

Reaching Out

Volume 22, Number 3
NA is restoring me to sanity

July 2007



For fifteen long years I've been sliding deeper and deeper into

Today I am 100 percent willing

Today I'm happy and proud to say I'm a recovering addict
attending NA meetings. I got in touch with my Higher Power

I became refocused on NA

Once I reached that point I lied and stole from the people who loved me

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From the Editor

We would like to welcome all of you to the NA World Services newsletter, *Reaching Out*. We hope that the contents of this newsletter will assist you in your recovery or H&I efforts. There are two sections to *Reaching Out*. The first section, "From the Inside," is filled with letters from incarcerated addicts, sharing their experience, strength, and hope as they find and maintain recovery from addiction through NA.

The second section, "From the Outside," is an opportunity for H&I subcommittees to offer their experiences obtained through carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. You may also find personal experience from those members who heard the NA message on the inside and are now living and enjoying life on the outside.

We encourage submissions for *Reaching Out* from members and H&I subcommittees. Please consider that we are more likely to publish articles that focus on how NA has helped an individual to recover while incarcerated rather than those that concentrate on the horrors of drug use. Send all submissions to *Reaching Out* c/o NAWS, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999, USA.

GET INVOLVED AND HELP US CARRY OUT OUR FELLOWSHIP'S PRIMARY PURPOSE!!



Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

Issue	Deadline
October 2007	15 July 2007
January 2008	15 October 2007
April 2008	15 January 2008
July 2008	15 April 2008



You may notice that we have made few changes to the look of *Reaching Out*. As part of that, we are trying out new cover art. We are interested in your thoughts, so please send your input to let us know what you think.

FROM THE INSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I hit my knees and prayed the last run I had while I was using a lot. I actually hit my knees a lot the last couple of runs.

I'm so grateful that God answered my prayers this time by coming to prison for a long time. I know I need to keep working my program, including hitting my knees, though I've been clean for six years now.

I have a few more to do in prison, but I know I'm going to stay clean with God's help, one day at a time, and staying grateful and remembering where I came from and not taking that first drug or fix.

I still find it hard to believe that I made it through all those years. Stay strong.

Sincerely,
JM, Pennsylvania

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Thank you for all of the supportive material that has been sent in my direction. Upon some contemplation, I decided it was my obligation to write this letter.

My hesitation in writing stems from a sense that it may sound redundant. I realized even if it is redundant, I still have the obligation to share. Without my sharing, the program that has afforded me more freedom behind bars than I experienced in the last fourteen or fifteen years of my career as an addict would not cease to exist, but if everyone took the stand of it feeling redundant, it certainly would or could cease to exist.

Fourteen or fifteen years may be veteran status to some or rookie status to others. However, one day is way too long to be bound by the evil clutches of addiction.

My serious legal trouble began just over three years ago. Naturally, it wasn't my fault; nobody understood me! How familiar are those words?

Seven months ago, toward the end of being in a lot of trouble, I had representatives of virtually every law enforcement agency imaginable demanding that I exit my home. Upon entering jail, I still thought, "It isn't my fault; nobody understands." I really didn't understand it myself.

For the first four weeks of my incarceration, I was very angry and really didn't know who or what to be angry at. As the old adage goes, when you point fingers at others, there are always three pointing back at you. Childish... maybe? I know I was.

Anyway, a couple of local male NA members were bringing in meetings. Both of those men had and still have something I wanted badly, very badly. Initially I didn't know what exactly they had that I wanted; I just knew I wanted it.

After leaving that meeting, back in my cell I found a blue-covered NA book. I began reading it and then flailing around and drowning in the steps, still in search of what those two men had, and even more desperate to find it.

By the grace of God, one evening the men dropped off a copy of *The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides*. I will be indebted forever. I couldn't wait to get back to my cell and tear into it. I got back to my cell and began reading it, and the words at the end of the first page jumped out at me. For the first time in many years, I heeded these words: "There's probably only one inappropriate way to use these guides: alone."

This hurt. I realized, all of a sudden, how alone I really was. I shut the study guide and waited two weeks for another meeting—an eternity, it seemed at the time—only to find out that I should seek sponsorship outside of the group bringing in the meetings. More delays, more frustration, but I was still in search of what I had seen in those first two guys.

I wrote an old friend who had endured much of what I am enduring now. Having over three years clean and a year out of prison, he agreed to be my sponsor. Thank God—maybe now I could find it.

Off to work I went, stumbling through my study guide, writing down as thoroughly as possible answers to all questions presented, waiting, at times, for money to mail the answers to my sponsor. A couple of dollars at a time for postage is a fortune when you're locked up. That's not including all the paper used. But in my quest for what I saw in those other men and in my thoroughness, I persevered, still in search.

Upon completing the guide I felt really good—my first constructive accomplishment in a long while. Less than a week later I began to feel a void in my life. I took it upon myself to start at page one of the study guide again.

After I shared this with my sponsor, he concurred that I had done the right thing. What a novel concept for a change: a good decision.

Presently I am working Step Ten for the second time, learning more about how the disease of addiction affects my life and about the prison without bars that it created for me. Nearing eight months clean, I really felt an obligation and desire to share this part of my story.

To everyone at WSO and *Reaching Out*, thank you once again for the literature and correspondence. Without all of the generosity I have experienced, there would still be all those people in the world who just "didn't understand me."

Love and prayers,
SB, Kansas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello again from up here in Canada. My name is S and I am an addict who is coming back. I am incarcerated again as a direct result of the disease.

This merry-go-around seems impossible to get off of. My Higher Power has saved me again—one moment, one hour, one day at a time.

Sometimes coming back to jail seems like the only answer. Another car crash, some more hurt relationships, another blessing from my Higher Power not to have died.

I am a grateful recovering addict. The fog is starting to clear again, and I'm sitting here in my cell on lockdown looking out the window at the snow falling (no, we don't live in igloos here), hoping that life on life's terms will get better.

The choices are always inevitably up to me. I stopped attending NA meetings regularly, I slipped back into old behavior patterns, and boom, I'm back using again.

The insanity never stops until I get arrested, it seems. I'm fortunate, though, for the NA program, this *Reaching Out* newsletter, and

all the addicts I read about in this newsletter who I can completely identify with.

This institution does not have an NA meeting, so reading the stories in *Reaching Out* from Florida to California to Canada really helps me to say clean "just for today." Thank you and God bless.

SS, Canada

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is S of Maine. I am a member of NA. I read as much as I can get my hands on while in the county jail. I will be going back to prison for twenty-four months any day now. I am twenty-four in three days and sick and tired. Here's my experience. Please put me on your mailing list.

It is hard getting out of a rut. Sometimes it's impossible without jails, institutions, or death. Well, that has been my case in the last ten years.

I'm awaiting my bus ride to prison to spend a few years taking my willpower back.

Knowing what to do is only a piece of it, but doing it is a bigger piece. Before you can get what NA has to offer, you must hurt like you have never hurt before.

I'm twenty-four and have felt so empty over the last ten years. I have gone to meetings, prayed, and worked steps, but I always held on to the chance that someday I could use safely. Not today.

Using is not an option for me now. If I use I will die! No way to play it other than to accept that I have a terminal disease. My medication is picked up not monthly at a pharmacy, but within the halls of the program and among other addicts.

Sincerely,
SH, Maine

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I do apologize for a bit of a delay in this return correspondence, but I have been somewhat preoccupied with one of the many hazards associated with many addicts: court appearances and the justice system. My legal affairs coupled with a brief illness have caused me to fall somewhat behind in what I consider to be obligatory writing duties.

One of these happens to be my continued open line of communication with all of the generous folks at *Reaching Out* and NAWS. The last letter I received from NAWS, dated February 2001, made me feel—well, many feelings come to mind, and to be brief I shall mention only a few. The letter stated that my correspondence would be retained for future consideration to be published. I felt overwhelmed, honored, happy, worthy, privileged, proud—the list of feelings is long, but those brush the surface.

So many addicts out there like myself, so many still suffering; this sheds light on the possibility that even I can make a difference and I may be successful at recovery.

One of my biggest fears is failure upon finding myself in a larger facility which will be my next stop in life for a year or two, or failure upon entering society once again.

However, my continued closeness to recovery-oriented people, literature, and correspondence can be my best hope for success in that future. Thank you for all the kind and generous staff at *Reaching Out* and NAWS; you have all contributed immensely to my self-esteem and continued success at recovery.

SB, Kansas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I want to reach out and share how much I've developed mentally and spiritually since being incarcerated. I've recognized that it was my addiction that arrested me and sentenced me to ten years in this correctional facility, and with my inventory I also recognized that if it was not for my addiction and recovery, I may have never gained the experience and education I've attached to my addiction and recovery from addiction. I'm thirty-five years old and I despise the shame, meaning I don't try to remain anonymous about my former abuse of drugs. Why? Because I fear it will be hypocritical if I relapse, and if I refuse to reveal that I am a former drug user, then I will do the same if I use. It's a delight to be secure with yourself and with the strength of God's grace and mercy, and addicts mostly know this because we actually are the most giving, loving people alive. We know pain, hurt, and loss.

DW, Missouri

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Grace and peace to you all.

I write honestly humbled by such care and support from all those in the NA program, especially the World Board of NA, *Reaching Out* to touch us with that genuine care, faithful guidance, and love we lack in our lives. Although I serve a life sentence due to the use of drugs, I thank you for these blessings you have given me.

There are many stories of far too many people who have lost and suffered. I feel and pray we understand this serious danger that is our own death, and that will destroy us and our own families just like that. I need to be continually reminded of this to survive. Each one of you and your stories helps me. Thank you all! You give me the hope that is real, hope that we can be filled with new life wherever we are today. *Reaching Out* puts my hands in yours, connects our lives tighter, no longer alone, but united in fellowship.

Let's help each other through this deadly disease to healing, like a caterpillar into a butterfly, like coal to diamonds, and from this dreaded bondage to freedom.

May this gift we have of Narcotics Anonymous guide our way. May love touch you, strengthen you, and give you peace by the amazing grace of the spirit of this beautiful program and people I love.

BP, Massachusetts

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is G and I am an addict. My addiction has caused me to lose everything. I went from a mental health unit to jail, where I am now awaiting transfer to a long-term inpatient rehab (court ordered). Though I am only twenty-one, I have been under the influence for five years.

However, there is a light in my life now: NA! It is through NA that I found a way to pick up the pieces and put it all back together again. With sixty-one days clean and a new Higher Power in my life, I realize all was not lost! I can be OK today!

NA has revealed to me a world of support, understanding, and clarity. Thank you.

G, New York

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello, my name is J and I am currently serving time on drug charges. I receive your publication and really enjoy reading it. Other inmates and I can really relate to the stories. Many of us talk about writing you, and now I finally am.

My story is like any other addict's who just doesn't seem to get the point the first time. I am not here for my first time or my second, but rather my third time for the same charges. I have heard insanity is doing the same thing and expecting something to change. Now I feel pretty safe in saying, "Things don't change if things don't change." I am no stranger to the NA program on the inside or the outside. I have been trying to get clean and fix problems for the past thirteen years, with some periods of success and some periods of grave defeat.

In the past I used NA to get or keep jobs, get family off my back, and even to get back in the house. When attending regular meetings, talking to a sponsor, and working the steps, I received many gifts. I bought a house, started a business that did well, got engaged, and had a beautiful baby boy. Once I got away from the meetings and got "too cool" for NA, I relapsed and lost it all. Now my ex has a new boyfriend and I have a new bunkie.

My son is four and I have not seen him for two years. Everything I worked so hard for and was given was lost and gone very quickly. As soon as I picked up the first one, there was no getting between me and my drugs. I have four months until I wrap up. I have been writing my steps and reading my literature, and by the grace of God I will be going to an NA meeting on the day of my release. Please remember one thing: "Recovery is a gift and it is not to be taken for granted."

JM, Massachusetts

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm an addict, and due to virtually no spiritual maintenance I'm now sitting in jail through the grace and mercy of my Higher Power.

I relapsed after four and half years clean and I'm grateful for the foundation I've been able to build, so this relapse is more education and not just painful and shameful. I picked up on a Monday, 13 March, and twenty-four days later I was arrested after a six-day binge, facing a parole violation in another state before paroling back home.

I'm so thankful for NA because my wife is pregnant and members of my home group and other people in my support circle have come to her aid and have helped her during our time of need because my actions got her fired as a manager at a pawn shop.

NA comes to the jail, and there are men I know and they have sent me a Basic Text and a *Just for Today* meditation book. Now I know that I must share the NA way; now I know that I can't do this alone no matter how long I've been clean; now I know that I must tell my sponsor whatever is going on with me; now I know that I must give away what I've learned in Narcotics Anonymous in order to keep it.

DJ, Memphis

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hello friends! Like so many of the stories I have read so far, this last relapse landed me a bid. My problem is that I have been here before, more than once. I have read and been told that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. I chose to live it one more time.

Previous to this bid I managed to get clean through the help of NA and some counseling. While clean, I acquired lots of stuff. The stuff defended me—not my fiancée, son, or clean time, but how much stuff I had. I once heard it said that while using we chase it. We don't know what "it" is, but we chase it. Without a full, honest surrender on my part, I went back to chasing it.

Sorry if I'm bouncing around a bit. I am getting sentenced tomorrow and I am very anxious. This time around I have made myself tell the truth to myself when it counts. I am an addict, through and through.

Last time I got clean I received the greatest gift a man could receive, a son. He is three now, and I have only been to one birthday. That is sad. I was too busy with stuff, boats, cars, toys, and chasing it to realize that I was losing my family. Addiction takes or has taken many faces with it. I need and want to surrender to my Higher Power each day. If this is your first time, learn one thing from me. Learn from your mistakes and learn from other people's mistakes. A wise man will learn from another man's mistakes instead of making his own.

My biggest mistake was missing a meeting, because then I missed another and another, and now I am going to get sentenced tomorrow. NA is a great way to live. Try it. Your misery and the judge will be waiting if you don't like it. That's my experience, anyway.

JM, Massachusetts

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm a grateful recovering addict in a treatment program in prison. I would like to share my story with other recovering addicts of the world, that they might see themselves in my story and give themselves a break for spiritual principles to work in their lives as they have in mine, just for today.

This is my seventh time in prison at age thirty-five. I didn't know my addiction was with me before I picked up that first drug. The pain of my past was hurting my future, and I had no idea until I began to work the steps.

I was molested at age four, when I lived with my mother. I was also molested at age seven and eight when I lived with my grandparents. I was raped at age nineteen in prison and was afraid to tell about it at that time because people would say I was gay, but I'm not! I didn't know deep down inside that living with the pain of my past was hurting me, because I was told, "Keep all secrets to yourself." But it was hurting me spiritually and mentally.

Being a part of NA and working on the steps was a breaking point for me because I began to see the real me. When I first did a searching and fearless moral inventory, I did it without a sponsor and relapsed because I didn't understand about a Higher Power or have another addict to help me when that time came. But when I worked my Fourth Step with someone and had the Third Step to guide me, it worked. You see, I've learned that I have to always go back to Step Three when working the other steps because it gives me willingness to work the steps when I turn my will and life over.

I used all drugs because of the pain of my past, but now that I've let go I can move on in life. I know how to handle pain now, and that is with my Higher Power and you people in the rooms of recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to share.

CD, Illinois

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Well, I'm not a writer, but I would like to submit a letter to you in hopes of helping someone out. My name is P. I'll write it; you can edit it. Thank you!

I am forty-one years old, serving time in the prison system for my fifth out. All my life I've considered myself lucky for having a family that was involved in addiction recovery. Some people (I'm probably one of them) need more than just the initial push into recovery. It helped me and probably saved my life, having recovery always around me. Due to all the times I've relapsed, I always was aware that I had a problem and that there was a cure, which gives you hope. Excuse my shaky writing; that's just one of the side effects of addiction. I'm forty-one and shake like an eighty-year-old.

I've been in and out of recovery for about twenty-four years, never staying clean for more than six months. I've been through two marriages, and my siblings don't talk to me. I have nowhere to go from here but up. I have one year until I am released. This is my last chance! I've always wanted it, but I guess not badly enough. I've been told I have not suffered enough. The truth is that I believe I needed to be locked up to obtain some clean time in order to really quit.

My brother, clean for twenty years, says I was messed up or high my whole life. I didn't know what clean felt like. It feel great! Thank you, NA and everyone involved with recovery. I've been clean one year and am so thankful to my Higher Power (God) and NA. I will be sure to keep you posted through my lifelong progress of my recovery. The main thing to know is that your past is your past; move on, forgive yourself, and know you are never cured. I plan on being involved somehow in recovery as my career. I've always been a functioning addict, a working addict. I believe the Lord wants me to give it away so I can keep it this time. Thank you for this opportunity!

God Bless,
PL, Wisconsin

FROM THE OUTSIDE



Dear *Reaching Out*,

I am truly humbled by what JG from California shared in the January 2007 issue in the "From the Outside" section. If it wasn't for our predecessors "having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps," and had they not shared the message of recovery with other addicts, there would be no freedom from active addiction and no Narcotics Anonymous!

In 1992 I began practicing half-measures in this program, and it did not work for me. I needed to get clean. It wasn't until I wanted to get and to stay clean more than anything else that the miracle happened. The miracle or jarring experience that led me to recovery this time was another prison sentence.

I have been to prison three times and have had countless short- to long-term stays in county jails. Every time I got out I went straight to the dope house. For as long as I can remember, my life has been centered on drugs and the ways and means to get more. In 1992 I was in an intensive twenty-eight-day treatment program and was introduced to Narcotics Anonymous by an H&I panel member who came there once a week. I wasn't serious about getting clean at the time, but the seed was planted by this selfless individual who took the time out of their life to share a message of hope, the message of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

Today I have five years and eleven months clean as a direct result of following some direction from people just like me in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, and who are working the steps.

The last time I went to prison I finally figured out that if I kept doing the same thing I had always done—get out and use—I would eventually end up spending the rest of my life behind bars.

Every single night I prayed to the God of my understanding to remove the desire to use and everything that goes along with that life. Only this time I believed that he could and that he would if I only believed that he could and would.

Today I experience freedom from active addiction as our Basic Text promises. Our literature tells us that we have never seen an addict fail who fully applies him- or herself to this program. I am living

proof that lost dreams reawaken and new possibilities arise.

It is only by sharing the message with others that we recover. Sharing does not imply selfishness; this is not a selfish program. The message is "that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live."

This disease kicked my butt for twenty-five years. Thanks to Narcotics Anonymous and recovering addicts actually working their program by carrying the message, I have a life today.

I am free from the prison system and, more importantly, free from the self-imposed prison that my disease told me that life was about. This is all I had to do: don't use, go to meetings, get a sponsor, work the steps, and don't use no matter what! God bless you.

In loving service,
GF, Texas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is J, and I am an addict. I am a fifty-six-year-old with a little over ten years clean today. The God of my understanding and Narcotics Anonymous have become my way of life today, and I'm so grateful for this. After reading the articles in Volume 20, Number 2, April 2005, I was touched by the way addicts who are locked down are recovering. I was that addict who was locked down in January 1976. And today I wish that I could have seen this newsletter at that time. I was locked down for three years and eight months and three days and didn't change a thing. I did get my first introduction to NA but went to the meetings for the wrong reasons. I was told by other inmates that if I went to the NA meetings I could get early parole. And this was the only reason I got involved in the NA program. I didn't change anything in my life at that time. So when I got out of lockdown I went right back to the same things I was doing before I got locked up. Having changed nothing, my disease and using got really bad fast, and I was on a journey to hell and death for the next sixteen years and four months. I would like to share with the inmates who are locked down today that taking the time to get involved with recovery and changing the way your life is going are very important, because you may not get the second chance like I did.

Today I go into the penal system to share my experience with the inmates in the hope that they may take a look at their lives now and want to make some changes for the good. I am very grateful that I

went to the NA H&I meetings while locked down because they let me know that there was a way out of active addiction when I was ready. When at the end of my road of active addiction, I walked in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, my life changed. From that day in 1996 on, I have done things in my life that I never thought could be possible. I went back to school, was the owner of my own business (I am now retired because of many medical problems), and got to see three of my kids walk into college. I am grateful to say that through all of this I have found no reason to use any mind-altering or mood-changing substances. And I know that if I can do this, anyone can.

Thank you, Narcotics Anonymous, for the new way of life.

J, North Carolina



"When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, or death—or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man's entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual—not religious—program, known as Narcotics Anonymous."

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Reaching Out is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available free of charge to incarcerated addicts through Narcotics Anonymous World Services. If you will be incarcerated for at least six more months and would like a free subscription to *Reaching Out*, complete and return the following form.

Reaching Out is also available by a twenty-copy bulk subscription at a cost of \$31.00, annually. If you are interested in purchasing a bulk subscription please complete the following form and return it along with a check or money order.

- ☐ I am an incarcerated addict (and will be for at least six more months) and want a free subscription to *Reaching Out*.
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