

THE NA Way[®]

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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 NA Way[®]

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For discussion

I was at a meeting and the topic for discussion was relapse. Someone who had been around longer than just about anyone else talked about the things that appeared universal to an addict's going back out. This was from hard-won experience working in a detox centre, talking to lots of repeat clients. My observations since then, through talking with those who have returned, seem to support these findings.

The common conditions are: they quit going to meetings; they quit talking to their sponsors and recovery friends about how they felt and where they were at; they quit writing; they quit praying. In short, they stopped working a program of recovery.

I often find meetings a pain in the backside. An hour and a half in a smoke filled room sometimes gets intolerable. There are people there I don't like, there are opinions expressed that seem sadly misinformed, and there are other things said that I get angry or depressed over. I have heard it said at more than one meeting how a member has left a meeting feeling worse than when they came and a few have even expressed how meetings have made them want to use. There are lots of reasons for not going to meetings.

Some of them are pretty feeble excuses, and some of them fairly realistic, if taken exclusive of recovery.

Regardless, isolation is a big part of the disease of addiction. An addict off by his or her self is in bad company. So many years of using, so many years of denial, so many years of negativity do not create a healthy mind that is capable of making good choices back to back.

Talking to sponsors and recovery friends gives us a chance to express ourselves. Sometimes I have been so full of my own "B.S.," resentment, judgementalness, opinions and so on, that expressing it was the only way I could get at what was really bothering me and make room for the truth and peace. Listening to others, especially those I have come to know and trust, has, when I was willing, saved me time and anguish. My recovery friends have always been for my recovery. Often their opinions have been at odds with my own, sometimes painfully so. Their observations have pierced my defenses and forced me to re-evaluate dearly held truths (spelled denial), to challenge my ill-formed opinions and to re-examine behavior I felt was so justified.

I have been through a dry, depressed time of late. A week ago we were at a meeting and we were reading through the Basic Text. The passage I read brought tears to my eyes and that sinking feeling to my stomach I get when the truth reaches out and grabs me. I had found an answer to a question I had been ignoring. Reading recovery literature has always done one of two things for me. Though much of the time nothing

really sticks out it acts as a gentle and unconscious reminder of what I am all about. Or, as in the case of last week, there is a powerful message that I desperately needed. Going to meetings, talking to my friends and reading have all given me this kind of vital support. When I choose not to go to meetings, talk or read I lose this support, and isolation can all too easily become as bad an addiction as anything else I have ever used.

The first year plus in the program, I did two things consistently. One was go to meetings, lots of meetings and the other was to pray. I have since had periods of losing heart with prayer and have subsequently quit for a while. My losing heart was in forgetting to pray according to Step Eleven, forgetting to ask for, and more importantly accept, God's will for me. In remembering my parents as my first conscious Higher Powers and my own blaming God for the ills of this world, I believe I understand a person's reluctance to pray to a power greater than self for guidance and strength, much less be willing to trust this power. I was desperate for help when I first came in and this was something that seemed easy enough to do, that I latched on to. Prayer, every bit as much as meetings, was what kept me clean my first year—because that was about all the program I willingly worked.

Working the Twelve Steps of recovery has given me these opinions through the experience of my own recovery. I have gone through periods where I have turned my back on parts of or all of the program. Each time I felt isolated, lost and without purpose.

My peace and security disappeared immediately. I have blamed God, the program and others for this loss and have finally come around to the fact that I am the rebel choosing rebellion, and have hurt myself far worse than the truth, friends or God.

Recovery is a choice that I make one day at a time and that gives me a life. Relapse is a choice that I can make, perhaps just once, that could cost me my life. The Twelve Steps are a program to recover a life or real living.

K.H., Canada;

*Courtesy Free Spirit Newsletter,
Calgary, Alberta*



Sharing the miracle

I am an addict named B. I would like to express my gratitude to the NA program through action, because I believe gratitude is an action. With love and honesty, this my story.

When I was young, I was one with whom I choose to call God. Events in my life, that I recognized through step work, changed all of that. My world came to a crashing halt at the age of six and one-half when the structure of my family fell apart. My father self-destructed, in my opinion, behind this disease, and in front of his family.

Immediately after my mom informed me, "Your dad is dead," my brother got me loaded to ease the pain, and it worked.

From the age of seven to twelve years, drugs always eased the pain. It wasn't a matter of being cool or fitting in; it was survival, a direct course to anesthetize my inner feelings. Inside I was a time bomb.

I knew I had a problem at fifteen, when I tried to hang myself on a patio in the back yard. My brother slapped me around, said "What are you trying to do?" and then said "Just forget it, do you want to get high?"

Jails and institutions were the next plateau, ten years in and out consecutively. As it went along it got worse and the "emergency God" got more

important. At times I thought I had God fooled, too.

At the age of twenty-seven, five months before I got clean, my denial ended beside a freeway, where I was living. This addict was "broken" in all areas. I had just gotten out of a mental hospital and was facing some prison time, also I had a girlfriend who had just given birth to my daughter. I felt utter desperation and complete demoralization. I said, "God, if this is it, then take me off this ride." That is when I believe the miracle started for me. The very next day I was walking across a street and I saw a using partner at a stoplight. He said, "What are you doing?" I said everything was "fine," when I knew that all I wanted to do was die. He said, "I found a new way to live, I'm clean, my life is getting better." He had a sparkle in his eye, and he wasn't that deranged dope fiend that I knew before. He then gave me an NA card with his phone number on it. I thought nothing about it at the time, but five months later I dialed the number and my friend answered the phone. He told me he was glad to hear from me. I told him that I needed help and he asked if it would be alright if he and another member of NA came and talked to me. I said "yes." Within a short time they showed up and told me that I had a choice, and that I did not have to use, just for today. They gave me directions to where there was an NA meeting that night. I went to the meeting. The people were very nice. They told me to keep coming back, imagine that. They invited me back the next night. Soon I started to hear my story coming out of the mouths of other addicts

at those first meetings. The message of recovery rang loud and clear: freedom from active addiction. That was when I made my initial surrender, the run had stopped. I was tired. I could stop running. The people in NA had found a better way to live. That was an attraction to this addict. By the grace of God and Narcotics Anonymous, I have been clean ever since. At between thirty and sixty days clean the obsession to use was lifted, by following direction, getting a sponsor, going to lots of meetings, reading NA literature, cleaning up after meetings, etc., etc.

I found out along the way that the steps are the tools that can assist me in walking through life without getting loaded.

By working the steps I can find out what happened in my life, and attempt to live in the solution. The steps of Narcotics Anonymous and an NA sponsor make this all reachable. As far as feelings go, what I have to do is find out what's behind them before I can walk through them with the steps and the help of other members of NA.

Today is my third anniversary clean. I have God, the program and you people to thank for a new way of life. This last year has been rough, yet I have also come to know a new way of life. This last year has been rough, yet I have also come to know a peace that I have never known before. I've got problems today, but I find solutions through the spiritual principles of NA. Also this year, I've come to a better understanding of my HP, and that was a gift from the pain. At times I feel one with God and that it is

serenity. I am searching for my daughter and I believe if I stay clean, trust God, live the steps to the best of my willingness, that God provides the answers.

Living this program and praying bring me to the place that I could not find using. The place I have found is home. The person there was me. I love me today.

By getting honest, being open-minded, and willing to go to any lengths I am a miracle, one of many. This program is a miracle. I can't even begin to express in words how thankful I am that there is a loving, caring God, the NA program, and you, the Fellowship of NA. God bless.

B.K., California



Finding a balance

Gradually, I started to suspect that something might be wrong. In the summer before my senior year in college I tried to moderate and control my using, but that didn't work. I would always break my own rules and promises no matter how hard I tried. I tried switching drugs, but that didn't work either. I'd quit smoking pot for awhile and increase my drinking. Then I'd go back to pot again and pick it back up at the same level of using. This went on for awhile and I started to feel worse and worse about myself. I felt worthless, defeated, dirty, and corrupt. I realized that I was powerless over drugs. I couldn't stop and I didn't know what to do. I had reached my bottom and was willing to try anything.

Fortunately, I knew someone who had gotten clean. I thought he was a bit strange, perhaps even "brain-washed." But I respected him, since he knew how to stay clean and I didn't. We had maintained our friendship even though I was still using. One day I was talking to him about my problem and he asked me if I'd like to go to an NA meeting.

My first meeting seemed quite strange at the time, but in retrospect it seems quite normal. People were

smiling, their eyes were not half-closed, they laughed, talked about a Higher Power, and they hugged each other. I thought they must be some weird religious sect. They all clapped when I picked up a white chip and congratulated me afterwards. I didn't know at that time if I wanted to go to anymore meetings, but one phrase stuck with me: "One day at a time." The thought of staying clean for just one day had great appeal. It's something I thought I could do. Just make it through a day, five minutes if necessary. Another phrase also stuck with me: "Keep coming back." Although that first meeting was weird, I believed that I could stay clean if I kept going to meetings. My life might even get better.

Although I struggled a lot during those first few weeks of recovery, I kept coming back. I managed to stay clean. I also started to feel good about myself again. I felt like I was doing something good for a change. I might fail at other things in life, but at least I was staying clean. I also felt healthy, awake, aware, and glad to be alive. I soon learned about the Twelve Steps and started working them. The friend who had been through treatment became my sponsor. I made friends in NA, and I made friends who were not in NA, but were not using. I developed my own concept of a Higher Power and actually felt comfortable with it. (I had been an atheist.) I was, at times, happy, joyous, and free.

I soon found out that there was more to addiction than using drugs and more to recovery than just staying clean. I tried to replace the drugs with other things to fill my void—food,

sex, relationships, exercise, work, money, cigarettes, chewing gum, travel, music, videotapes, coffee, anything that made me feel good. My emotions and life also went out of control. I would go from happy to sad to angry, to scared to joyful to jealous all in a few hours. I was learning how to live all over again and feeling things that I hadn't felt in years.

Although I had quit using drugs, I still had a lot to learn about living life on its own terms. I had to find a way to find some sort of balance in my life, a concept that did not (and still does not) come easy to me.

Working the Twelve Steps, going to meetings, talking to people in NA and my Higher Power have all helped me to achieve some balance in my life and to deal with my emotions. Whenever

my life is getting out of balance, or I am having emotional troubles, I can use these tools. The steps help to identify my problems and find ways to deal with them, and other people help to live the steps. Although I still have a tendency to get out of balance and my emotions can go haywire, I'm getting better.

Today, I'm truly grateful that I've found this fellowship. Although I initially went to NA to get off drugs—and I still want to stay off drugs—NA has become my way of handling life. Thanks to NA I'm clean, I'm (mostly) happy, often joyous, and sometimes serene. I have become more spiritual and less self-centered. I don't have everything I want—not necessarily a bad thing! But I do have all I need.

D.R., Wyoming



Courage

Today is Monday. A start of a new week. The beginning of yet another journey for me in my recovery. The Basic Text points out how after years of recovery, we may find ourselves jobless, penniless and homeless. In years of recovery I've met people faced with this dilemma, and admired their courage to stay clean, no matter what! I've also met people who used over the same dilemma. I prayed for all these people. To some, I offered what I had to give. I never thought that one day it would be me.

Today, that person is me! Six months ago I was fired from a job I had worked for three years, at a company I worked with for six years. From then to now I have felt a whole range of feelings; anger, shame, resentments, humility, self-pity and fear. Constantly holding on to my ass the whole way. The basics came back to save me each time I was ready to give up. My friends did what they could. They gave me food and sometimes money. I had addicts from other states to send me stamps so I could continue to write them and mail resumes. They called and prayed for me. They gave me rides to meetings. They listened and gave me support. They loved me and cared about my well being.

When I realized I was jobless and

penniless, I knew I wouldn't become homeless. Not me!! Something would happen—it had for six months. Well, I'm packing today. I have broke through my denial. *It is me! It is happening!* I am also breaking through my isolation. I've only allowed a few to know what has been going on. Because of my choices, I haven't been open to what might have been available to me. No one in NA (that I know) is a mind reader.

I am leaving the area I got clean in. The area where I found a family—a home. I'll be moving to another area where I know I'll be welcomed, accepted and loved. With this in mind, I ask myself "why the tears, why the sadness?"

You have said to me that God hasn't brought me this far to leave me now (I'm taking HP with me). You have told me I never have to be alone (I'm taking your love with me). You told me that I don't ever have to use again (I'm taking my Basic Text). You assured me it would be okay (I'm taking hope and faith that you told me I always had). You convinced me I could do anything as long as I lived by the spiritual principles (I have courage to take with me).

Courage. Oh, yeah. That's what I admired in people I've met along the way. But, what is courage? My sponsor shared something with me months ago. Today I can use it to understand how others survived this dilemma. How I can survive it and maybe one day, you can use it, too. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to carry on with dignity in spite of it.

L.I., Virginia

We change

My name is D. and I am an addict. I have been clean since November 22, 1984. I went through some terrible feelings when I was using, the worst of which was the fear that I had truly lost my mind. For quite awhile I thought I was really insane, lock-up insane, the dangerous kind of insane. Today I don't feel that way at all. Today I am a safe person to be around and not a hazard to myself or other people.

This is not turning out exactly as I had in mind. What I really started out to write about was this nagging feeling that I sometimes get caught up in. It starts out something like this: I go visit my dad up north. (We live in Texas and go stay with him every couple years for a few days.) Every time I see him I get to thinking, wow, this old man will never change. He's 73 years old, supposedly retired, and still doesn't have time for his grand-kids (my kids,) just like he never had time for me. . . Then, sometime later when my kids are misbehaving, in the same fashion they always misbehave in, I get to thinking, wow, these kids will never change. They'll grow up being bullish or complaining and be that way all their lives. . . Then, my thinking goes, well, this can only mean one thing—I'll never change either! Suddenly my whole program takes a turn

for the worse. I guess a big part of my faith is that things don't have to stay the way they are, that I can change, that I am not "stuck" in my addiction. I thought for a long time that I would use drugs all my life. I started out wanting to be high all the time, but then, even after I didn't want to live like that, I couldn't stop. See, it was too late to change. I'd waited too long to do anything about my problems and I was "stuck."

Occasionally, I still get this feeling about other areas of my life. I forget, or discount, the changes that have taken place. I think my character defects are permanent.

Last night I went to a birthday meeting. At my home group we celebrate birthdays by all the celebrants taking turns speaking first, then the floor is opened to the other people attending. Anyway, listening to those addicts share about the changes that have come about in their lives this past year was, well . . . very good to hear. I do not believe people can change, I know they can. I know I can too, maybe it's just not fast enough to suit me, or maybe I expect to be able to change other people. The NA book *tells* me how to work the program, you people *show* me how.

I try to remember, personal setbacks in my life do not necessarily represent crisis in my recovery program. There is hope for addicts, hope for a violent world, hope for tomorrow. People can and do change. I am a person free from active addiction.

D.J., Texas

PAINTEINS

The wind kicking up a storm tonight blew through the kitchen; the way my active addiction swept across the lives of those I knew and loved. Nothing was secure from the gales tonight, neither was anyone safe when I had chemically medicated myself. Branches broke, dust flew, people scurried to their havens of refuge, seeking cover from the pelting rain and belting gusts. There was a time when I, too, with a blast of rage sent loved ones, heads bent, running for cover.

Skies opened, releasing torrents of rain, angry and destructive. Nothing in the path of furious sheets of water

was left untouched. I once held the same power; when the reins broke on my fury, pain, misery and destruction, only pieces of shattered lives were found in the wreckage.

The rain just past, night air breezing my skin, the peaceful whispers of recovery caressed my mind. Each raindrop that fell this night was a tear shed in the growing process of recovery; each leaf that drifted to the ground under the gentle pressure of water a reminder of the defenses I have let go.

Clouds, resembling the walls I still need to disperse, finally broke slowly moved apart to reveal the illumi-

nation of a full moon. The glow crept tentatively through the scattering of misty shadows, and I felt the light of recovery shine through my own clouded haze.

Raindrops slid down the glass door, single droplets coming together, puddles formed on the back porch, like the pools of addicts I see gathering in the rooms. Rivulets of water wandered across the broken concrete, and though some were lost along the way, many streams flowed, making the puddle larger and more formidable. I see my own face mirrored in the shallow pool: I am an addict, reflected in the congregation of our tears. Tears of

joy, tears of pain, all at rest in the ever growing pool of recovery.

When I awoke this morning, the sun had already burned off the puddle on my porch. My vision began to blur, filled with the tears of losing the beautiful pool. The grass, green and bristling with life, caught my eye. Nothing had been lost, it has only turned to growth and love. The water was part of the cycle again, and my recovery began anew in the sunlight of a new day.

F.A., New Mexico

Twelve Steps to a meeting of NA

(Ed note: A Tennessee NA group offered to share this meeting format. The NA Way Magazine review panel elected to print it not so much because it is the "right" approach to a meeting, but to spark thought and possibly encourage more members and groups to share what works for them.)

Note to Chairpersons:

The meeting format and content was developed and approved by the Little River Group, group conscience, in 1992. To preserve our Tradition Four, please follow the directions for a meeting in the name of the Little River Group of NA. Thank You.

Before the meeting; put out the readings around the room or ask for volunteers to read.

Start

1. "Would everyone please help me open this meeting with a moment of silence and the Serenity Prayer?"

2. "Welcome to the Little River Group of NA. My name is _____ and I am an addict. (Pause for a response) This is a meeting of Narcotics Anonymous. If you suffer from addiction, you are welcome here. We ask that when speaking you refer to addiction and your recovery as clean time. This is not to make us better than or less than but to preserve our unity and singleness of purpose. To not follow these suggestions is to dilute our unity and abandon our First Tradition."

3. "Are there any newcomers; people with less than 30 days clean?" If yes, ask them to share their first name only and say, "You are the most important person(s) at this meeting. We only keep what we have by giving it away. Welcome." Then ask if any out-of-towners or other group members that would like to be recognized.

4. "Are there any announcements for the good of NA?" (Pause for a few seconds.) If not then say, "If not, Little River Group has a few."

A. "We ask that if you have any drugs or drug paraphernalia that you

leave now, dispose of it, and come back. We need you here and not your drugs. This is for your protection as well as the protection of the group."

B. "If you have used today, please listen, do not talk during the meeting. Then get with somebody clean after the meeting."

C. "We are here on a matter of life and death. Please show respect for those speaking. If you feel the need to have an outside conversation, please take it outside."

D. "Please help us be good tenants by cleaning up after yourself before you leave."

5. "We begin our meetings with reading from the Basic Text of NA."

Who is an addict?
What is the NA program?
Why are we here?
How does it work?
The Twelve Traditions

6. NA room meetings

Ask, "Does anyone have a topic related to their addiction or their recovery?"

Main room meeting

Count off by 3's or 4's and split up. Ask someone with some clean time to chair the breakout meetings. Remind everyone to return to the main room at ten minutes to 9:00 to observe the closing traditions.

7. When everyone, is back together, pass the basket and say, "Our Seventh

Tradition says we are self-supporting through our own contributions. If we are to survive, we must pay the rent, buy key tags and literature and support the general fellowship. If you haven't got it, don't worry about it and keep coming back. If you've got it, give as though your life depended on it; because it might."

8. Ask for a volunteer or appoint someone to give out key tags.

9. Ask someone with good clean time to explain what sponsorship means to them in their recovery. Point out the temporary sponsor list.

10. Read Tradition Twelve. Ask someone what it means to them.

11. Read "We Do Recover" from chapter 8 of the Basic Text.

12. Close by forming a circle and say, "Let us observe a moment of silence for the suffering addict and the one that will die today. End the meeting by reading "Just For Today" from the Basic Text or with the "We" version of the Serenity Prayer.

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change. The courage to change the things we can. And the wisdom to know the difference. Just for today.

G.H., Tennessee

"Fired," one sponsor's perspective. . .

I was fired by a sponsee recently, and my sponsor suggested I write the NA Way and share my feelings with everyone.

Well, first off, I knew something was wrong when R. didn't call me for two days in a row. This sponsee, although a newcomer, had been very diligent from day one and through thick and thin, happy and sad, up and down, had called me every day without fail.

When I finally heard from him on day three he said he was going to make a change of sponsors. He said he thought he found someone who could give him more of what he needed from a sponsor. You know that at this point I wanted to say something like "that's really great, if you knew what it was that you needed in the first place you wouldn't be in the fix you're in, would you?" But I didn't of course. I was supportive, told R. I still loved him and that should anything go awry or should he ever need to talk to give me a call day or night and that I would be there for him. And you know what? He has. And I was. That feels good.

First things first, though. My feelings were a little hurt when he fired me. I immediately questioned my own self worth and started wondering what I had done wrong to make R. want to fire me. I like personalized everything right away and didn't even credit the sponsee with any part in it at all. What arrogance. Anyway, I processed things quickly and didn't freak out or anything, but my ego was bruised. It wasn't a question of the time or effort that is put into sponsorship. That is the nature of the beast, and how it should be. We sponsor someone who needs our help in working the steps and we give freely in this matter. The privilege of sponsorship does not need individual discourse, the gift is in the giving. Anyone who has ever sponsored someone knows that.

Fortunately, R., has a new sponsor and they're doing fine. He does call me to talk and he still attends my home group so that we see each other on a weekly basis.

I think that, bottom line, my feelings about this subject are thus: "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."

J.G., California

And another's

Sometimes when a sponsee comes up to me with the "We have to talk" look in their eyes, I know they are going to fire me as a sponsor. I wish I could say that my first thoughts in response to this news were loving and gentle, but they are not.

Reality is that I am an addict and my first thoughts tend to be diseased. My initial reaction is always to feel hurt. Then like a good addict I try to fix myself emotionally. Step one fixing is to blame the other person. "They are not willing to pick-up the phone or a pen; they are setting themselves up to relapse, who needs them." Step two to fixing is to blame myself. "Maybe I was too hard on them or not hard enough, maybe I wasn't available enough, if it wasn't for my job, my wife, and my child I would be a better sponsor." The feeling is that if I can just change myself enough then they will not reject me.

If I allow my blaming thoughts to continue, they will open the door for all of my other defects of character to come pouring out. So I don't act on these thoughts and feelings. I ask my-

self what is the lesson I am supposed to learn from this. A quick Tenth Step usually reveals that the defects of character I am attributing to them are things I need to work on. Addicts are wonderful mirrors for me. Later I can take these defects to my sponsor and together we take them to the steps. Blaming self is a totally ineffective way to avoid punishment that I learned in childhood and its sister defect of "people pleasing" can also be taken through the steps. Having done this Tenth Step, I can thank my Higher Power for more material to work on and return my attention to my former sponsee.

I no longer need to act on these early blaming thoughts. I can come from a place of love and concern. This does not always mean giving them the okey doke. Sometimes after looking at my part in the situation, the loving thing to do might be to tell them what I see is going on. More often it is simpler than that. I just thank them for the time we shared and assure them of my ongoing love and support.

Although I wish my first reaction to getting fired was loving and gentle; I am grateful to NA for giving me the tools to move from the hurt, blame, anger and shame to place of love and respect for myself and my fellow addicts.

C.W., California

The broad perspective

Preparing an NA Way monthly issue often feels like what is happening on the facing page. After all the hair-pulling, perspiring and knife-wielding there's an opportunity to sit down and give thanks, and "It's definitely worth it!"

Our first course this month is "For discussion," on page two. It is the first such publication to result from a recently created procedure. With this procedure we hope to regularly channel local NA community newsletter articles to the wider audience of NA Way subscribers.

Originally titled "A remembered topic for discussion," the piece was gleaned from the *Free Spirit* newsletter, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, with thanks.

When you run across an article you like or that you feel describes insight that might be beneficial to our common welfare, please send a copy in for consideration. Right now the process is to send such articles through the regular review process, and seek any advice from the generating committee.

Part of the rationale for this effort is to, hopefully, add to the general motivation addicts might have for writing. An awareness that newsletters are being systematically scanned for magazine material could be just

that extra push our members need to go from inspiration into action.

WSC Deadlines

Motions to be included in the 1993 *Conference Agenda Report* should be received by the admin team at the WSO no later than December 14, 1992. Conference reports from boards and committees are due by November 15. Budgets and workplans need to be completed by December 5th.

Editorial parameters

The NA Way Magazine Editorial Board will have met (in Cincinnati, Ohio, Oct 30-31) in a first-ever, formal, planning session by the time you read this. Matters for which the magazine board shares responsibility and authority; and between-conference type of decisions the editorial board must singularly make on behalf of the fellowship, will be discussed.

The board is comprised of one member appointed by the WSB (currently Bob M); one elected by the WSC (Greg P); and the managing editor, employed by the WSO (Andy M).

Agreement on the time, place, fiscal responsibility, and boundaries for this discussion have taken months to organize. Each participant has expressed hope for this session as a kind of new beginning.

Among items to be considered and articulated are the process by which the editorial board indicates its decisions regarding each issue's content; and broader range, multi-issue projects and themes.

Though Andy M has resigned as managing editor of the magazine effective in December, a WSO publications staffer will be present to help apprise his successor of the meeting's resolutions.

Home Group

Thanksgiving

MY FIRST THANKSGIVING DINNER FOR THE HOME GROUP! I WANT IT TO BE PERFECT!...I KNOW SOMETHING HIDEOUS IS GOING TO HAPPEN!!



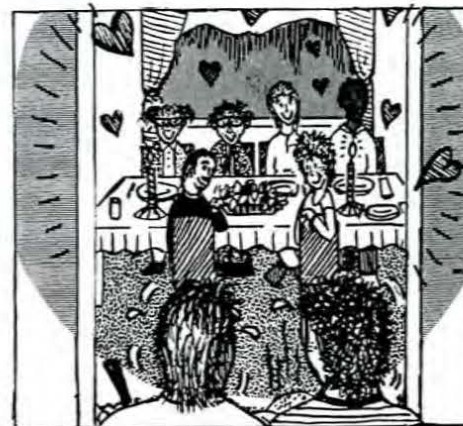
HAVE YOU FINISHED WITH THE SALAD YET, EDDIE?!!



IT'S COMING! DON'T RUSH ME! YOU WANT A FINGER IN THIS SALAD?!!



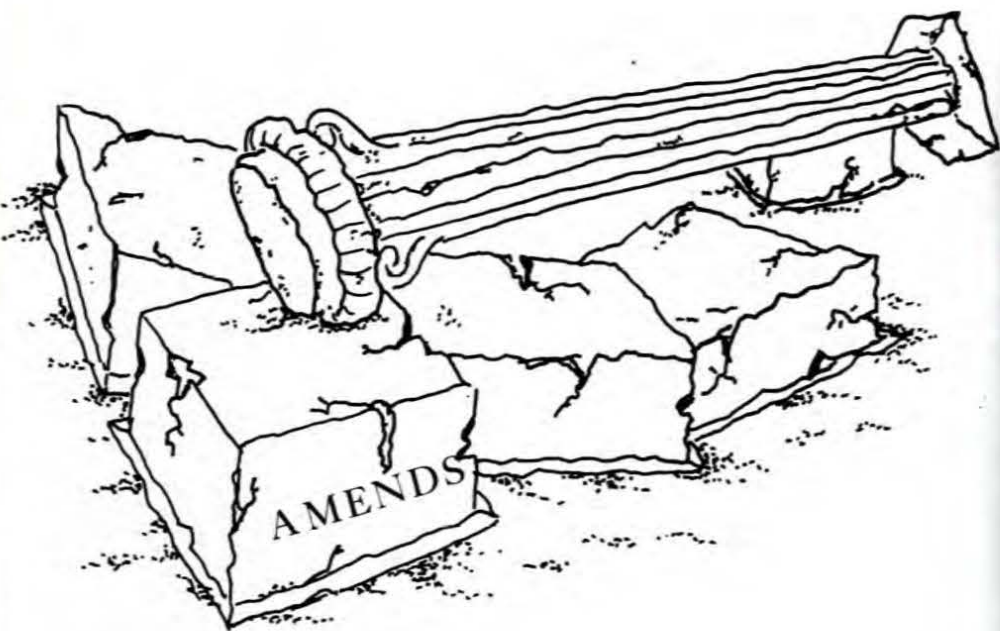
ARGHH!! IS THIS WORTH IT?!!



THERE'S NOTHING I'M MORE THANKFUL FOR THAN THE FRIENDS I'VE FOUND IN NA!



IT'S DEFINITELY WORTH IT! ♥



During the past few years, I have had some incredible experiences with Steps Eight and Nine. I have rarely read or heard anyone sharing about how to make those "difficult" amends, ones to people who are deceased, ones to those who have been out of our lives for a significant amount of time, or those where unspeakable acts have been committed. Through the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, my loving Higher Power, and the Steps, I have been given the opportunity to make amends of these types and the freedom I experience as a result far exceeds my expectations.

The first of these amends occurred some time ago in Colorado. That's where I grew up and experienced most of my struggles with my parents. Without going into great detail about my story, my father and I rarely, if ever, agreed on anything and I lived in a household that I perceived to be lacking in love, affection, or any semblance of nurturing. I grew up confused, frustrated, and angry. Looking back on it now it made perfect sense that when I started to use I found what I believed was the answer to all my problems. A way to feel and act differently, rebel against authority and form friendships, or at least what I thought were friendships, with people as confused and angry as myself.

I will delve into other parts of this convoluted story later, but for now, suffice to say that I continued along this path, eventually got married, had two incredible children brought into this world through the grace of God, and, by 1973, I thought that the resentments, frustrations, and anger were largely behind me. I was living what many would term an idyllic life. My children were my primary reason for living; every day spent with them brought new meaning to the terms love and joy. Even watching my father play with my sons in ways that we were never able to helped the healing process. In January of 1974, all of this ended for me. My parents were driving Chris and Alex, my sons, back to our house, when they had a head-on collision with a tractor trailer driven by someone under the influence. My parents and my younger son died immediately and my older son, Alex died in my arms four hours later. If I had started on my self-destructive pattern of using some years before, it now kicked into high gear as I systematically destroyed anything and anyone in my life. I continued trying to die on a daily basis for nine more years until I found NA.

I came into NA with the resentments, frustrations, anger, confusion, and self-loathing I experienced early on amplified by my active addiction. This without ever experiencing any real solutions. In the last few years, even the drugs I used had turned against me, no longer blocking my feelings. I found that regardless of how much or what I had used,

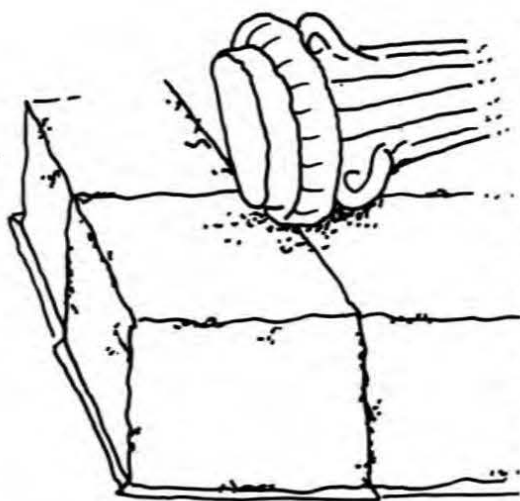
I could no longer feel that which was so attractive to me in the beginning. My first inventory consisted of my pointing, at others as the cause for my actions.

It took me three and a half years in recovery to do a fearless and searching moral inventory of myself. It was then that I realized that I was the cause of many of my problems with my family, and that while my parents may not have lived up to my expectations they did the best they could. As my character defects came into the light of day, many of the same ones I practiced with my parents, I started thinking about ways in which I could make amends to them even though they were no longer around. Many people, including my sponsor told me that the best way I could make amends was to stay clean and continue in my recovery, but that did not answer the growing need I felt deep within to make amends in a more "direct" way to my family.

Through one of my service commitments, I found out that the 1987 fall WSC Quarterly meeting was going to take place in Denver, my former home town. I felt that somehow I was guided by my Higher Power back there and given the opportunity to make my amends. I arrived in Denver two days early scared to death, not knowing how to go about this process. Due to various reasons, my sponsor and I went our separate ways some weeks before this trip, so there I was, scared, lonely, not knowing what to do. I attended a couple of local meetings

and shared about my fears and my resolve to follow through. Many members came up to me after the meetings, offering their presence if I wanted their help in dealing with my upcoming visit to my families' graves. While I was moved by their support, I eventually decided to do it on my own—something which, in retrospect, I do not recommend to anyone.

I had not attended the funeral thirteen years before and had never gone to their graves previously. The night before, I wrote a letter to my father and mother but when it came to my sons, I was once again overcome with grief and could not write anything. The day was overcast as was I when I approached their graves. I sank to my knees and started to read my letter and found that I could not continue. Tears washed over my face, as the years of pent-up feelings came out in a rush. I stayed there for about four hours.



Instead of reading my letters, I talked with my family like I have never talked with them when they were alive. I told my parents how much I had loved them and how heartily sorry I was for the grief I had caused them. I told my children that even though they were no longer on the face of the earth, they were in my heart and that they would always be safe there. That's when the miracle occurred. I realized that not only were my children in my heart, but my parents were there as well, in fact I had the distinct feeling that they were watching over me and were glad that I had finally taken this step. I was enveloped in a love that I had never experienced before. I don't know whether it was parents, my Higher Power, or something else that loved me liked that, but it didn't matter; I started to feel the freedom from guilt and shame our literature talks about. This was, however, only the first of such experiences.

The next, chronologically speaking, occurred some two and a half years later. Once again through a service commitment, I ended up in Arlington, Virginia. During the previous year, I had started to deal with some of my experiences in Vietnam during the late sixties. This was a topic I rarely said very much about, except to say that it was during this time I started to really use and learned how to hate completely. For years, my memories would surface in my dreams causing unbearable nightmares of violence, death, and utter futility. I would not

talk about it very much, even to my sponsor. It was a topic that I felt I was not ready to write about in a fearless and searching way. I was still fearful of the possible results, not the least of which would be a Fifth Step, where I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt I would be even more condemned than I already felt. My dealing with the issue, before Arlington, really consisted of making extremely vague statements about the fact that some of my problems with trust and intimacy were related to these experiences.

The second day I was in Arlington, once again at a WSC Quarterly, some friends who were also present stated that they were going to go to the Vietnam Memorial the following morning and that I was going with them. I immediately became scared, but was not really willing to let them see how much. We set out early the next morning on one of the most momentous journeys of my recovery. As we approached the monument, I started to feel like I was back in 'Nam again. The heat, the smells, everything seemed to be there. My knees started shaking and I had a harder and harder time walking as memories flooded through me and time slipped away. Apparently I was not the only one as one of my friends started to lean on me and we could only walk forward leaning on each other for support. As the black walls approached, I could swear that I began to hear whispering. I did not consciously realize that I was constantly praying to my Higher Power for help and

support and receiving it through my companions' strength and compassion. We stayed at the wall for about a half an hour and left, with me feeling that my entire life had changed in that short span of time. After I got back home, I knew that the time had come for me to work the steps around this part of my life.

My Third Step seemed to have a deeper meaning this time around—as it did each time I did an inventory—and I went forward with my inventory. I wrote as much as I could, and while I was still fearful, I shared it with my sponsor. Instead of judging me, when I broke down, he comforted me and helped me to feel human once again. For the next seven months I struggled with Steps Six and Seven, and realized that there were a number of amends I needed to make. These included some of my friends who died in 'Nam, the fifty thousand plus listed on the wall, and the people of Vietnam itself. These letters were extremely hard to write, and I don't need to go into details about their content, but I also realized that these letters were not enough.

While I was able to write these letters and thus begin to make amends, I truly believe that the most meaningful amends I can make is to be of service to humanity. There is no way I can make up for what I have done in this area, regardless of how sorry I truly am or what I write, I must do two things: first, with the help of my Higher Power, not allow those experiences to control all my waking

moments through my actions, and second be of service. I choose to do this through NA as well as other opportunities that are afforded me.

The final area I would like to share about is making amends to someone who is no longer in my life—not dead or in an unreachable place, but removed by their own decision as a result of my actions. Such a person is my ex-wife. We got married for all the wrong reasons and stayed married for the wrong reasons as well—our two sons. When they died, I could no longer see any reason for us to be together. Besides all the confusion, anger, resentment, and rage I felt at God, the world, everybody, I felt nothing (or so I thought) towards my wife. Being the coward I was, however, I did not talk to her about it, instead I set out to ensure that she would leave me, thereby making me feel like I have been abandoned again. Ahhh, the disease was really working its magic. Anyway, I did everything within my power, such as it was, to humiliate, embarrass, infuriate, and alienate her. Of course, I succeeded. Six months later she divorced me and moved back home.

Shortly after I got into recovery and did my first Fourth Step, I realized that I probably needed to make some amends to her. I found out where she was living and, with my hot nine months, I called her. The conversation lasted less than five minutes. I said that I was sorry, but I was in recovery now and could she ever forgive me. She told me that

she hoped I rot in hell and hung up. I was crushed, but I couldn't see that this fed into my plan of the moment to be a victim again. Some years later, after my second inventory, I began to see the extent of my damage and wrote a lengthy letter, detailing what was going through me back when our kids died, what happened since then, and what I was doing currently. I mailed it off, hoping for a reply, but knowing that even if one did not come, it was the best I could do for the moment.

Well, nothing happened. Wouldn't you know it though, this past year, once again through NA, I would find myself in Montreal, her home town. For about a month before, I wrote and gained a better understanding of the effects of my actions on her, and tried to ready myself for a face-to-face encounter. I attempted a number of times to contact her during the week before my trip to let her know that I would be there, to no avail. During the first three days in Montreal, I still tried but could not reach her until my last full day there.

To say she was surprised to hear from me would be a gross understatement—shocked is more like it. However, she agreed to meet me in a completely neutral location (restaurant) that afternoon. Once again my knees were shaking, and I was completely relying on the God of my understanding for help.

We met and, for the first two hours, I could not get a word in edgewise. In her words I was nothing but

a sack of this and a sack of that. I realized though that I needed to hear everything she had to say, including how my actions made her feel, and the result of those actions on her life for the next few years. She described in some detail her agony, frustration, self-loathing, and impotent rage towards me and the extreme difficulty she had in trusting and becoming intimate with other men for the next five years. All I could do was sit there and listen to her as she unloaded all those years' pain.

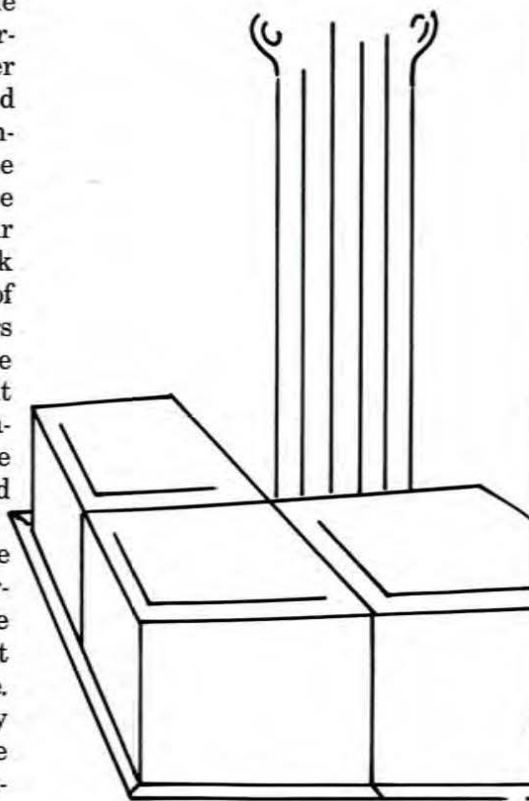
Afterward when that part was done, I told her of my thoughts during the last few years, and the actions I've had to take to become the person I am. I told her of discovering, through NA, a Higher Power that has fulfilled my every need and helped me to start becoming an entirely different person than the one she had known. I tried to put nine years of recovery into a half hour soliloquy. When I started to talk about truly accepting the deaths of our sons, we both broke down, tears streaming down our faces, as we each realized what that loss meant to each other. I believe that a miracle occurred at that point, as we were able to share on a level we had never been able to previously.

In parting, she said that, while she is still not sure whether she can forgive me, she asked me to never leave recovery behind, lest I return to that monster she had learned to hate. Once again, to make a long story short, God and NA helped me through one of the most difficult ex-

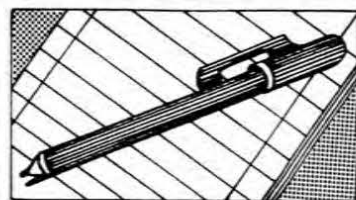
periences of my life. While she is not in my life, I believe that I can finally begin to lay this one to rest. I pray on a daily basis that I never again have to do the types of things that require such amends. I know, however, that it is only the beginning, as I have to work on amending my behavior on a daily basis.

The freedom resulting from these amends is absolutely overwhelming. Thank you *NA Way Magazine* for allowing me to share these experiences.

S.L., California



Viewpoint



NA WAY— 10 years

(Note: We asked for ideas and information to include in the ten-year birthday celebration of The NA Way Magazine. The following article came in response to that request, but was not received in time for the October issue.)

In 1981 several members of the NA World Literature Committee requested permission from the World Service Conference to develop a monthly newsletter/magazine for all of Narcotics Anonymous. We were told that NA already had a magazine; had we seen the *Voice*? The *Voice of NA*, published irregularly by WSO, was part of what had inspired us. Many of us had purchased subscriptions only to receive one or two irregular issues with no explanation and no opportunity to help. We wanted a dependable, substantial, meaningful magazine/newsletter for NA as a whole. And we were told that this was impossible.

This was a time for us of learning to be of real service: the Twelve Traditions were illustrated to us. The WSC is supposed to act upon the direction of Narcotics Anonymous so we asked Narcotics Anonymous. We submitted a simple motion to what then was the *Conference Agenda Report*, that "the WSC form a subcommittee to administer the publishing of a monthly magazine on recovery from addiction the NA Way."

I believe that this motion was considered by the fellowship strictly on its own merits, without prejudice. At WSC 82' an RSR, whose local fellowship strongly favored the motion, successfully negotiated the parliamentary barriers that would have, in my opinion, prevented the consideration of the motion, and it came to the floor for a vote.

The motion passed, overwhelmingly. We were elated. Narcotics Anonymous wanted its magazine and the WSC had agreed to it. Perhaps the system really did work. I was elected to chair the new WSC subcommittee; three members who wanted this magazine for NA and who had newsletter and literature committee experience were elected to co-chair. . . our commitment would be tried, our resolve would be tested.

I think simple logic is a rare commodity in this, an age of emotional-

ism in NA service. Real service to NA is doing the right thing for the right reasons.

Many trusted servants seem to question their actions and tend to evaluate themselves according to their popularity and the popularity of their ideas and actions. I think this tendency is very negative. Spiritual principles are not necessarily popular and actions based on spiritual principles are often very unpopular. Even in a spiritual fellowship. I think the best superficial evaluation of actions of trusted servants is that "the more popular the action, the less spiritual it is."

At the birth of the magazine we divided the responsibilities and "networked" between members we knew were interested. People became excited and we soon had enough material for our first issue. It was well produced with quality work and materials. The articles were crisp and clear; sharing recovery from addiction, with style. It came out on schedule, at the world convention in Milwaukee, as the September 1982 issue. Many members bought individual copies and took subscriptions. Everyone who talked to us seemed to like it.

Then a series of events nearly stopped our effort altogether. In fairly rapid succession the BOT (while stating support for our work) decided that we shouldn't/couldn't sell magazines and subscriptions and that we (non-specifically) violated the traditions and that our committee was "null and void;" the co-chairperson in charge of production and distribution disappeared from the committee with

our subscription list, etc.; and the third co-chairperson became, for whatever reason, too distant to effectively communicate.

We could easily have given up at this point but we did not. We took a deeply introspective look at ourselves and the NA Way. We felt there was no violation of any tradition, and, rather, that our efforts enhanced the spirit and letter of all Twelve Traditions. Where the trustees were coming from truly eluded us, so we continued to do what we felt was the right thing for the right reason. We were convinced that the NA Way had a valid mission in our fellowship: to expand, clarify, and personalize concepts expressed in our Basic Text, and learned during our literature movement; to clearly share recovery from addiction while emphasizing the uncompromising purity of the spiritual principles that set us free from addiction. . . to give Narcotics Anonymous a dependable, substantial, respectable vehicle to define itself and mature.

That our continued effort was the right thing to do is evidenced by the fact that two IPs came from the very next issue.

Against all odds, but with what seemed the full support of the fellowship, we continued to seek quality without compromise. The Jan 83' through May 83' issues set a standard of quality in written expression and presentation we feel is unparalleled in service to NA. Perhaps our greatest joy in NA service was the fellowship acceptance and pleasure with the NA Way.

J.M., Ohio

Empathy

I've just finished reading "Don't Let Me Go" in the May 1992 issue, written by an addict who is allergic to cigarette smoke and feels alienated from her groups.

I suffer from asthma, which has become much worse since I've been recovering, about eight and one-half years. About three years ago I had to get honest with myself and recognize that the smoke I came in contact with in meetings was seriously exacerbating this condition. I could avoid smoke in most the other areas of my life. What a dilemma!

I'm one of those people who get very squirrely after about three days without a meeting and I wasn't willing to put up with my own insanity or risk using again.

Not attending meetings and isolating myself from recovering people, smokers or nonsmokers, was not an option for me. Very simply, I will become an active addict if I do that.

When I first started my recovery, I was frequently the only nonsmoker. Now there are several well attended nonsmoking meetings held where I live. Smokers are welcome, they just take a break outside.

No matter what the drug, the addict—any addict is powerless over his compulsion to use and only a Power greater than himself can relieve

him of that compulsion. Today in my recovery, I strive to have compassion for the nicotine addict who is suffering. What drug I happened to choose, or not to choose, does not make me any better or any worse than any one else. To the writer of "Don't Let Me Go," I say: Do whatever it takes, but do it.

M.Y., Indiana

Urging acceptance

I'm writing in response to the June 1992 NA Way article entitled "One Disease—One Program." The author's theme was that NA is the only place recovering addicts should seek help. "I hope I never have to tell somebody to go elsewhere because we don't have it all in NA" she said, "We can get everything we need from NA." She said she would "feel like a traitor" if she participated in other programs, because "if we all went somewhere else where would NA be?"

The author's intense feeling of loyalty toward NA comes through loud and clear. I am concerned, however, about the negative impact such thinking may have on people who are trying to recover from addiction. September 19, 1992 will mark my 14th year of continuous clean time. Based on my recovery experience, I'd like to offer a different point of view from that expressed in

"One Disease—One Program."

As a recovering addict, my number one priority is abstaining from addictive drugs. I also have a few other major priorities. Examples include physical health, spiritual growth, career success, social responsibility, and family relationships. In pursuing these priorities, I have learned that Narcotics Anonymous does not provide everything I need. That's not a put-down of NA, it's just reality. I go "somewhere else" for many needs, including food, shelter, health care, and employment. To enhance my spiritual life, I am active in a religious congregation. For my body, I participate in fitness organizations. For my mind, I go to theater and museums. To learn, I attend educational programs. To meet my responsibilities as a citizen, I am active in political organizations and I volunteer at a shelter for homeless people.

The list of places other than NA that help me meet needs in my life would be a very long list. The fact that I go "somewhere else" to meet various needs does not hurt NA unity nor does it make me a traitor to NA. It simply makes me a real person living in the real world. NA is a part of my life, but not my whole life. The NA program is not a place to hide from the world.

A recovering addict's individual decision to go "somewhere else" in order to address needs in his or her life should be welcomed and supported. Neither NA unity nor anyone's recovery are threatened by open-mindedness.

Recovery from addiction is a very personal journey. No two addicts have

exactly the same background or set of problems, struggles, circumstances and needs. Part of the magic of NA comes from the support and dignity we can offer each other as we travel our journeys. We have an opportunity in recovery to emerge from tortured, drugged existences and to realize better lives. It's not easy to do. Recovery takes courage, persistence, work and the willingness to endure anguish. If we hang in there and are lucky enough to find the help and support we need, it is possible to stay clean for the long term and to find some tremendous rewards. It is possible to pursue a few dreams, build some relationships and to do something good in the world. Each addict should feel complete freedom to participate in, attend, read, do or think anything and everything that helps them to succeed in establishing the drug-free life they seek.

W.L., New Jersey

Defining a "purist"

Through the course of my recovery, so far, I have found that the awareness and growth I have gained came only through pain, anguish, and the realization that I am not always right. Most recently, I have experienced both anguish and joy from some of the feelings I had about keeping NA "pure."

I had heard the phrase "NA purist," and felt that this was an accurate way of describing the views I had. This view included the following:

1) Persons at NA meeting only identify themselves as addicts.

2) It is wrong for others to pawn off their ideas and values that deal with their Higher Power, this includes using the Lord's Prayer, using the name of their Higher Power, or quoting from their religion's text, whatever that may be.

3) Only our Basic Text be used at meetings, or quoted from as opposed to other fellowships' materials; only approved NA literature, please!

4) No other fellowships being endorsed at our meetings, during our meetings, or even believing that NA hasn't got it "all."

Other issues I really freaked out about were mostly personality issues. I would judge those who refused to carry the message to newcomers, or that would deliberately avoid newcomers. I would judge those who avoided trusted servants positions, especially when their home group was in dire need of someone to just open it and get the meeting started. I judged those who whined constantly and never seemed to want to work an honest program, or those who were "too clean" to associate with other addicts, especially those at meetings!

After thought on these issues, lots of intensive writing, several phone calls to my sponsor and constant contact with the Higher Power of my understanding, I had a spiritual awakening and got really humble. I then took a serious look at what a true NA purist would be like. In other

words, a perfect recovering addict.

Here's what I came up with: a true NA "purist" would be very willing to be very open-minded to everything. Everything! From the newcomer cross-addicted-alcoholic, to the whining old-timer, to the religion-freak, to one who judges those who judge others, to any given other person, place, or thing, they could be very open-minded, finding something in everything that they could learn from.

An NA purist would also be deeper-than-gut-level honest, searching deep within for the defects and the growth that bring about a stronger recovery. Quite possibly, he or she might be too damn honest for any of us to want to be near, especially when we are being secretive and in denial about our pain.

Purists would also be willing to go to all the lengths necessary. Willing to share from their hearts, as their experiences just might help someone else to stay clean one extra day. Willing to welcome a newcomer with a big hug, even if they smell bad or are wearing out-of-date fashions that don't match. Willing to go to meetings regularly, not just when reality is too hard to handle, but when they are doing okay, you know, maintenance. Willing to get a sponsor, of the same sex, and use that sponsor, (phone calls on a regular basis and taking that sponsor's suggestions, reading and writing included!) Willing to be a sponsor, willing to help out their home groups, willing to carry the message of Narcotics Anonymous, not another fellowship's message. Willingness to become involved in service

work and willing to live the program on a daily basis. Willingness, period.

Humility is another practice that NA purists would have plenty of in their lives. Getting humble about their shortcomings, both past and present and not being selective about which would be softer on their pride. Humble in situations that are part of life on life's terms, realizing that life, too, is a power greater than ourselves. Humble enough to realize, also, that they are not always right. Humble enough to see that there really is a power greater than ourselves. Humble, period.

Last, but not least, NA purists would have ultimate acceptance toward all people, places, things and situations. From the person who identifies themselves differently, to the place where getting their cars rear-ended, to the dog do-doing on the rug, to the flat tire on the way to a meeting. Full and total acceptance of everything, and having the humility and willingness to acknowledge it. Accepting instead of blaming, as blame leads to acceptance sooner or later anyway.

Now, after defining the NA purist, I see how I really was not putting these principles in my life. I had to come to the meetings to learn about all of the values and ideals that make recovery possible, and I didn't get them in one day! I had to see that the drugs really did affect my whole life.

All of the puritanical things that I thought were NA were really just my distorted conception and my way of wanting to control others. I still hold to my views about how our identification should be, that our meetings

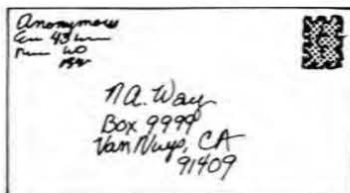
should only use NA approved literature (quotations, too), and that the Higher Power of your understanding need not be mentioned by the name you give it at meetings. But I don't have to shove it down your throat, I just have to be patient and wait—you'll get it, they'll get it—really! All the rest of the stuff, I just need to look at and learn from for myself. I know that there was someone who must have been very patient waiting for me to "get it" (actually I know of at least two.) This patience is what it is all about!

When I first got clean, I identified myself as a "cross-addicted-alcoholic," I claimed to be clean "and sober," and I occasionally mentioned "sobriety." I did some dictionary work and looked up these words: "clean, sober, recovery, addiction, alcoholism, God and cross-addiction," (which was unfindable). After this, and for the last two years, I have come to believe in the Higher Power of my understanding, that I am an addict with the disease of addiction and that I am clean and free to enjoy a life in recovery the only way I know, The NA Way.

A loving member of NA.

R.M., Michigan

From our readers



Been there

I am not a professional writer, just a very happy spirit learning to be a human adult woman in recovery.

At 15 I was diagnosed schizophrenic. Later, at 24, I was rediagnosed as a manic-depressive. In the 1970's, I think, schizophrenia was the token disease; in the 1980's it was manic-depression, and this decade: addiction. So I guess I have stayed with the times in the high society of mental health diagnosis. I went through all the treatments of the times . . . shock treatment and different forms of the medications and therapies. You know. . . lock up, don't tell, and "she's at school or on vacation," although everyone knew different. My "vacations" consisted of detoxing from both street and prescription drugs, or from hospitalization to help me through my psychoses.

During this realm of history, you never told you were an addict and alcoholism was social. The consequences were law intervention, to "get who did this to you" or lock up, probably in better conditions than I was "vacationing" in.

I had exhausted most avenues of support in my 17 years of active suicide, medicating away the pain and horror I experienced in my life style.

I am an incest survivor. I have over two years off of active bulimia. I do

not play the lottery or gamble. I have just over one year clean from drugs. I no longer sell what God gave me to live in, or use it to change the way I feel. And what is most beautiful to me is that I no longer rant and rave like an animal.

Today I am getting all my recovery and treatment from chemicals in NA. My primary problem is *me* and my chemical addiction must stay in remission for me to have me; to even begin to think of asking a Higher Power to help with the rest of me.

So tell me if a spiritual program can give "me to me" and let me learn how to be human? And if psychiatry is the doctorate of the spirit and psychology is the study of the spirit—why aren't mental people treated with a spiritual program, i.e., Twelve Steps/Twelve Traditions? Or even as humans, sometimes at all? If you abuse an animal he will be mean. If you befriend an animal he will protect you. If you treat humans like animals, without knowing better, they will act like animals. They are not animals, never were and never will be! I am a spirit experiencing the freedom of recovery trying to learn how to be human.

I heard my story for the first time three months ago, after seeking recovery for over four years. Today I know I am not the craziest woman that

walks the earth, just someone learning to have fun, love life, and live life on life's terms. Sometimes it is hard, for I am 30, and learning how not to be a hyperactive kid. I think that is rather funny and sometimes rather difficult.

I would really like to see this in print and see if my opinions are justifiable and if there are more social psychos out there. It is hard to talk about it in public, most people immediately start talking about their medications. I take no medications and have no doctor today. I get everything I need from the Twelve Steps/Twelve Traditions, my sponsor, my Higher Power and life. It is difficult sometimes, for integration is hard. Some things you can never talk about in public for 98 percent of the population cannot relate.

I have found that Vietnam vets in recovery seem to relate the best. They understand when I say "there." There. You know they are "there" in the boxes, either fighting or broken in their spiritual imprisonment."

M. M. W., Texas

On the Twelfth Step

"Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps," an understatement to say the least. These steps have shaken my world. Released me from the wreckage of the past. They have shown me how to live right today and leave tomorrow in the hands of the God.

"We tried to carry this message to addicts." As the result of the first part of this step I can share it with other people. On the phone, in meetings, through sponsorship. I am human, I

make mistakes. I can share my struggles, identify with others and feel their pain. I can let them know there is hope. There is life without using.

"And practice these principles in all our affairs." Step One—Each day I don't use. Step Two—Each day I pray in the morning and at night. Step Three—Each day I try to do as my God would want. Step Four and Five—Having worked these steps fearlessly I now maintain my recovery each day through my Tenth and Eleventh Step. Step Six—Each day I recognize and allow God to remove my defects. Step Seven—Each day I pray that God remove my shortcomings. Step Eight and Nine—Having made the list and amended where possible, I allow God to reveal new situations for me to stay willing and promptly admit it. Step Ten—Each day I take time to look at my day, to write about the good and the things I need to improve on; the people I have wronged and what I must do to make it right and stay clean. Step Eleven—Each day as I practice my Second Step I pray only for the knowledge of his will, not for things. I clear my mind with thoughts of comfort, of family, fellowship and God.

J.L., Maryland

Love, gratitude and miracles

I have the privilege and the honor of being the panel coordinator for a very special H&I meeting. It is in a head-trauma unit. All those that come to the meeting are in various levels of coma.

When most people think of "coma" they think of someone who is unconscious, unresponsive, lying in a bed

hooked up to machines. That is a "level-one" coma. Most of the people who have been in a level-one coma will come out of that initial state and move up. There are ten coma states. Level-ten is considered the highest functioning. All those that attend our H&I meeting are in functioning levels. All those that attend this meeting have drug related injuries.

Every time I chair I face many things that I never knew could happen when I was using. Even in recovery I have been sheltered from these realities. I see all those things I never thought for one second could happen to me. When I'm at the meeting I see and hear first hand what can happen if I use again. Most of the time I have gratitude and sadness at the same time.

At this H&I meeting I have met those who have been in car accidents and other kinds of accidents. Those who out of total desperation and feeling there is no other way to stop using, pulled the trigger on a gun! Those who were shot when a drug deal went bad. Those who were "beaten to death" for the drugs or cash they had, or by another addict in a drug induced state. Then there are those like B.

B had been clean for almost a year, then a major disappointment came into his life. Like many of us he wasn't sure how to deal with the hurt and the disappointment. So B did what he thought was the only option at the time. He used. This simple act changed B's life.

He overdosed. He was comatose and in level-one. He can not walk. He can not see. He can not feed himself. Does our Basic Text contain enough hope

for someone like B? His sponsor thought so. I think he totally believed that a Higher Power could get through to B. So he would visit B, and read to him from the text.

B's sponsor started talking to other members about getting an H&I meeting into the facility. The doors of service were closed many times. The very idea of doing an H&I meeting for those in coma! However, God is always in charge and usually gets what He wants. This time, I think, God used the services of the World Service Conference Additional Needs Committee. In May of 1991 the first meeting was successfully conducted. Even with the various types and severities of head trauma, all those in attendance could relate to the topic. They all participated in the meeting, except for B, who sat quietly to one side of the room. He never spoke. This is the way that the meeting went on every other week. Each time B was brought to the meeting. Each time he sat in silence. At about the fourth meeting we made a circle and started the closing prayer. There was this voice saying the words to the prayer. A voice we had not heard before. It was the voice of B. Tears still come to my eyes when I remember the night B spoke. It was the spark of hope that B needed.

After a year this meeting is successful. As far as we know it is the first H&I meeting of this type in NA. It remains a cooperative effort between H&I and Additional Needs.

What happens when these members go home? How many meetings are wheelchair accessible? How do they get to the meetings? Even for H&I we have had to face obstacles.

For instance there are suggested IP's to take into H&I meetings but only a few of these are in large print. Those that can read really need the large print materials. Most of these members are from outside our region. They come from all over the country. Do we just give them a phoneline number and pray that it is a right number and the person on the other end of the phone will understand?

They are separated from family, friends and loved ones. For some we are the only "light in the tunnel" that they have. They voice fears of living on the outside. Of course they have the same obstacles that every newcomer has, feeling different and asking for help.

Out of all my service experiences this H&I meeting has been the most rewarding for me personally. Every time I walk into this meeting I get to stare into the faces of God's miracles at work.

With deep appreciation and gratitude, respectfully submitted by,

D.J., Pennsylvania

Response

Hello, to the writer of "Don't let me go," (printed in May '92). So much of your story is like mine. I'm five-and-a-half years clean, go to school, work, do service, and have only just remembered incest and started sharing about it. I'm plump too (can't come to terms with that "f" word!).

There are some dissimilarities, too; I gave up caffeine and sugar rather than nicotine (hypoglycemia emerged a few years ago).

I can talk in glowing terms of my area. Most of our meetings are non-

smoking (I'm a smoker; I can cope.) So is our ASC, RSC and our area convention is now, too. Our convention registrations are never more than twenty dollars and we billet out-of-towners. . . But this is of no help to you. I live in Australia and I can tell that you live in the states! You're going to school, there's no way you can move. You don't have to tell me!

The first non-smoking meeting we had didn't get much support. But then a lot of the venues (the government buildings) became non-smoking, and all us smokers had either to come to terms with it, or somehow find a lot more money for venues. (We are not a wealthy fellowship-most of our members spend more time on an internal healing.) We hadn't noticed what we were missing, not having our smoke-allergic members participate in service. Now it's about half-and-half, smokers to non-smokers, in service, and we are seeing the talent we were depriving ourselves of and it's considerable.

Please don't despair; I hear you. Try starting a meeting with other non-smokers. Send a rep to your ASC when the group is strong enough. Petition for non-smoking service meetings. Use the streak of stubbornness I can hear in your sharing—it's God-given—because it may take years. Remember you are not alone, you are loved.

R.R., Australia

Comin' up



CALIFORNIA: Nov. 20-22, 1992; 6th Annual Western States Public Information Learning Days; "The Connecting Link"; info (714) 776-0996 or (714) 449-0950

2) Jan. 21-24, 1993; 1st Central California Regional Convention; Red Lion Inn, Santa Barbara; info (805) 487-1768 or (805) 486-1950; Convention, PO Box 1534, Ventura, CA 93002

FLORIDA: Nov. 12-15, 1992; 11th Serenity in the Sun; Ramada Hotel Resort, 603 Clearwater Park Road, West Palm Beach, FL 33401; info (407) 844-7726 or (407) 686-6760; Palm Coast ASC, PO Box 3151, West Palm Beach, FL 33402

2) Jan. 22-24, 1993; 4th Annual Palm Coast Spiritual Retreat; "The Spirit Soars"; Gold Coast Christian Camp, Palm Beach County, FL; info (407) 743-4579; Spiritual Retreat, 1605 US 1 Apt A-403, Jupiter, FL 33477

ILLINOIS: Feb. 26-28, 1993; 5th Annual Chicagoland Convention; "Fellowship Faith & Freedom"; Hyatt Regency, 151 E Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60611; rsvn.s (312) 565-1234; info (708) 848-2211; Convention, PO Box 872, Oak Park, IL 60302

INDIANA: Nov. 14, 1992; Indiana Multi-Regional H&I Awareness Day; Donner Center, Donner Park, Columbus; phoneline (812) 331-3974

KENTUCKY: Jan. 15-17, 1993; LACNA III; Holiday Inn South-Airport, 3317 Fern Valley Road, Louisville, KY 40213; rsvn.s (800) 465-4329; LACNA III, PO BOX 2343, LOUISVILLE, KY 40201

MASSACHUSETTS: Jan. 8-10, 1993; 1st Boston Area Convention; Westin Hotel, Copley Place, Boston, MA; rsvn.s (800) 228-3000; info (617) 424-0958

MISSISSIPPI: Nov. 13-15, 1992; Surrender by the Seashore Gulfcoast Area; Biloxi, MS; Speakers and Workshops interpreted in ASL; info (601) 863-6285 or (601) 868-8595

OHIO: Dec. 31, 1992; New Year's Eve Dance; Ohio National Guard Armory, 2170 Howie Road, Columbus, OH; info (614) 252-1700

2) Jan. 1-3, 1993; Central Ohio Area Convention IV; "Point of Freedom-Living the Dream"; Radisson Hotel Columbus North, Columbus, OH; rsvn.s (800) 333-3333; info (614) 297-7472 or (614) 252-1700; COACNA IV, PO BOX 10323, Columbus, OH 43201-7323

OREGON: Nov. 13-15, 1992; 15th Pacific Northwest Convention; info (503) 344-6040; EASC, PO Box 262, Eugene, OR 97440

PENNSYLVANIA: Nov. 20-22, 1992; Tri-State Regional Convention; Pittsburgh Hilton; rsvn.s (800) Hiltons; info (412) 223-9489

SOUTH CAROLINA: Jan. 29-31, 1993; 13th Annual Area Convention; Holiday Inn, 4295 Augusta Road, Greenville, SC 29605

TENNESSEE: Nov. 25-29, 1992; Volunteer Regional Convention; Memphis Marriott Hotel, Memphis, TN; info (901) 323-7783; rsvn.s (800) 228-9290; VRCNA X, PO Box 11107, Memphis, TN 38111-0107

TEXAS: Feb. 26-28, 1993; 9th Annual Texas Area Convention; "Breaking the Chains to be Free in '93"; Best Western Northgate, I-30 & Stateline, Texarkana, TX; rsvn.s (903) 793-6565; info (903) 832-6257; TACNA IX, Route 15 box 113, Texarkana, TX 75501

2) Apr. 9-11, 1993; LSRCNA VIII; Hyatt-Regency, Town Lake, Austin; if you wish to speak at meetings or workshops write by November 30, 1992; Two years clean time requirement for workshops, five years for main speakers; Programming LSRCNA VIII, PO Box 19444, Austin, TX 78760

VIRGINIA: Jan. 8-10, 1993; 11th AVCNA "The Journey Continues"; Hyatt Richmond, Richmond, VA; rsvn.s (804) 285-1234; info (804) 756-8303; XI AVCNA, PO Box 15664, Richmond, VA 23227-5664

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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.

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What is Narcotics Anonymous?

NA is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only one requirement for membership, the desire to stop using. We suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that they work.



*My Gratitude speaks
when I care
and when I share with others
the NA way*