

# early history up to Basic Text.

N.A. History Workshop - Baltimore, MD - 11/25/00 - Fawn F.

*Jimmy made a promise a long time ago when he was hospitalized in 1968 for TB which affected his throat to the extent that doctors told him he would not be able to speak again. During his stay there he vowed that if he regained his voice that as long as he lived he would use what voice and what strength he had to further the efforts of Narcotics Anonymous. He kept that promise. He expressed his feelings best when he said "you and I have been given, thru illness, thru suffering and thru disease, a talent for helping other human beings like ourselves. Let's never forget that we have it and that we are responsible for others but primarily we are also responsible for ourselves." He always used to say our program is a program for life and living. ^ It was also during this stay in the hospital that he carved out a symbol for NA on a piece of leather. He also made sketches of it. It was a circle with a diamond in the center and the initials NA in the inside of the diamond. This carving is presently in the archives of our World Service Office today and is depicted on the cover of our book Miracles Happen.*

Before our fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous came into being, there had been many attempts around the world to start a fellowship for drug addicts. A few tried to fashion themselves after Alcoholics Anonymous realizing that countless alcoholics were achieving sobriety through A.A. For one reason or another these attempts would start up and then fail. I suspect they were not following the Traditions which usually leaves an organization dependent upon personalities and/or outside organizations. Many addicts found recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous and settled in but many addicts were not able to stay clean in A.A. and were going back out. I am here today to present to you a history of our fellowship, Narcotics Anonymous and not of any other.

*As Jimmy Kinnon wrote in WE DO RECOVER, many addicts were still going down the road of disillusion, degradation and death because they were unable to identify to the alcoholic in A.A. With several other addicts who were staying clean in A.A. and some members of A.A. who had great faith in them, they formed a committee in 1953 for the purpose of helping other addicts like themselves. Now the addict would find from the start as much identification as each needed to convince themselves that they could stay clean by the example of others who had recovered for many years.*

*It was agreed and accepted that the 12 Steps of AA would be adopted into NA. One of the first things they wanted to do was live by the Steps because they knew AA worked for others and that the format was practical. Another item of discussion was in rewording our first step. Jimmy felt it was important that we stay away from a specific substance and that we get into understanding the disorder of the disease of addiction. The word We would be inserted at the start of each of the first 11 Steps. We were this way from the beginning. They finally agreed to call themselves Narcotics Anonymous. Jimmy was chosen to be the Chair to start off with. So you could actually say that N.A. started out as a service committee.*

The 12 Traditions of AA were accepted and were later re-established in 1960 as guides to be followed.

Now the objective would be to start N.A. meetings where addicts could meet. No easy task.

*Jimmy got clean in A.A. in 1950 and attended meetings regularly. He was very active in service work in A.A. and sat on the Board of Directors for the A.A. Radford Clubhouse located in Studio City, California. ^*

*During this time, addicts attended a meeting held at the Dad's Club in the San Fernando Valley off of Vineland Avenue at the corner of Cantara and Clybourn Streets. One regular meeting where addicts would go was a place called Doctor Shrier's Detox Center. They nicknamed it Shrier's Dryer because many people would go and dry out there. But this was not a Narcotics Anonymous meeting per se. Jimmy had a real problem with this particular meeting because of its format - - all the alcoholics would raise their hands and then all the addicts would raise their hands. If there were more alcoholics it was run as an AA meeting and if there were more addicts it was run as an NA meeting. But most addicts that were attending meetings back then tended to hang very close together. Back then 12 step calls were done in groups because people were afraid that they would use. Some addicts hoping to break away from A.A. formed meetings known as rabbit meetings. Rabbit meetings were meetings that popped up and were held at different locations every week, usually in members' homes. Many members feared police surveillance and this became a good option for them. Meanwhile, some A.A. meetings became known as meetings where mostly addicts attended. Strong personalities dominated certain meetings and there was a lot of struggle and conflict with personalities, especially when topics such as a recognized separation of the A.A. and N.A. Fellowships, terminology relating to addiction and alcohol, and an apparent lack of members interested and/or knowledgeable with the 12 Traditions. This thread of conflict continued for many years in N.A.'s growth as a Fellowship, that belief that N.A. could stand on its own two feet, separate and apart from any other Fellowship.*

*Jimmy set up a post office box for N.A. in Studio City, California in 1954.*

*N.A.'s first booklet was then printed and was being distributed in 1955. It started off with 20 questions and was entitled Do You Need Narcotics Anonymous? The questions were very different in this booklet than what we find in our more updated versions of questions in our I.P. Are You An Addict.*

*On the inside back of the booklet were listed two post office boxes for people to contact to get meeting locations or information about N.A. One of the P.O. boxes was the post office box that Jimmy set up in Studio City, California and the other post office box was in San Diego, California. Meetings started to take root in southern California and northern California.*

*By 1959, however, N.A. started to die out. This was due in large part because we were not following the Traditions. After a few weeks, another woman, Sylvia Wexler, came up to Jimmy and asked him what were they going to do? And Jimmy said, I don't know what you're going to do, but we're going on.. And she said, all right, let's do it and he said but this time we're going to follow the Traditions. They sat in the moorpark meeting where there had been a lot of*

dissention on how the meetings would be run. They had a shoebox of booklets. They took an inventory of what had gone wrong, how personalities had shaped the groups instead of the Traditions.

*And so by November of 1959, N.A. started up again with about 4 members. The 12 Traditions were then re-established as guides to follow within the framework of N.A. Jimmy wanted to get away from the old influence and they started a meeting to what was then a Unity Church on Moorpark Avenue in Studio City, California. That was the location of what later became the only NA meeting in the world. So by 1960, there was one basic meeting of Narcotics Anonymous. In the course of NA starting up again and they needed some kind of a business office and Jimmy placed a phone number for NA in the telephone directory. His home was the first hotline to helping addicts. Throughout this time, Jimmy would often sit down with his thoughts and check to see if what he was doing was right not only for himself but for the Fellowship as well. Our Fellowship sorely lacked literature of its own.*

*Many of us at the Office did not realize until after Jimmy died just how many pieces of the literature he did write because he never mentioned it. In 1990, I was asked to do a history workshop in Ocean City. I had called Betty and asked her who authored the pieces in our little white book and first I.P.'s. I placed a call to her again last week to confirm. This is the information I got.*

In 1960, Jimmy wrote "Who is an Addict?"

In 1960, What is the NA Program was written by Jimmy Kinnon and another member Sylvia Wexler.

In 1960, Jimmy Kinnon and Sylvia Wexler wrote Why Are We Here.

The paragraphs before and after the Steps in How It Works was written by Jimmy Kinnon in 1960.

In 1960, Jimmy Kinnon wrote Recovery and Relapse.

In 1960, Jimmy Kinnon wrote What Can I Do.

In 1961 Jimmy Kinnon wrote We Do Recover.

In 1962, Phil Phillips wrote One Third of My Life.

In 1962 Penny Kennedy wrote I Can't Do Any More Time.

Around 1962 Gene H. wrote The Vicious Cycle.

In 1962 Bob B. wrote Something Meaningful.

In 1963 Jimmy Kinnon wrote Another Look.

In 1975, more stories were added to the little white book.

In 1976 Greg Pierce wrote I Was Different.

In 1976 Betty K. wrote Fearful Mother

In 1976 Bill B. wrote Fat Addict.

Our prayer Our Gratitude Speaks When I Care and When I Share with Others the NA Way was written by Jimmy Kinnon.

*In 1963 at the Tahachapi State Penitentiary, Bob B. <sup>Barrett</sup> was an inmate at the time they were bringing members into the facility to share their experience, strength and hope. He got the message and when he was released later that year he started attending meetings.*

*The board of trustees was formed around the mid-60's. Jimmy knew he couldn't do it all by himself. The main purpose of the Board of Trustees founding was to see that N.A. didn't die out again. You've got to remember that in the 1960's, Jimmy said that they would stick to the Traditions. The roll of our Trustees being the guardians of the Traditions seems to come from this early era. The early experience that if we didn't stick to the Traditions we'd disappear. And what better way to embody that than to have a group of people rather than an individual.*

Now N.A. had literature of its own. With a P.O. Box, a direct phone line and a few member volunteers who were willing to put aside their own egos and own self wills to help other people, N.A. could now go forward. There had been an N.A. office established for a brief period on Crenshaw Boulevard in Los Angeles. It was a primarily a recovery house where addicts lived. Downstairs was where business meetings were held. However, mail addressed to N.A. was still being delivered to the post office box that Jimmy Kinnon had established. Jimmy would pick up the mail. Betty G., a recovering addict, who would later become Betty K., was a volunteer at this service office. When Betty would open the mail, she was told that the mail came from Jimmy and that if she had any questions she was to call Bob B. if she didn't know how to write any thing out. Bob B. would be at work. Betty would not be sure how to respond to business letters. In the desk drawers there were not many letters to follow example. She was told that Jimmy K. okayed the mail before it was sent to the office on Crenshaw. Then there was the office located at the headquarters of the Suicide Prevention Center, after the Crenshaw location folded. But people would call for NA and the phone would often get answered Suicide Prevention Center and a lot of confusion ensued. The door was rarely locked. A copy machine had been donated and it disappeared. Things began to disappear out of that office. For a while, literature was stored in the trunks of members Bob B.'s and Jack B.'s cars! If someone needed booklets or I.P.'s they would often have to track down Bob or Jack. Also during this time was when Jimmy was in and out of the hospital for reoccurring illnesses related to his T.B. During this time, another office had been set up on Highland Avenue in Hollywood and this office was

primarily known for servicing the California area. Attempts at maintaining N.A. offices were not successful during this time for one reason or another. The office at the Suicide Prevention Center was moved to a Van Nuys location, above a bailbondman's office. With Jimmy out of the hospital now, he and a small staff took over the care and running of this office. Handed over to them was what was kept or what was left from the previous office - - one tiny box of records, a few letters and that was it. The Holy Grail so to speak. A donated couch and one filing cabinet were also moved over. With a small inventory of literature and hardly any funds, the small one room office on Van Nuys Blvd. was the N.A. office. No parking was available for the volunteers and no one had any money back then. Volunteers in the office would have to keep running out to put coins in the meters because they were only allowed to park for an hour. They would pick up old cardboard boxes and paper bags and this is what they used to send out the first orders of literature. Someone lent the office a desk. Eventually, due to a lack of volunteers who could regularly commit to coming in and running the office on a daily basis, the office was moved into Jimmy's house in 1975. *In an enclosed porch off his house, measuring about 9 feet by 11 ½ feet, this became the office, what originally had been his roofing and painting office. From these humble beginnings NA moved forward.. The room measured 9 feet by 11 ½ feet.* The borrowed desk had to be returned. Jimmy and his wife Betty answered the phone day and night and the volunteers who volunteered during this time were expected to work. Everyone was very motivated to get what had to be done done. A used typewriter was acquired as well as file cabinets and other used office equipment. Jimmy and Betty would hit yard sales and garage sales to get more office equipment for the office. During this time the office grew into other parts of Jimmy's home eventually taking up just about every room except for the bathroom. Members who volunteered would be spread out on the living room floor folding I.P.'s, stapling starter kits together, dubbing audio tapes for the speaker tape library we had. Others would be running the mimeograph machine, typing letters, correspondence, directories, and the newsletter. File cabinets as old as dirt were kept in the mudroom of Jimmy's home. People would take breaks and have coffee in Jimmy's kitchen and some of the happiest times were when we gathered around his coffee table and just talked about NA. The files were in meticulous order. The phone rang constantly from members all over the country, all over the world. Literature orders were also handled out of his home. The office really took over his entire life and home. People were welcome day or night at his house. NA continued to grow and every penny that was made went into the office. Jimmy always believed we should be self sufficient so there were no debts accrued. The only credit they had was through a few of the regular businesses, the printer and the bank they did business with. He said that throughout that time they paid cash on the barrel and had excellent credit. Mail came to the post office box and sometimes to his home address. Often times the local areas in southern California would purchase their literature through this office.

*In 1971, the first world convention was held at the La Mirada Country Club in Los Angeles, California.*

*In 1972, the second World Convention was held at the VFW Hall in Sun Valley, California.*

*In November of 1975 the N.A. Tree was written by Greg Pierce and Jimmy Kinnon and introduced as a pamphlet outlining the service structure of N.A. In its preamble the members stated that the purpose of the N.A. Tree was to express in simple terms, basic ideas about how*

members and servants of N.A. relate to each other and to N.A. as a whole, and to present an ideal Service Structure for N.A. in such a way that we can strive to improve our fellowship and better fulfill our primary purpose of carrying the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. It's also important to note that it was here that names were given to specific functions, i.e., GSR's, ASR's, RSR's, World Service Conference, World Service Board AND The World Service Office. Prior to this time, with the exception of N.A.'s Board of Trustees, nothing had a name or a written out description of its purpose and/or function, including a WORLD SERVICE OFFICE.

The 1976 World Service Conference was held in conjunction with N.A.'s Sixth World Convention in Ventura, California. That Conference established an Ad Hoc Committee of elected representatives of the fellowship to review and revise the N.A. Tree. That Ad Hoc Committee presented the results of its labors to the first independent World Service Conference held in Van Nuys, California in the Spring of 1978. The Conference accepted that work and the many other suggestions that came in and turned them over to the newly established World Service Conference Literature Committee for finalization. That work was completed and the third edition of The Service Manual of Narcotics Anonymous was presented to the Conference and approved by the Conference in April of 1979.

Meanwhile, there was some stability and consistency for NA through the world service office.

Meetings continued to sprout up all over the world. Areas and regions had formed and addicts were staying clean in Narcotics Anonymous. The world service office served as a link to the rest of N.A. and the office also became a literature distribution center. By 1972 there were about 70 N.A. meetings worldwide and this included meetings on some military bases. By 1971, about 25 meetings were listed on a Southern California meeting list from San Diego to Ventura. The office out of Jimmy's home was reaching out and making contact and establishing links with addicts who then started meetings in Canada, Australia, Germany, Guam, Great Britain, Scotland, Ireland. Jimmy's son was serving as an officer in the military and through that connection, literature was made available to the bases stationed in Germany. His son also saw to it that our literature was made available to the forces that were engaged in war over in Vietnam. Later on the first meeting would start behind what was once known as the Iron Curtain, then Czechoslovakia. Another wonderful day was when a meeting started up in the Philippines. These were monumental milestones in N.A.'s growth back then.

In 1977 the World Convention was held at the Jack Tar Hotel in San Francisco, California. It was at this world convention that an interesting turning point occurred in our history. **Tell the story.....**after Houston, it moved to Kansas.

World conventions were held on a yearly basis. And whatever city the World Convention took place, NA shot up like a weed.

But N.A. was still undergoing growing pains as it continued to expand and come of age. Old timers and newcomers alike who had been schooled in Alcoholics Anonymous were not prepared

to sever their personal ties to that organization. As addicts began to realize that recovery was possible in NA and that NA could stand up on its own two feet, they wanted independence and a language of their own, their own book, their own terminology, their own WAY of carrying the message. Many regions debated and battled over these new ideas and ways in which to go about realizing them. Even at the World Service Conference level, this was evident if you examine meeting minutes from the late 70's and early 80's. Often times, it was the NEWCOMER active in service work who would set the ball in motion. N.A. was growing and members, especially newcomers involved in service work in NA, were no longer tolerating or waiting for a slow ease into total separation from A.A. Motions to cease the reading, selling or distribution of AA literature in NA meetings were made, motions to eliminate NA meetings that were doing so were made, the idea that members of NA use recovery in lieu of sobriety to identify their clean time were set into motion, speakers at conventions were expected to be solid members of N.A., these were new and challenging things for N.A., but lots of these ideals were not met with open arms as set out by the people presenting them.

#### Message from member in UK:

I cannot tell you how nice it was to revisit those early days again in my mind whilst writing the UK History.

The enthusiasm, the togetherness in purpose and how members travelled over from Ireland to those early fellowship gatherings.

What always brings a smile to my face is just how big that first group grew.

We were afraid to split into another group. I guess we feared losing the strength we found together, unfortunately faith in a higher power was a bit in short supply in our early days.

Picture this..... A large basement room, with 2 windows that open to ground level outside and 2 that don't. A room so full of recovering addicts that they stood on tables at the sides, against the wall at the back of the room and sat sideways across the window sills of the 2 windows that didn't open.

Behind the table and the speaker etc. are open windows at either side.

With 6 addicts laying on their bellies in the courtyard outside, with their heads poking through these 2 windows to get into the meeting. Through the doorway, left down the 18 ft long passage, and left again up a good 15 stairs was "solid" with addicts seeking recovery.

This is not an exaggerated tale of an old man, this is exactly how it was.....

What a lot of people don't know is this; That earlier on we ended up as just three members, Dudley said, "Nobody's coming in (from Johnny's PI efforts) let's wind this thing up" I replied, "Over my dead body, if nobody else ever walks in through that door "I" still need to stay clean".....

We have NA today, with the faces we have today because WE "continued" to help each other to stay clean.

I thank God with tears in my eyes for this.

When we examine our roots and the reason we are still alive today, we familiarize ourselves again with what we as a fellowship set out to do in the first place.

I have run out of time. There's so much more. Our history is so very rich and colorful. So many sacrifices.