

SUGGEST!

A
Home Group
Anthology

OH
JOY...
A MARDI
GRAS
OF ME.



SLUGGFEST



WSO, Inc.
Van Nuys, CA 91409 USA

"Home Group" development began in mid-1988 when NA Way editors started looking for ways to make the magazine's contents more interesting and varied. They combed their archives of local newsletters from around the world and examined the various comic strips already being published, borrowing the story lines and characters they liked and embellishing as they went. By the time they'd finished, they had seven characters and a year's worth of "Home Group" strips.

All in all, 1989 was a very funny year for the NA Way. Not only did Slugg make his first appearance, but a half-dozen prose humorists surfaced in the pages of the NA Fellowship's international journal. Comic strips combined with stories like "Oldtimer's Disease" and "Computerized Recovery Instrumentation" to produce strong reactions, both positive and negative.

"Our subcommittee is deeply concerned with an article," an editorial letter read. "It is the opinion of this subcommittee, after two hours of discussion, that this article...is a slap in the face of recovery."

On the pro side of the humor debate, another reader wrote that "when someone talks or writes in a humorous vein about" the circumstances addicts commonly encounter in recovery, "I can't help but laugh at myself. In my program, that's right up there in importance with calling my sponsor and working with newcomers."

"I am saddened by the way many addicts pick apart and analyze almost everything that is printed," wrote another NA Way reader. "It seems to me that too many addicts take too many things too seriously."

Even given this kind of support, the NA Way staff grew progressively more anxious about humor pieces in general and the "Home Group" comic series in particular. In December 1989 the acting editor of the magazine announced the strip's suspension.

The "Home Group," however, would not die. In its short eleven-month life, the comic strip seemed to have squarely hit the funny bone of many an NA Way reader, building a large and loyal following. It wasn't long before numerous fan letters started arriving in the magazine's editorial offices, all containing variations on the same simple theme: "Bring back Slugg." Finally in the July 1990 issue of the NA Way, the "Home Group" strip returned to the pages of our fellowship's magazine, where it has appeared almost every month ever since.

All told, there have been ninety-one "Home Group" strips produced to date, including favorites like "The Anal Retentive GSR," Denilah's divine encounter with a kiwi fruit ("Green is, like, a God color"), "Slugg's Bonfire of Lust," Marge and Eddie's "First Dance," and "Jake's Dream." Eighty-five strips were published in the NA Way Magazine between January 1989 and October 1996. Four strips appeared only in one of the three annual "Home Group" calendars marketed in 1993-94, 1995, and 1996. And two strips (of very questionable taste) have gone unpublished—until now! You'll find them (if you dare) at the end of the section on "Relationships," on the last two pages of this book.

In addition to the "Home Group" calendar, NA Way editors also marketed a coffee cup drawn from the strip. The mug, featuring Slugg's portrait on one side (enough to put ordinary addicts off their breakfasts, one might think, but a popular seller nonetheless) and the words "Slugg Mugg" on the other, was initially manufactured in very limited quantities. First offered for sale in the February 1993 WSO Newsline, it was marketed at a couple of major conventions that winter with mixed results. More than one convention-goer simply didn't recognize Slugg as a comic-strip character from the NA Way Magazine and wondered why a coffee cup with a picture of an ugly white guy was being sold at their fellowship event. Mug sales grew stronger after the World Service Conference that April, when a sixteen-month 1993-94 "Home Group" calendar was added to the NA Way merchandise inventory.

What's the key to the "Home Group's" success? Well, probably the same as the key to your home group's success—and that, as far as we can tell, is what has made the "Home Group" comic strip such a hit in our fellowship. The joys that motivate us, the challenges that strengthen us, the doubts that plague us, the questions that puzzle us, the epiphanies of insight that enlighten us, the love that unifies us, the odd twists and turns of life and recovery in Narcotics Anonymous—these are the typical cues for comedy in the "Home Group," the NA Way's long-running comic strip.

“Home Group” creative duo share a few personal impressions

We asked two of the NA members who produced the “Home Group” to share a few of their thoughts on the continuing development of the *NA Way* comic strip as it commemorated its fifth anniversary. Partly in the interests of anonymity, partly for sport, we’ll identify the two simply as XX and XY.

XX: It seems like a lifetime ago, yet it could have been yesterday. I sat at a table at a recovery house, maybe five months clean. I had very little sense of who I was or what I wanted. I was just beginning to catch a hint of what self-worth was about.

The one thing I knew was that I could do art and do it well. Someone approached me and asked me to do a design for our regional convention. I was thrilled and flattered. My design stank and wasn’t used, but I remember realizing then that my dream was to do art for the fellowship someday. Sometimes you get what you ask for.

Here it is seven years later¹ and I have had the privilege of contributing artwork to NA on an area and regional level and working under contract to the WSO drawing the “Home Group” comic strip. I came to be creatively involved with the silly, exaggerated, yet very human characters found in the strip through providential timing, a little talent, and a lot of luck.

Call them character defects or just evidence of human nature, I believe each of the “Home Group” characters display one or another aspect of most addicts’ personalities. From Slugg’s cynicism to Gretta’s idealism, from Marge and Eddie’s innocence to Robert’s perfectionism, from Jake’s spirituality to Denilah’s spaciness and Serena’s good-natured strength, I can identify with all of them.

Regardless of whatever insight into ourselves we may get from the antics of the “Home Group” characters, I believe the strip’s true value is the opportunity it offers us to laugh at ourselves. Though our disease is deadly, recovery is sometimes a bitter pill to swallow; the combination of perspective and pleasure provided by humor makes that pill a little easier to stomach.

I believe that our sense of humor is a gift from a loving Higher Power and that laughter is truly the best medicine. My Higher Power loves it when I laugh—and the way my life goes sometimes, HP must have quite a sense of humor itself. Though I take both my disease and my recovery seriously, I pray that I may always take myself lightly and laugh as much as possible while I still can.

Just for today, I’ll embrace the Slugg within and thank him for helping me face life squarely—with a snicker.

XY: Why do we enjoy Slugg so damned much? Because he’s *outrageous*. He says the kinds of things we all think sometimes but probably wouldn’t say out loud for fear of hurting someone or giving the wrong impression.

Slugg sits in a meeting where someone’s talking about hearing God speak through other people, and he says to himself, “I can identify with that. My only problem is that I hate other people.” We read this, and our eyes grow wide, and we say to ourselves, “Omigod, am I really reading this in the international journal of the NA Fellowship?” Then we smile a twisted little smile, and we enjoy the perverse kick we’ve gotten out of the whole thing, and we laugh.

And then we get it. God really does speak through other people, and the only thing preventing us from hearing God’s voice is our arrogance, our ignorance, our insensitivity to others.

Truth is a kind of nasty, kind of funny, kind of bizarre kind of thing. If you find Slugg entertaining or enlightening, that’s fine with me. But what I’m really grateful to Slugg for is the ability he’s given me to find that nasty, funny, bizarre kernel of truth within myself and give it voice.

¹ Written in January 1994

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