

Interview
Chuck S.
January 7, 1989
(By Lee M, the N.A. Way Magazine)

LM: I wanted to talk to you to fill in my own background on the trustees in general, and particularly on what was going on in the early Eighties. You happened to be the chat at that time, so maybe we can start of with when were you first involved with the board?

CS: I was involved with the board from the time it started. I was on the board... I think I was about the fourth or fifth member on the board.

LM: Oh, really? How were board members elected at that time?

CS: In the early days we were appointed by the board. That meant if you had a car and could travel and you were doing anything at all [in service] you could get on the board.

LM: What was the board originally set up for?

CS: To run N.A.

LM: And N.A. was basically just the eight or ten groups in L.A. when the board just got started, right?

CS: Well, I think there were about four groups in L.A., probably about three or four in Northern California.

LM: And what kind of things where involved with "running N.A." at that time?

CS: Well, we didn't have a World Service Office at that time---it was in the back seat of somebody's car Of course, we all had grandiose ideas- I got on the board because I was heavily involved with institutional work. That's how come I got on the board.

LM: From what I've been told, the board was started up sometime in 1963. When was an office started up? Some kind of physical location?

CS: Well, you've got to understand that I'm not, off the top of my head, [real good] on remembering; I could be off five or six years. I'll give you a milestone go by. We had our first world convention; we made a grand profit of two hundred and some dollars, and we opened our first World Service Office with a rent of two-hundred and some dollars a month.

LM: You had one month's rent in your pocket.

CS: We opened the World Service Office approximately three or four months after we had the first world convention.

LM: Had there been a physical office location started earlier than '71 or '72?

CS: Jimmy Kinnon and Bob Barrett had the World Service Office in their possession.

LM: The post office box and the literature?

CS: Yeah, the post office box they did up to this point.

LM: Well, from what I've seen--and please correct me if I'm wrong, 'cause that's one of the reasons I'm talking to you--from what I've seen, there wasn't a whole hell of a lot going on with the Board of Trustees up until it was time to put the N.A. Tree together. Standing committees were created around when?

CS: Well, you've got to understand that there wasn't much going on in N.A., and as

N.A. grew then we were behind in everything, we had no finances, nothing but grandiose ideas, but no money to take care of it.

LM: No real ideas of how to go about getting it within the traditions.

CS: Well, we didn't have that big a fellowship. At our first convention... And you know how this goes, you have a good hot meeting where you ask people if they want to do something, and they all tell you, "Yes." Then the day after tomorrow, they come up with all kinds of excuses. At our convention I had gotten pledges from people in N.A. that amounted to \$600 a month. We figured we had enough due, being we had the \$200 cash on hand, that We figured with the \$600 we could open the World Service Office.

LM: How much of that money actually ended up coming through each month? Any of it? None?

CS: None.

LM: So things were mean and lean. Can you tell me a little bit about the process of getting the N.A. Tree together? Were you involved with that, or are you familiar with that process?

CS: The Tree, that was mostly done by Greg Pierce.

LM: Yeah, that's what I'd heard.

CS: This is the part I don't want published, this is me and you talking.

LM: I imagine there's a lot of stuff we are going to be talking about, just to fill me in on the background, that cannot possibly find its way ever into print. I intend to keep off personality discussions, any of that kind of stuff.

CS: The Tree was Jimmy Kinnon and Greg Pierce's idea. Greg Pierce being the intellectual at that time of N.A. A lot of it was hard fought for, mostly by Greg, and a lot of it was good and a lot of it wasn't so good. But what the Tree was was to set the World Service Office as a one-man rule. It didn't say so exactly, but that's what it endeavored to do. To make the World Service Office the command point or the law of N.A. Then, of course, it has been torn apart time after time since then.

LM: At that time, the office was administered by one of the standing committees of the Board of Trustees, wasn't it?

CS: No.

LM: No?

CS: It was administered by Jimmy Kinnon.

N.A. Way: Did the board have any control over him at all?

CS: Very little. Greg and Jimmy got the charter for the board... what do you call it?

NA. Way: I know they incorporated the board completely independently of the Board of Trustees.

CS: They set up a board.

NA. Way: Tell me about that. That surprised me a great deal.

CS: That board.

LM: Yeah.

CS: Jimmy Kinnon picked who he wanted and put them on the board.

LM: I guess what my question was, how could he possibly get away with that?

CS: You've got to understand, times were different than what they are now.

LM: I guess so.

CS: For one, we were all a lot younger then, and none of us had a lot of money. We were all busy working [our regular jobs], and we didn't have the time. Jimmy

had gotten out of the hospital and he agreed to take the World Service Office in his home. Then we had grown to the point where we were getting a little money, so then we started talking about incorporation. Finally, Jimmy got it around to where he wanted it; he got it Set Up for a one-man rule of the World Service Office. Then he hand-picked his own people. Where I got involved, and the great fiasco came about, was there were groups headed by Bo Sewell [pushing] to write a book, and Jimmy said, "There will be nothing published unless I say so." Well, anyhow.

LM: The personality battle between Jimmy Kinnon and Bo Sewell is a legend.

CS: But where I really got involved is there were two members of the board that... The reason being justified for him wanting them off the board was because neither one had been active on the board for years... One was completely out of the area, and Jimmy called a meeting of the board members.

NA. Way: Now, are we talking about Jimmy's board or the Board of Trustees?

CS: I was chairman of the Board of Trustees at this time.

NA. Way: When were you elected chair of the trustees?

CS: I don't know.

LM: Okay.

CS: And Jimmy called a meeting of the World Service Office board, and didn't notify the two members that he intended to abolish. The board consisted of Jimmy, his wife, and one other member. They voted the two members off without even notifying them there was going to be a meeting. So these two members came to me, and I called Jimmy up and told him I would like to take him out to dinner. Me and my wife went over and we took him and his wife out and then came back. I said, "Jimmy, we got a little problem," I said. "I'm not disagreeing with your reasoning; I am disagreeing with your methods." I said, "Jimmy, if you will call another board meeting, and notify these two people that there is going to be a meeting for this purpose, and you hold a meeting and the results are the same, then, fine." And Jimmy said, "I run the World Service Office; I say who is on or who is off the board." I said, "Not anymore, Jimmy. We've grown too big for that. This is a fellowship." And he also brought up the point about the book. He said, "There will be nothing published until I say so." And that's where the fight started, or all the chaos started.

LM: The fight between the trustees and the newly active conference committees and the office?

CS: No, let's not say between the trustees and the office, let's say between me and them. Because they [the other trustees] had nothing to do with it.

LM: You were personally taking action, but it wasn't really business of the Board of Trustees per se?

CS: No. So we, then, being political--as we all are--got my little following and they got theirs and the battle started. You know the results.

LM: I know at one point it was written into the N.A. Tree that the office was supposed to be under the direction of the Board of Trustees, and that even when the manual was revised for the third time that's the way the conference had approved it. But by the time it had actually got to print, that language had been deleted. Can you tell me any stories about that?

CS: Well, there has always been a vast difference between what is approved and what went to print. There seems to be a little gap in there somewhere, and at that time we weren't big enough or sophisticated enough that we really worried about it, 'cause we didn't figure too many people would read it anyhow. It wasn't until we got people who started reading it and started asking questions that we got into all the physical battles.

LM: I want to get onto one thing in particular, Chuck. The way I've read the material which I have so far, which is some of your old guidelines, the N.A. Tree and things like that... The way I see things being set up, at least on paper, is that the Board of Trustees is supposed to be the main branch of service for N.A. a whole, and you have your standing committees set up, and they were supposed to be doing the work on behalf of N.A. a whole, and the office was supposed to be carrying out their directions.

CS: In the earlier days that is what was supposed to be. You've got to understand that in the earlier days there just weren't that many people in N.A.

LM: It was a bunch of volunteers and a volunteer office and the whole business. How did it happen that the conference committees--who, as I understand it, are supposed to be just meetings of the state and regional delegates with trustee committees to review what was going on... How did the conference committees become the active committees and the trustee committees fade into the background?

CS: Well, you see it has always been my contention that the Board of Trustees should be like, if you will, the Supreme Court; that all the Board of Trustees should be is a review committee. Make sure that everything is within the guideline of the traditions. Things had grown so fast during this period, and it had gotten to where the time was so demanding that the Board of Trustees could not any longer handle everything that was going on. Because the growth in N.A., it you will remember, in the late 70's just catapulted. We truly went across the country.

LM: It seems like that period in the late '70's is when N.A. truly went national.

CS: And it just got so that we could not possibly handle it. So we started delegating our roles, Maned rewriting the Tree, Maned rewriting the guidelines, all of these things and putting it into words. The fellowship, set some rules and regulations for the fellowship. That was the idea behind it.

LM: So you all actually encouraged the conference committees to start working actively?

CS: Sure. Because, you know, it was just too much for us, and none of us were financially able to devote all our time to it. To kind of give you a little idea: the last three years I was on the Board of Trustees it was costing me about better than \$10,000 a year in lost wages and actual money being chairman of the Board of Trustees.

LM: Oh, I can imagine. I know how busy you were, and how much time you spent just traveling, I'm sure you must have spent a whole lot more time just doing the work here in Los Angeles.

CS: It just got to where nobody could handle this kind of a demand anymore.

LM: When the review text of the book had gone out, Jimmy had not been real cooperative with that, as I recall, and a trustee panel had been created to review complaints from people in the fellowship at large--to hear complaints about the office.

CS: I set it up.

LM: Can you tell me a little bit about that? I read the report of that panel, but it doesn't give me any of the background or time or anything. I'm not even sure whether that was report to the '82 or '83 conference.

CS: I think it was the '82, but I'm not sure about that either. But anyhow, we were in a dogfight with them, and there was... You've got to understand this, I'm talking about... before this there was no money, right, so people would send their dollar in and want ten 1. P.'s or ten books, and of course it would be in the publishers and Jimmy didn't have the money to get it out of the publishers. So it would be six to eight months sometimes before you would get your order, and everybody was saying it caused a lot of conflict, because you know how we are, we're naturally suspicious anyhow. And everybody was accusing Jimmy of stealing their money and all this kind of jazz. Jimmy never did steal a penny. In fact, he was taking from his own little social security check a lot of times to get the stuff out of printing. But people didn't understand that; they didn't know what the situation was. Of course, people in Pennsylvania thought these people out here in California were ripping them off. Just the normal suspicions of an addict.

LM: Yeah, I guess so.

CS: Even now, it's still there to a minor degree. Its only because we have perfected our services; but we didn't have those services back in those days.

NA. Way: There was that misunderstanding there from people, because they were so far away and naturally suspicious?

CS: Then we started getting people in who had some money. Up to this point, practically everybody that came into N.A. was like me: they came from the penitentiary into N.A. and all we had was a habit and a lot of mouth--I could say ideas, but it was mouth. Like I said, the Tree... Now it's around then when people were reading it and finding the faults in ft. We set up a committee to redo the Tree. (I think that committee is still active, I don't know, maybe still redoing the Tree.) But the whole thing comes down to this: we are always taking three steps forward and two back, but we gain a step each time. We always have these ideas of brilliance, and of course we had to settle for mediocrity as we went along. That's where we generally ended up. But we made some progress on everything we did; it wasn't always right, but we never lost anything on ft.

LM: So the report came to the '82 conference, and they did what with it?

CS: The report came to the '82 conference. By this time Jimmy had kind of seen the handwriting on the wall, and he capitulated, and I don't think the report was ever used really.

LM: It was kind of used for information, but no big deal was made of ft.

CS: It was on record, but that was all there was to it.

LM: Well, I know that right after the mess in '83 was when you finally got a way to get out of that business. The book came, about and when the trustees were reviewing it you realized that the service structure had been written out of N.A. You all made a decision along with other people in the service structure at that time to correct that error before it went to print. Quite a few people took strong exception to that. Can you tell me a little bit about the '83 conference meeting?

CS: The printing of the book?

LM: Yeah, the printing of the book, and do you remember the craziness that came out and hit the floor at the '83 conference?

CS: Okay, I can tell you exactly what that was all about. At the '82 conference they had turned the book over to the World Service Office to publish; they were to publish it by July. Okay, it drags on and on. They put out \$11,000 and they got a good price; and then we get serious reasons why it can't be printed here, it can't be printed then, So I get a call one night; they want to see me at the World

Service Office. So I go over there, and there's me, Bobby Rehmar, the chairman of the World Service Conference at that time, Doug Forsmyth, who was president of the World Service Office board at that time, and Jimmy Kinnon. They had the book there, and Jimmy said, "I will not publish it with this in it." I forget now what the three lines were; anyway, it was a paragraph.

LM: Yeah, it was just two or three lines out of two traditions.

CS: We sat down and we talked about it. Jimmy said, "We can't publish it with this; there's something about it." Well, I looked at it and looked at it, and we tried various methods and thought of various methods and nothing came up. Finally, I cut some words out of three different sentences, and Rehmar and Forsmyth said they could live with that, and I said, "Publish it." That raised a fury, that!

LM: I happen to remember that fury real vividly. I had just gotten clean in November of '82, so I was almost conscious about the time that stuff hit the fan. That discussion was my first exposure to service in N.A.: when our RSR came blazing into our meeting and said, "Everybody's going crazy!"

CS: Well, they did go crazy!

LM: Yes, they did.

CS: And at the conference they voted to put back in what we had deleted. Of course two years later they took it out again. But in retrospect, in looking back, I made a mistake, and I knew I was making a mistake at the time I did it.

LM: Just because it was such an important work, that sort of thing should have gone to the conference, or what?

CS: Yeah. But I took into consideration the fact that we already had \$11,000 invested, and I took into account that it would take another year before we could get the book [if we delayed], and I thought that the book was important, that we should publish it. So I took it upon myself to go ahead and do this. A lot of people tried to accuse the Board of Trustees, and I of course told them that it was not the Board of Trustees, that it was me, and the Board of Trustees had nothing to do with it. They were going to abolish the Board of Trustees. So I told them it was not the Board of Trustees; the Board of Trustees knew absolutely nothing about it. It was me. Then, of course, at the conference, when they had all the Board of Trustee members get up to confirm themselves, I heard all these suckers get up and whine and moan about how they didn't know nothing about the book. By the time I got up I was pissed off, and I went berserk. And that's when I told them, "I did it, and I told you all along that I did it; I called the chairman of the literature committee and told him I had done it the very minute I did it! At that time there was controversy about the N.A. Way Magazine, too.

NA. Way: Yeah, a little bit, as I recall. I'm not so familiar with that discussion, but I've heard quite a bit about George Hollahan's talk on the floor, trying to get rid of the N.A. Way.

CS: Well, the N.A. Way with them... as I told you when we were talking about the Tree...

LM: Yeah, now, that was Jim Miller's N.A. Way?

CS: Yeah, and the year before he came out with that he came to me with a proposal to put on the floor, and I told him it was a violation of traditions then. I went to the bathroom and came out and he's got somebody else putting it on the floor. It got approved, then he published it, and I fought it all the way. At the other conference when we were talking about the book I told people at the convention that I was opposed to the

N.A. Way-- that I was not opposed to the N.A. Way as such, I was opposed to method being used to produce it. When the N.A. Way was finally published by the right people under the right guidelines, I thought it was one of the best magazines that had come out in Narcotics Anonymous. But until it was published by the World Service Office, I did not support it, and I fought HE until the day they turned it over to the World Service Office. I've had no quarrel with it since.

LM: Yeah, distribution was turned over to the office that year, and I believe the following year actual editing of magazine was turned over to the office, too.

CS: Looking back in retrospect, I think N.A. came through a trying time in good manner.

LM: Yes.

CS: We came from nothing to a multimillion dollar outfit overnight, so I'm amazed that we haven't wound up in more trouble than we have. So I'm well pleased with the way things went.

LM: Good. I think, all in all, considering the times, especially, you were of great service to the movement.

CS: Well, we're all in our time... I wouldn't do it again.

LM: Now that I can understand real easily.

CS: It's enough. Very seriously, I would like to see the Board of Trustees get to be what I think they should be, and that is, like I said, like the Supreme Court. Guardians of the traditions, completely independent and nonpolitical. The way the Board of Trustees is set up now, they have to do everything based on politics.

LM: How so, politics?

CS: Maybe if I make a decision that you don't like, and when it comes time to reaffirm me, then you're not going to reaffirm me. I think that the Board of Trustees should be set up like the Supreme Court: If a situation cannot be solved in the group, it goes to the area; if it can't be solved there, it goes to the region; if it can't be solved there, it goes to the conference, and then the Board of Trustees should take it under advisement and write an opinion just like the Supreme Court does, and that should become law. And that doesn't require a \$60,000, \$100,000 budget either. I don't think the Board of Trustees needs to run the World Service Office or anything else; I think they do need to be very independent so they can be guardians of traditions, and that way everything will keep in line. Because we're all in self-service.

LM: To an extent; hopefully, that passes a little after awhile.

CS: Not necessarily. It's just like the last three years I was chairman of the Board of Trustees, I did things that I knew were against policy, that I knew were against traditions. I did them under the guise of need and expediency, and I think anybody else would have done the same. Fortunately, I feel that what I did turned out right.

LM: Yeah, it appears so.

CS: In the long run, overall, it turned out right. However, let me tell you from personal experience that the three years I was chairman for the trustees was the hardest time that I've ever spent in my life. Because, like I was saying, I was violating my own principles to get what I wanted.

LM: That must have been very difficult for you personally.

CS: It was very hard to do.

LM: I hope that you have been able to spend the last few years recuperating from that experience.

CS: I've enjoyed life these last few years. I'm going to retire in July, and then we're going travel around the country again and see how N.A. is growing since we traveled last time.

LM: I think you're going to be thrilled. It's a wonderful community that's developed out there.

CS: Well--what was it, four years ago now, in '85 we took five month and just traveled around the country, took a world directory...

LM: Well, it's even grown just in the few years since then.

CS: I was in Cleveland when Jimmy died. I called Bob Stone, and he said, "Chuck, do you have any idea how many new groups have been registered since the World Service Conference?" Now this was in July or June, the first of July I think. I said, "150?" He said, "1,110." And since then I know its just phenomenal.

LM: I want to wrap this up. Is there anything that you can think of that we've not talked about that's real important to your recollection of the board or your feelings about where the board ought to be going now?

CS: Well, I think I told you where I think the board ought to be going now.

LM: Yeah, it seems to me like we've pretty much covered all the bases.

CS: I can say in the beginning we put people on the board for various reasons we put them on the board because they had a job. We put lawyers on the board expecting to get free legal advice, doctors on the board expecting to get free medical advice, and anybody with any sense didn't stay, of course, because they didn't want to deal with us nuts!

LM: Is that what happened to people like Judge Emerson?

CS: Judge Emerson was the only person that we put on the board as a non-addict other than Dr. Bohan.

LM: Yeah, Mike Bohan.

CS: Judge Emerson was the only non addict that we've put on the board up to this point that's ever done us any good.

LM: What exactly did he do? I'm going to be talking to him sometime in the next few weeks, and I would like a little background on what his involvement was.

CS: Well, other than giving us a place to hold meetings--in his judge's chambers--everybody that went to his court on a drug charge, he sent them to N.A., so we got a lot of Judge Emerson's members. He was really concerned, he really had heart.

LM: How did he hold up in the service environment in N.A. at that time; how did he respond to us dope fiends going off on our crazy little rampages every once in awhile?

CS: He seem to handle it pretty good. He never got really involved in it, but he seemed to handle it pretty good. Plus he had a good businessman's sense, and he kind of kept us in line in the business sense. Plus he was really interested, he

really cared, it just wasn't something that he was just doing for follies, he really cared about people.

LM: Yeah, that's the impression I've gotten from speaking to other people, too.

CS: I sure hated to see him get off the board. He just got so active that he had other things that he was making money on, so he had to take it where it counted.

LM: Well listen, I need to get off the line and deal with a couple of people who've come to visit. Chuck, thanks very much for taking the time to talk to me. It's been real helpful.

CS: It was nice talking to you.

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