; that would be where the money came from to pay the printer. Once again, I just accepted that this was how things were done.

I left the meeting with a sack of old T-shirts, a whole lot of encouragement, and something I now recognize as self-esteem. I can't describe how good it felt to know that people had faith in me. Even though, in reality, the group had risked very little on me (a sack of old T-shirts), I thought I had been given the biggest, most important job ever. I saw that I had something to offer, that I counted, and that

I could make a difference. I really felt like I was part of something—and that was a new feeling for me.

Today, I still get all the same feeling from participating in N.A. service. Today, nothing warms me like watching others grow from their involvement in N.A. service. Today, I find it easy not to complain about what I do, as all I need to do is look back and see benefits of service work in my life. Today, I try to be careful of how I depict service work to newcomers; I focus on the benefits. I introduce them to service in much the same way it was introduced to me. In this way, I don't spoil the newcomer's opportunity to find what I have found.

Thanks to God I'm alive today, and thanks to Narcotics Anonymous I'm clean today.

*R.W., Michigan*





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## Spiritual, not religious

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**October 1987.** I'm one of those addicts who, for as long as I can remember, was always seeking some kind of spiritual contact. I went to a parochial school from grade school on into junior high and high school.

At the same time that I began to seek "enlightenment" through LSD, I began a period of spiritual searching that took me from drugs, to psychic phenomena, and into a very strict fundamentalist religion. Though I did stop using for a time during my religious experience, I soon gave the religion up because I felt it was too strict and narrow-minded.

Not too long after that, I started shooting heroin, and again I thought that dope would lead me into the kingdom. I figured this time around I'd sneak in the back way, the easier, softer way. That's what I supposed I was doing by studying white witchcraft, healing herbs and crystals, and the psychic phenomena trip.

**T**hrough all of it I was using drugs, from grass and booze to dope, and then on to cocaine and freebase. My

pattern of addiction kept pace with the merry-go-round of the spiritual search I was on.

Toward the end of my active addiction, people in the spiritual paths I was attempting to follow pointed out to me that I could never claim any spiritual accomplishment while using mind- or mood-altering substances. I'd flirted with that idea before, but it had never been put to me so bluntly. They said that I could go nowhere but down, spiritually and every other way, as long as I kept using. I realize now that was a revelation to me—a spiritual awakening, if you will.

I'd been introduced to N.A. once before, but I thought it would be the last place I'd find spiritual healing or enlightenment of any kind. And when I finally did surrender, it wasn't because I thought it would be the last stop on my spiritual quest. By that time, I'd practically forgotten about my search for the truth. I was a desperate, strung-out addict looking for help. I was physically, materially, emotionally, and spiritually bankrupt.

When I walked through the doors of N.A., I started feeling real love and concern for the first time in my life. I also noticed there was a lot of sharing about a God of our own understanding and a Higher Power. It was even written on the walls, right there in the steps.

I don't know how I missed it the first time around; I guess I was pretty foggy then. But there it was, and it frightened me a little. I felt that my last ten years out there, I'd been actively and consciously spitting in God's eye. I didn't think He really

wanted to see or hear from me. I felt ashamed.

You people told me it was alright. You told me that if God didn't still love me, He wouldn't have led into these rooms. I started to ease up and ask about this God.

What really surprised me was that no one gave me any hard-line rigid answers or dictums. You didn't say things like, "We must pray three times a day facing east," or "Our God has only one name and He will not respond to any other."

You *did* say things like, "Well, I had a hard time praying in the beginning.

**'I'd been introduced to N.A. once before, but I thought it would be the last place I'd find spiritual healing or enlightenment of any kind.'**

Now I just talk to my Higher Power, as if I'm talking to another addict I really trust," or "I tell my Higher Power, to the best of my ability, what's really going on inside, and ask for His guidance. Then I listen for the still, small voice from inside, and I try to do His will rather than my own. Oh, sometimes I take my will back, and it causes me grief, but my God is always ready to forgive me and set me straight again. I need only ask, and accept His forgiveness humbly."

After I was around a few months, I started praying. I started by "acting as if," because I didn't know what my

Higher Power was. I just knew that I needed to get one.

You see, that had been a part of my downfall in the past. I had been seeking God's face. I had to know whose God was the right one, and what He looked like, and which group He favored most. I thought I needed all this information to get close to Him.

Today, I realize I don't need any of those answers. It gave me the greatest relief when I read in our Basic Text, "We can use this power before we begin to understand it." Today, the only conditions I have for my Higher Power are again those from the Basic Text: that He is loving, that He cares for me, and that He is a power greater than me and my addiction.

For that matter, I only call God "He" for simplicity, realizing that my God has no gender.

Today, I enjoy conscious contact with my Higher Power when my will is in accordance with His. And even so, I don't begin to understand what or who God is—just that the essence of my God is love. And the more I learn to give, the more I can be open to receive. All else is mystery, which is just fine with me.

That gives me something to strive for, although I know I'll never have all the answers until I leave this world—and maybe not then, either. What's most important to me is that I've learned that I have a choice, and today, I choose life. I can enjoy living and growing today, by the grace of God, through Narcotics Anonymous.

*M.C., New York*



# Comin' up



**ALABAMA:** Apr. 20-22, 1990; East Alabama Area Spring Fling; Wind Creek on Lake Martin, Alabama; EA-ASC, P.O. Box 745, Alexander City, AL 35010

**ALASKA:** Mar. 2-4, 1990; 6th Alaska Regional Convention; send speaker tapes; ARC-6, P.O. Box 84946, Fairbanks, AK 99708

**ARIZONA:** May 25-27, 1990; 4th Arizona Regional Convention; Ramada Renaissance Hotel, 200 N. Centennial Way, Mesa; rsvn.s (602) 898-8300; ARC-4, P.O. Box 44374, Phoenix, AZ 85064

**ARKANSAS:** May 18-20, 1990; 6th Annual Beaver Round-up; Buffalo Point National Park, Yellville; Northwest Arkansas ASC, P.O. Box 23, Lowell, AR 72745

**AUSTRALIA:** April 13-15, 1990; Australian Regional Convention; Function Centre, North Sydney Oval, Corner Miller and Ridge Streets; Convention, P.O. Box 591, Chatswood NSW 2057, Australia

**CALIFORNIA:** Mar. 29-Apr. 1, 1990; 12th Northern California Regional Convention; San Jose Civic & Convention Center; housing at Fairmont Hotel (408-998-1900), Holiday Inn (408-998-0400), and Red Lion Inn (408-453-4000), San Jose; NCC-12, P.O. Box 215667, Sacramento, CA 95821

**2)** May 26-27, 1990; Multi-Regional Public Information Learning Days; St. Jude's Reception Hall, 3824 Mitchell Rd., Ceres; phoneline (209) 526-1817; SVG-PI, P.O. Box 675, Modesto, CA 95350

**3)** Jun. 1-3, 1990; San Diego-Imperial Regional Convention; Holiday Inn at the Embarcadero, 1355 Harbor Drive, San Diego; rsvn.s (619) 232-3861; RSO (619) 587-1007; San Diego RSO, P.O. Box 184, San Diego, CA 92104

**CONNECTICUT:** Jun. 1-3, 1990; 4th Great-er Waterbury Family Campout; Lone Oaks Camp Grounds, East Canaan; Campout Committee, P.O. Box 1075, Woodbury, CT 06798

**FLORIDA:** Mar. 16-18, 1990; 1st Florida Spring Service Break; Holiday Inn, 999 N. Atlantic Blvd., Ft. Lauderdale FL 33304; rsvn.s (305) 563-5961; FSSB-1, P.O. Box 601412, N. Miami Beach, FL 33160

**2)** May 4-6, 1990; 3rd Annual Florida Regional H&I Awareness Weekend; Clearwater Beach Hilton Hotel, 715 S. Gulfview Blvd., Clearwater Beach, FL 34630; rsvn.s (813) 447-9566; phoneline (813) 894-6262; Florida RSO, 1110 N.E. 34th Court, Oakland Park, FL 33334

**3)** Jun. 28-Jul. 1, 1990; 9th Florida Regional Convention; Hyatt Regency Miami, City Center at Riverwalk, 400 SE 2nd Ave., Miami FL 33131, (305) 358-1234; RSO (305) 563-4262; FRC-9, Florida RSO, 1110 NE 34th Ct., Oakland Park, FL 33433

**HAWAII:** Jun. 8-11, 1990; 4th Big Island Gathering; Mauna Kea State Park; phoneline (808) 969-6644; Big Island Gathering, P.O. Box 5415, Kailua Kona, HI 96745

**ILLINOIS:** Apr. 27-29, 1990; 2nd Chicagoland Regional Convention; Sheraton International at O'Hare, 6810 N. Mannheim, Rosemont IL 60018; rsvn.s (708) 297-1234 (ask for CRC-2 rates); Chicago Service Office (708) 848-2211; CRC-2 c/o CSO, 212 S. Marion, Ste. 27, Oak Park, IL 60302

**2)** May 18-20, 1990; 6th Annual Little Egypt Area Campout; McNair Group Campgrounds, Carlyle Lake, Carlyle; phoneline (618) 548-3547

**INDIANA:** Jul. 27-29, 1990; 6th Mid-Coast Convention; Hilton at the Airport, 2500 S. High School Rd., Indianapolis; rsvn.s (800) 445-8667 or (317) 244-3361; send speaker tapes; MCC-6, P.O. Box 47462, Indianapolis, IN 46227

**IOWA:** Jun. 29-Jul. 1, 1990; 4th Iowa Regional Convention; Holiday Motor Lodge, Clear Lake

**KANSAS:** Apr. 6-8, 1990; 7th Mid-America Convention; Holiday Inn, Great Bend; MAC-7, P.O. Box 374, Great Bend, KS 67530

**KENTUCKY:** Apr. 13-15, 1990; 4th Kentuckiana Regional Convention; Executive Inn, 1 Executive Blvd., Paducah KY 42001

**LOUISIANA:** May 25-27, 1990; 8th Louisiana Purchase Regional Convention; Hotel Bentley, 200 DeSoto St., Alexandria LA 71301; rsvn.s out of state (800) 356-6835, in state (800) 624-2778; LPRC-8, P.O. Box 3192, Pineville, LA 71361

**MARYLAND:** Mar. 23-25, 1990; 4th Chesapeake & Potomac Regional Convention; Ocean City Convention Center; accomodations CPRC Hotel Request, P.O. Box 4062, Salisbury MD 21801, tel. (800) 654-5440; CPRC-4, P.O. Box 771, Ellicott City, MD 21043

**MINNESOTA:** Jun. 8-10, 1990; 7th Upper Midwest Regional Convention; College of St. Scholastica, Duluth; phoneline (701) 234-9330; send speaker tapes; UMRC-7, P.O. Box 5393, Fargo, ND 58105

**MISSISSIPPI:** Apr. 6-8, 1990; 8th Mississippi Regional Convention; Trace Inn, 3400 W. Main Hwy, 6, Tupelo, MS

**MISSOURI:** Jun. 15-17, 1990; 5th Show Me Regional Convention; Holiday Inn Executive Center, 2200 I-70 Dr., Columbia; rsvn.s (800) HOLIDAY; phoneline (314) 635-0271; SMRC-5, P.O. Box 373, Columbia, MO 65205-0373

**MONTANA:** Jun. 9, 1990; 2nd Annual Montana State Gathering; St. Joseph's School Auditorium, Missoula, MT; Gathering Committee, P.O. Box 351, Lolo, MT 59847

**NEBRASKA:** Mar. 31, 1990; Return of the Close Encounters of the Clean Kind; Uno Milo Bail Student Center, Omaha; Omaha ASC, P.O. Box 3907, Omaha, NE 68103-0907

**NEW JERSEY:** May 25-27, 1990; 5th New Jersey Regional Convention; Meadowlands Hilton Hotel, 2 Harmon Plaza, Seacaucus, NJ, (201) 348-6900; send speaker tapes; NJRC-5, P.O. Box 852, Woodbridge, NJ 07095

**2)** Jun. 22-24, 1990; 11th East Coast Convention; William Patterson College, 300 Pompton Rd., Wayne NJ 07470; phoneline (201) 761-6646; ECC-11, P.O. Box 22091, Newark, NJ 07102

**NORTH CAROLINA:** Mar. 9-11, 1990; 3rd Capital Area Convention; Sheraton Imperial Hotel & Towers, I-40 Exit 282 (between Raleigh and Durham); rsvn.s (919) 755-5050 (out of state), (800) 222-6503 (in state); CAC-3, P.O. Box 50196, Raleigh, NC 27650

**2)** Mar. 30-Apr. 1, 1990; 5th Greater Charlotte Area Convention; Marriott Executive Park, 5700 Westpark Dr., Charlotte; rsvn.s (800) 228-9290; GCAC-5, P.O. Box 32262, Charlotte, NC 28232

**3)** June 29-July 1, 1990; 11th Annual Regional Convention; Stouffer Hotel, Winston-Salem; CRCC, P.O. Box 67485, Winston-Salem, NC 27103

**OHIO:** May 25-27, 1990; 8th Ohio State Convention; Seagate Center, Toledo; send speaker tapes; Ohio Convention, P.O. Box 1046, Toledo, OH 43697

**OKLAHOMA:** Mar. 30-Apr. 1, 1990; 4th Oklahoma Regional Convention; Holiday Hotel, Shawnee; rsvn.s (405) 275-4404; RSO (405) 239-2768; OKRC-4, P.O. Box 5485, Norman, OK 73070

**ONTARIO:** May 18-20, 1990; 3rd Ontario Regional Convention; ORC-3, University of Toronto New College, Box 7079 Depot A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1X7

**PENNSYLVANIA:** Mar. 23-25, 1990; 8th Greater Philadelphia Regional Convention; Adams Mark Hotel, City Line & Monument Rd., Phila. PA 19131; rsvn.s (800) 231-5858 or (215) 581-5000; GPRC-8, P.O. Box 42628, Phila., PA 19101-2628

**TENNESSEE:** Jun. 8-10, 1990; 2nd Annual Spiritual Retreat and Campvention; Lake Taal Army Travel Camp, Fort Campbell, KY; rsvn.s (502) 798-3126; helpline (615) 297-9762; Clean and Crazy Group, P.O. Box 1283, Clarksville, TN 37040

**TEXAS:** Mar. 23-25, 1990; 5th Lone Star Regional Convention; Hotel Galvez, Galveston; rsvn.s (800) 392-4285; Lone Star RSO, 10727 Plano Rd., Ste. 200, Dallas, TX 75230

**UNITED KINGDOM:** Apr. 20-22, 1990; 1st London Regional Convention; for venue information call UKSO (1) 352-8356; LRC-1, P.O. Box 417, London SW10 0RN, England

**WASHINGTON:** Apr. 27-29, 1990; 5th Washington Northern Idaho Regional Convention; Best Western Executive Inn, Fife WA; rsvn.s (206) 922-0080; WNIRC-5, P.O. Box 5998, Kent, WA 98064

**WEST VIRGINIA:** May 11-13, 1990; West Virginia Convention, Cedar Lakes, Ripley, WV; rsvn.s (304) 372-7000; Mounaineer RSC, P.O. Box 2381, Westover, WV 26502



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3TEA

## 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 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 nonprofessional, 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. Narcotics Anonymous 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.

Twelve Traditions reprinted for adaptation by permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.



1819 · 1957 · 1693 · 1962 · 1832 · 1995 · 1764 · 2028

*My gratitude speaks  
when I care  
and when I share with others  
the N.A. way*

2001 · 1760 · 1908 · 1618 · 1902 · 1500 · 2534 · 18

### What is Narcotics Anonymous?

N.A. is a worldwide fellowship of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other 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 belong to N.A.—there are no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using drugs. 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 N.A., see your local phone directory, or write us at the address inside.