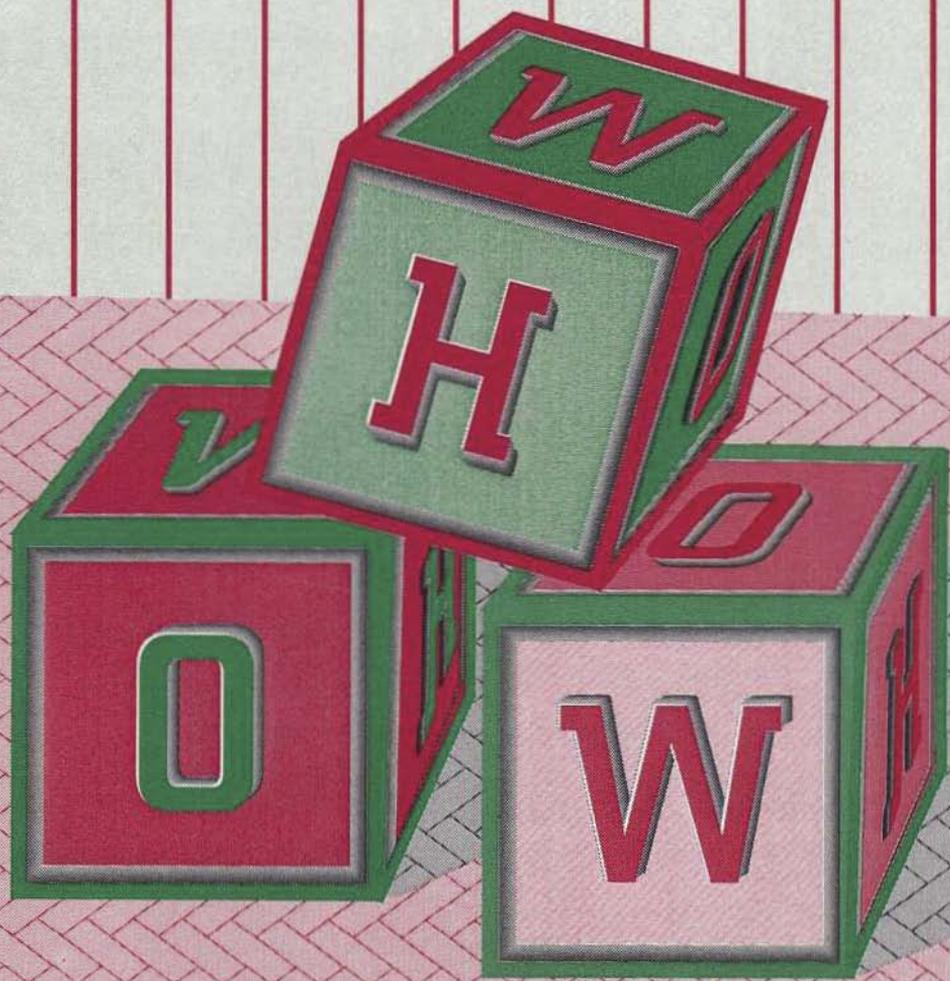


THE NA Way[®] MAGAZINE

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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 MAGAZINE®

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An NA tale

Once upon a time in a nearby area, there was a newcomer woman who attended meetings and tried to share in the love and fellowship of our program. She admitted her past openly and freely, honestly showing other addicts the essence of her person. One day in my home group's meeting she opened her mouth and, with tears running down her cheeks, shared that she was HIV-positive. Some narrow-minded men and women withheld their hugs, phone numbers, and love once they heard this woman's story. They were led by a gossip who called other members to spread the word, not of recovery but of this woman's pain.

A day came when this woman no longer came to my home group, afraid of reactions from other addicts and their fear of a virus. Not much later this woman relapsed, feeling she was unable to come back to our meetings.

After some time had passed, a day came when the narrow-minded people awoke from their ignorance, realized the exact nature of their wrongs, and resolved to change. The gossip had a moment of clarity, realizing she had



hurt the woman. She made amends to the woman and to the group.

It was a beautiful day when the woman came back to our fellowship and was welcomed with open arms, hugs, and a white key tag.

There is a day, today, when I am grateful for NA.

I have been all of these women: the newcomer, the gossip, the narrow-minded woman, and today a grateful addict working a program and trying to change.

Just for today, I am trying to change. Just for today, I am trying to accept all members of NA. Just for today, I am grateful for the Fellowship of NA and a program that allows me to make mistakes, yet gives me the opportunity to change.

Anonymous

Time for reflection

It's 9 a.m. on a spring morning in Rockland County, New York. I've thanked my HP for another day alive and clean.

I'm sitting here listening to some John Denver and Cat Stevens music. My canary is singing. I'm in a lounge chair looking into my fish tank. I just finished reading my *Just for Today* meditation; it was on self-acceptance.

When I take time to reflect like this, I realize the gifts of staying clean: The noise in my head is gone. I don't have the desire to use today. I won't have to lie or break my mother's heart today. I have direction and a purpose. The proverbial blinders are off; I can finally see the whole picture. I'm no longer afraid of facing life. I know I won't get locked up today. I have a car and gas money. I don't have any arrest warrants. I've got my high school diploma.

It wasn't always like this. On 4 July 1983 I was strung out, homeless, jobless, penniless, and had no hope.

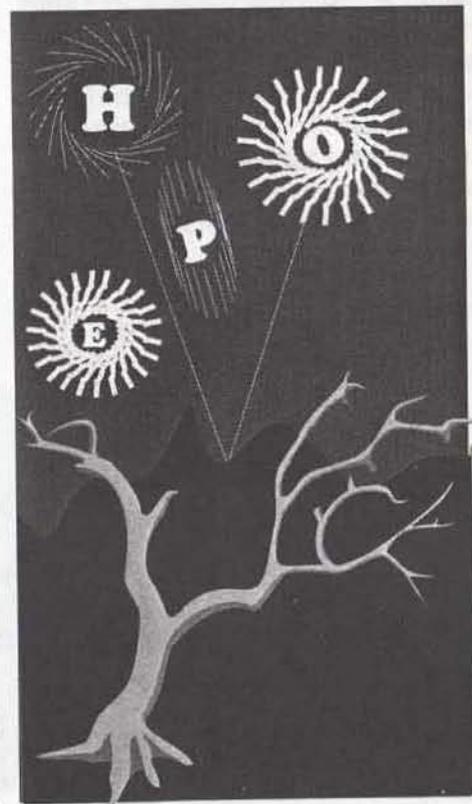
But on that day I was introduced to NA and my whole life changed. I heard our slogans and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. I work

hard to keep those tools active in my life. Guess what?! My life is wonderful. I appreciate life today. I'm living with the AIDS virus and I'm okay. Most important of all, I'm happy, joyous, and free.

Narcotics Anonymous promised me this freedom and it was the truth. I love NA so much, and doing service is still very important to me. I have nothing but gratitude. Thanks for my recovery and giving me my life back; it's wonderful!

I couldn't help reflecting on all the beauty that's in my life today. I owe it all to NA.

MK, New York



Why bother?

It had been a long business meeting, one with more than the usual number of disagreements. It was late and I was driving home with a good friend and somehow we ended up asking ourselves, "Why bother?"

My friend and I had been in the same home group for over six years and had worked our way up the service ladder together. Because of family commitments, new jobs, and new

hours, we were no longer able to participate in area and regional service work, but we were both serving at the group level. There was little difference between group business meetings and area or regional meetings. They were longer than they should be, filled with disagreements, and very little was actually accomplished.

The next morning I sat down to work on the group newsletter. The frustration of the previous night was gone, and with a clear head I began to think about the question that had come up. I began to realize what I have gained from service work.

To start with, service work has taught me how to work with people. When I was using, I had a bad case of the "terrible twos," always wanting what I wanted when I wanted it. If I couldn't get my way, I would throw a grown up's version of a temper tantrum. I would yell, bitch, pout, and then use. Through working with

people in service meetings, I have learned to be open to different ideas, and to work with others to reach a common goal.

Additionally, service work has helped me separate principles from personalities. Early on in recovery, I had a major problem with personalities. If I didn't want to make the effort to like or get along with people in the fellowship, I had a simple solution: Avoid them! I would go to different meetings, skip going to functions, whatever—all to avoid having to work on establishing communication and forming a relationship.

When I got involved in service work, I was forced to work on placing principles before personalities. I finally realized that just because I didn't care for someone personally, it didn't mean that he or she couldn't have a good idea. I learned to set aside personal differences to work for the good of the fellowship.

I have learned about responsibility and commitment through service work. I've learned that when I say I'll be at a given place or take on a particular position, I must be at that place or perform the activity I am responsible to do. This behavior is new to me. When I was using, I knew nothing about responsibility or commitment. I was out to do and get what I wanted. Nothing mattered but that. Using the principles I've learned through being of service, I am finding that I can be responsible and make commitments.

Serving the fellowship has taught me many other things that have assisted me in becoming an acceptable, responsible, and productive member of society. While all these lessons are great and wonderful, the answer to the question "Why bother?" is simple: Service work helps me stay clean!

TB, Alaska



New blood

I'm an addict. I live in the Southeastern USA and consider myself a member of the best group in the world. I wasn't born here; I was brought here by my parents and have spent the last twenty-one years living in this very rural community. I don't consider myself a service junkie, but I love service work and consider it to be a vital part of my recovery. Recently, I was asked at an ASC meeting if I would consider a nomination for alternate regional secretary. I thought, "Why not?"

Of course my disease stepped in and said, "You crazy girl! Why do you want to do this?" Despite this, I went to the RSC meeting.

When you hear me talk, you know I am from the South. My drawl really stuck out at the RSC meeting and I began hearing abrasive comments.

I guess I may have been too open-minded because I was in for some hard lessons in reality that weekend. The egos and attitudes astounded me to no end. My friends from my area introduced me, saying, "This is C. She is up for the alternate secretary position."

Immediately, I felt as if I had some sort of image to uphold, and my vision of service work became sharply distorted. Being new to the ins and outs of regional service, I just listened and watched. It got to the point that I began to wonder if serving at the region was really important. Having grown up in a rural farm town, it was easy for me to become judgmental of the "city folk."

These were some of the comments that were directed toward me: "Oh my God, country has come to town." "I'm surprised you didn't get lost." (I did get lost because I still can't fathom a six-lane interstate!) "Do you know how to work a computer?" I said yes. "Well, that's very surprising." "I think serving on the regional level might be too much for you."

These comments and statements are very true; they have not been taken out of context. My heart began to break wide open. Maybe the people in NA where I live are just too soft on me—I don't know—but I was not prepared for the abrasiveness and judgmental attitudes I encountered at the RSC meeting.

Maybe you can imagine my feelings. I was deeply hurt, angry, frustrated, and lonely. I felt useless, unloved, and very much "in the way." Hugs were few and smiles seemed nonexistent. Then a new feeling emerged: fear. A question came to mind quickly: "Will I become like them?"

You know, I hung in there. My stubbornness became an asset at that point because deep down, underneath all those feelings of inadequacy, I

knew my HP wanted me to be there. Later in the afternoon, I decided I had experienced enough abuse and retreated to my hotel room. There I felt safe, and in that safety I buried my head in the pillow and began to cry. So many times I put on the "tough act," but alone with my HP, there was no need. I cried and began to pray, asking for willingness, open-mindedness, and peace.

As before in my recovery, I began to feel peace come over me. After writing a bit in my journal, I called my sponsor. I was never so happy to hear a human voice as I was then. Her voice was filled with love and concern for me. She had me write down this statement: "Those who matter don't mind. Those who mind don't matter." And then with a touch of humor she said, "Personally, I think that what they need is some new blood."

For the first time that day, I laughed and it felt good. She pointed out that the people I had come in contact with had been serving on the RSC for years. This was my first time. Then we talked about motives and came to the conclusion that it doesn't matter what your motives are for doing service work—as long as you're doing it. Thank God I have a home group that stresses service work as a part of recovery, not just an extension.

For me, the individual addict is at the top of the service structure, not the bottom. The reason I made a commitment to service is so I can help further our primary purpose. Realizing my motives, I decided to do what

I could with the knowledge that I don't have to be like them. I can just be me. I was nominated and elected as alternate secretary the next day and it felt good. I didn't feel like I had proven something; on the contrary, I felt that I had followed the will of my HP.

I learned how it feels to be a newcomer all over again that weekend. I now have a renewed commitment to newcomers. I hug them more, tell them I love them, and with a big smile say, "I'm so glad you're here."

Words can and do hurt. I've seen too many people I love and care for turn their backs on NA because of harsh judgements and critical attitudes. We must keep in mind that a desire and willingness to serve are the basic elements in service work, not how it will make us look to others. I am grateful for the eye-opening experience.

My sponsor said to me one time that every person I encounter has a lesson to teach me. I must become willing to be teachable. At the end of the RSC meeting, a certain addict commented on my Southern accent and the way I drawl out particular words. I felt real love for this addict and reminded him of how funny he sounded to me. We both began to laugh and I realized that it was going to be okay. All we needed was some new blood!

CW

It begins with me

Hi, my name is Mudd. I am an addict. In the last four years of reading *The NA Way Magazine*, the one thing I have found very little of are letters and articles from young recovering addicts. I need to hear their stories. When I express this to my fellow addicts I usually get told that perhaps I need to stop looking at what I can get out of the program and look instead at what can I give back. So here I contribute a little bit of my story, hoping that it may reach and touch the young recovering addicts as well as adults.

I came into the program in 1987. I was sixteen years old, and I have been blessed to stay clean ever since. My story is similar to most addicts in that I came from what is now commonly known as a "dysfunctional family." Like many when I came into the rooms, I was socially inadequate and emotionally and spiritually bankrupt—a shell of the person I was to become.

In my early childhood I had endured a mentally, physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive upbringing which was terrifying to me.

Often I wondered if they would eventually abuse me enough to kill me. If I wasn't plagued by the horrifying daily anticipation of what abusive ordeal I was to face that day, I was plagued with thoughts of suicide.

At age ten or eleven I discovered the pleasurable feeling drugs gave me. I took anything that was easily available and would get me high. I had never thought I would brach out into street drugs. I always thought the people who did were really sick, but eventually I did those, too. I was finally immersed in a world where nothing else mattered. I found my purpose in life: I lived to use and used to live.

This way of life took me to the streets, and at age twelve I learned the game of "life" very quickly. Before I had found drugs the only thing I knew about life was that I was there to be my mother's scapegoat and my stepfather's sex toy. I was mostly confined to my house. So on the streets I really thought I had discovered life. I thought I had found my niche.

By the time I reached these rooms the only thing I knew was that I couldn't get loaded anymore. I was living in a drug- and gang-infested house, and the only thing I could do for the four months that I remained in that house was go to meetings and work. When I got home I stayed in my room. Although I didn't talk to anyone in NA when I first came in, I hung on to some of the stories I heard and some important slogans: "Don't pick up no matter what. Easy does it. Hang on to your ass. Just for today."

The most important slogan I heard was "Keep coming back." I knew this was the end of the road for me.

I moved out of that house four months after I got clean, and I moved in with my boyfriend. His family has pretty much adopted me since, although he and I broke up about five years ago.

During my first year and a half of recovery I would sit in the back of meetings. I only participated when it was time to take a chip or celebrate my birthday. At about that time I finally woke up and realized I had continuously stayed clean for quite a while. I could have never conceived of being clean for one day, much less for more than one year. After that great revelation I started taking action in my life.

I wasn't attending many meetings and that was quite apparent in the quality of my recovery. I realized I was still miserable. Working the steps in a matter of minutes, mentally, was not enough to have a clean and serene life. I finally got a sponsor, started reading the book, and taking action in my recovery. That was when my life started changing and Mudd started growing up.

The mention of God no longer makes me cringe. As I sit and listen to addicts sharing, I realize it all

refers to a Higher Power as the individual understands that power. Rooms full of people no longer petrify me, although I am not always the first person to introduce myself to someone. I hardly ever turn down an NA request, and I participate in my recovery as I am doing now. I function fairly well as a productive member of society. I am even back in school today, working toward a career.

Everything I have in my life today is a result of the action I have taken in this program. I realize today that everything that happens in my life begins and ends with me. If life isn't going so well it is usually because of something I did or didn't do. I have choices today. What a revelation! Life is never been better.

This is not to say that recovery has been smooth sailing since I started putting some effort into it. My first friend in the program passed away not too long ago. He died of AIDS at seventeen years clean. Watching this man live the last year of his life to the fullest without picking up anything that wasn't medically prescribed was to me a message of hope and a good example of "no matter what."

I have been close to losing everything in my life in recovery and still have not picked up. The hardest

Sometimes
I forget what
it was like to
eat out of
garbage cans

problem I have to face today is the chronic physical pain I suffer from an auto accident I was in a year ago. There have been times when I would have just begged for an injection of any narcotic that would put me out, or times when I would ask myself why I even bother to stay clean at age twenty-two. Why should I even bother hanging on? Well the bottom line is that life in recovery is the best I've ever known life to be.

In my active addiction I lived a life of continual horror. I dove into my thing. I learned how to lie, cheat, and manipulate in order to use. Sometimes I forget what it was like to eat out of garbage cans or spend all my time figuring out ways to evade the law and so forth. I may not be what I should be or what I could be, but I am certainly not what I used to be.

The things that this program has given me are not material. This program has given me a simple set of guidelines, the Twelve Steps, that enable me to live life on life's terms

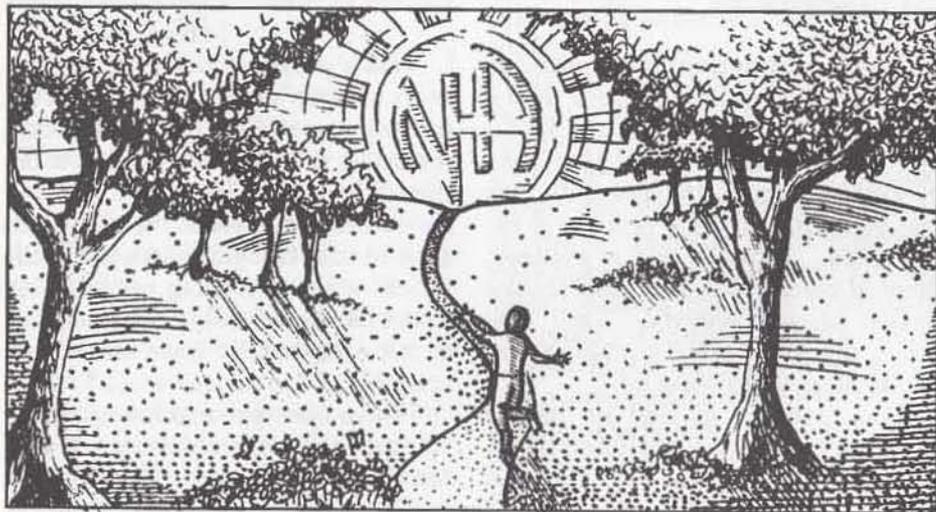
without the use of drugs. I can deal with life's situations without picking up or blowing my head off. Most of all, this program has put genuine love and hope in my life, feelings I didn't have prior to the program.

We do recover, no matter how old we are. This program is a gift, and to keep it you just don't pick up, no matter what. It works, if you work it!

I urge you to please keep coming back. I need everyone: the oldtimers to share their experience, strength, and hope with me; the newcomers to remind me that it isn't getting any better; and the ones who don't make it back to remind me of what's waiting out there.

As a youngster in recovery I have a head start and I am grateful. I thank my Higher Power daily for showing me the way to Narcotics Anonymous, for without Narcotics Anonymous there would be no recovering addict named Mudd.

Mudd, California



Lost, but not alone



Hi, my name is Alan B and I'm writing this so that I may share my experience with other recovering addicts. I'm thirty-two years old and have almost eighteen months clean.

About three weeks ago I went camping with my friends in the Sequoias (yes, there is fun in recovery). Little did I know what was in store for me. My Higher Power was about to teach me a lesson I would never forget!

I started off on a leisurely stroll in the woods on a Wednesday evening around 6 p.m. By 8 p.m. I was thoroughly lost. I couldn't find my way back to the camp site, so I decided to start a fire and try again the next day. I had a fire burning all night. My Higher Power provided me with enough wood to keep the fire going until five in the morning the next day. I started hiking only to discover that I had become even more lost. I saw a helicopter but it could not see me. It was a bit discouraging to say the least. After climbing over two mountain ranges I ended up at a river. This river became the path I chose for the remaining four days of

my journey. Thursday night I found an overhang and decided to camp for the night. The next day became even more discouraging. Plagued by bugs, thick brush, and unchanging landscapes, I pressed forward. I knew my Higher Power was with me every step of the way. Sometimes, I couldn't help but think that I was dreaming. I believed that if I gave up faith for even a moment I would die.

My friends told me later that after three days the search party was ready to give up on me. I didn't make it easy for them to find me since I refused to litter. All that I had with me was a lighter, cigarettes, a compass, and a back pack. By the fourth day I decided that it was time to eat something. I found a handful of wild berries, some grass chutes, a few nuts, and a lizard that I cooked over a fire. On the fourth day I came to a fork of the river and new hope arose. My Higher Power never gave me more than I could handle. I started to see signs of life: trash, fishing hooks, and



an empty can. I knew that it wouldn't be much longer before I was found.

The terrain was very rough. At one point it took trackers five hours to go just one mile. The trackers were three hours behind me on the fourth day, but I didn't know it.

On the night of the fourth day I had my first real talk with God. I told God that I was running down and that I could not take much more. I knew I was on the path. I prayed for guidance. The next day that is exactly what I got. I was so exhausted that I could only take a few steps before I had to rest. On the fifth day I walked out on my own. After climbing a cliff that was very steep and dangerous, I found a path that led to a road. At the road I flagged down a car and told them that I had been lost in the woods for five days. I asked for a ride. They turned me down! I know for a fact that if they had been recovering addicts I would have been saved there and then. I walked for about four more miles and then the rangers found me. I ended up walking a total of about twelve miles, much of it over

boulders, up mountains, and through streams.

People in the program showed me so much love that it overwhelmed me. I was in the prayers of many, many people.

I learned a lot from my experience. First, God was always with me. My faith was tested, and I would like to believe that I passed. Second, never expect recovery to go the way you think it will go. I never thought that I would ever be cold, hungry, without a place to stay, dirty, or severely fatigued ever again. I was wrong! Third, being lost in the woods was not half as bad as being lost in addiction on the streets. Making the comparison between my active addiction and being lost is one of the things that pulled me through. If you have a Higher Power, you never have to be lost again. God will guide you through everything life can throw at you. My faith was strengthened by my experience.

AB, California

Out of the fog

I was at a meeting last night to celebrate a guy's second recovery birthday. This guy had come to NA eight years ago, the same time I did, at age sixteen. He had hung out in the parking lot, instead of inside the meetings, with many other sixteen-year-olds. He had relapsed many times in the last eight years. Many of the other sixteen-year-olds had gone on to the places that relapsers go. But this guy kept coming back. I was proud of him for that. The topic of the meeting was "Gifts of Recovery."

I began thinking about the last eight years. When I got here, people told me that it takes five years to come out of the fog. I didn't believe them then, but now I do. I looked back at a resume I typed when I had three years clean. Many words were misspelled. I had trouble forming sentences. I was a straight-A student in school, but this disease fried my brain. Gradually all of that has gotten better; I can spell and form sentences again. I had lost many social skills and had to relearn all of that. The same with money management. It is like I was sane, then insane from

using, and now I'm sane again most of the time. However, the insanity can and does return. I'm sure it would return at a deeper level if I used drugs.

This disease is really scary. My boyfriend had five-and-a-half years clean, but recently he relapsed. He now has sixty days, but you could see the difference in him—not just when he was high but afterward, and even now. He is angry all of the time. He has a hard time sitting still for sixty minutes for an NA meeting. He has a lot of inner resistance to attending meetings. He used to love meetings. He feels judged by others, even when that isn't happening.

Besides the level of sanity I now have, my peace of mind and self-esteem are gifts. Negative thinking, shame, mental self-abuse, wanting to use all of the time—all of that is gone. My motives were constantly self-seeking; today they are based on spiritual principles and a positive concern for others. It is a miracle and a spiritual awakening that I care again about myself and others. I had shut down and I just didn't care anymore. I have found a new way of life, new beliefs, new values, a new career, and acceptance of life, self, and others. I have a relationship with my children. I have gotten rid of hate and resentment. I have freedom that I never dreamed of. I have a good feeling in my heart and, above all, a better life.

My list of gifts goes on and on. I have these things because I kept coming back. Thanks NA.

Anonymous



Newsletters

Gratitude is an attitude

From NA Post, the Manhattan, New York area newsletter: I often hear people talk about how grateful they are to be clean and, in the same breath, complain about such things as having to make meetings, their kids, going to work or school, and other things. Gratitude is more than an abstract cliché to be spouted at meetings. Gratitude is an attitude.

When I talk about being grateful to be clean or for being in school, it means I am willing to take the actions necessary to maintain this wonderful feeling.

Not only do meetings keep me clean (as if that weren't enough), they also allow me to help newcomers. They give me a forum for carrying the message; a place to meet and greet friends; a spark to ignite the wonderful chain reaction of hugs, fellowshiping,

phone calls, and more meetings. Making meetings allows me to do for others what was done for me, thereby affirming my gratitude. These are the same actions taken by those who came before me, who show gratitude for the gift they have been given on a daily basis.

Gratitude allows me to live life on life's terms, not in a fantasy rose garden. The ups and downs of life are what it's all about. I'm grateful for the struggles; they allow me to have accomplishments. Actions like showing up on time, studying, doing homework, and maintaining good grades reflect my gratitude for being in school. It's walking the walk that will give me the ability to use the education I acquire. It's that wonderful chain reaction when applied as an attitude, as opposed to a worn out, empty phrase for those unwilling to nurture the true potential of gratitude.

When gratitude is truly incorporated in your life, your attitude changes. The little pains of life don't fester into suffering. Walk with gratitude, cherish it, share it. I've heard it said that grateful addicts don't use. I agree. Gratitude is an attitude I can live with.

GB, New York

The gift of service

From Recovery Review, the Central Maryland area newsletter: As a newcomer I heard people joke that if you don't believe you have any character defects, get into a relationship and take a service position. I didn't know why people made fun of "area circus," but I did see one thing for certain: the people who had what I wanted were involved in some kind of service. Those with shaky recovery were not. I was hearing two conflicting messages. I decided to go to the ASC meeting one Sunday and see what all the hubbub was.

I found that addicts in service were not saints, nor were they agenda-driven egomaniacs. Most were just addicts with the usual faults and strengths trying to be of service to the fellowship that had loved them and saved their lives. I found service appealing. When I had the clean time I became a GSR, and since have served in many other positions. It has really been a challenge to stay God-centered. Some people have gotten into service to avoid working a program. They stay angry, look for enemies, and seek power. But most addicts seem to want only to be of loving service. I have great respect for those who toil anonymously, working for

the good of NA through love.

Early on, service taught me what other spiritual traditions have also said: Those who seek credit and praise get their reward here. Those who give out of love build an inner treasure, far more precious and rich.

One of the misconceptions I sometimes hear addicts spread is the notion that "we have no leaders." Actually, we do have leaders; however, they are "but trusted servants." A trusted servant is like a butler with whom you leave the key to the pantry while you're away. Those who serve need to be those with the least pretense, the kindest spirits, the most humility. They are agents of a loving God. They are messengers; and in an anonymous program they are servants to the message.

I found that the hardest yet finest type of leadership was sponsorship. Helping one newcomer to stop dying is more virtuous than chairing ten committees. When we lead through love; when we build bridges of trust; when we do the work not for credit but out of gratitude; when we encourage others to serve by being good examples of the gift of service—then we build a fellowship where everyone respects and wants to be part of service. Selfless service is said to be the spiritual principle of the Twelfth Step. We carry the message to addicts. It is from this experience that we learn that we keep what we have only by giving it away. It seems that when we are selfish with our recovery, we lose the spirit of recovery. But when we give it away, when we ask, "How can I help?" we enrich our recovery

and strengthen it. We give it deep and sturdy roots. Service for its own sake, centered in love, is the crown of our program.

Anonymous

The misconception of anonymity

From *The Recoverer*, the Washington/North Idaho regional newsletter: I was sharing with a fellow addict recently. He was dismayed because something he shared in a meeting had been repeated back to him by someone who wasn't at the meeting. I told him what someone had told me about the same kind of situation.

In some of our meetings we say, "What you hear here and who you see here, please let it stay here!" Well, where is "here"? Is "here" the meeting place, or is "here" the fellowship? If it's the meeting place, then how am I supposed to carry what I've learned in meetings outside into my life? If it's the meeting, then how can I carry a message that has worked for thousands to John Doe over at the Drugs R Us treatment center?

I believe that when we say our catchy little anonymity statement, we refer to the fellowship as a whole.

If that is the case, then why the useless resentment over one addict sharing with another about what was said in a meeting. The idea that I as an addict might be able to help someone stay clean because of what I said in a meeting thrills me to death, because maybe they'll pass it on. Isn't this the way it's supposed to be? Or is it different when we share intimate personal feelings?

The argument is the same for "who you see here, let it stay here!" I believe that it is okay to say to another addict in the fellowship that you saw so-and-so at your home group meeting.

Our Tenth Tradition identifies "press, radio, and films" as the places we should maintain personal anonymity, not groups, areas, and regions. The tradition was written so we would not be named or identified outside of the fellowship, thus making us truly anonymous. Is it okay then if I say my whole name at closed meetings? Well, of course. Why? Well, because if I truly believe in the people who saved my life, then there should be no problem. I can see why people might hesitate to say their full names, but for me it is all a matter of choice. Recovery has entered every area of my life—work, family, friends—so, personally, I have nothing to hide anymore.

So if people come to you and say, "I heard that you said blah, blah, blah at last week's meeting," be grateful they were listening and that it helped them stay clean one more day.

Thanks for my life.

AB

Forum



What is Motion #39?

At the 1993 World Service Conference, Motion #39 was presented by the Australia Region. It proposed:

"To make the following changes to our steps and traditions: *Step Three:* We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a God of our understanding. *Step Seven:* We humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings. *Step Eleven:* We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a God of our understanding, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out. *Tradition Two:* For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as may be expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

A conference working group recommended that the fellowship consider the following questions when talking about Motion #39:

1. Does the language of the steps and traditions truly reflect the principles of the program?
2. If not, what language does the fellowship feel would better reflect those principles?

Access to this column will remain as open as possible. *The NA Way* will publish your thoughts and feelings on the specific wording in Motion

#39, other suggestions for changing the steps and traditions, or opinions that the steps and traditions should not be changed at all. Feel free to share with other *NA Way* readers your views on this matter.

Out of order

I want to open this letter by pointing out that our text states, "The Twelve Traditions of NA are not negotiable." It also says, "So long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that will tear us apart, all will be well."

Motion #39 is out of order. Why is it when addicts get clean, all of a sudden they want to change stuff? The steps and traditions have been working since 1953 and now, more than forty years later, we want to change the text because some of us have shut down.

I was taught to keep an open mind and don't worry about the words "God," "He," or "Him"—just get a loving and caring power that's greater than myself. So I did, and now, 1,946 days later, I have a God who fits that criteria, and I'm alive and clean because I kept an open mind.

Leave the steps and traditions as is. "If it ain't broke don't fix it." So why are some of us trying to fix something that's working?

As addicts we get clean and want to change the whole damned world.

We need to leave the world alone and change ourselves. The text, as written, works very well. I love NA just the way it is. It saved my life. Today I live only because of NA. Let's not confuse newcomers, because they are the most important people. Let's not negotiate our recovery for the sake of sounding good. Leave the s___ alone. Motion #39 is out of ___ order.

GP, New York

From Germany

I would like to share with you my thoughts about the language in our steps and traditions. First of all, do you consider other countries, cultures, and languages in your discussions? It is probably easy to forget when making statements like "Don't fix it if it ain't broke" that cultures other than the United States have problems with the language of our program. If we are a worldwide fellowship—and I hope we are—I think this fact should be included in any discussion about changing the steps and traditions.

The idea of Motion #39 does not work in German because the word "God" in German is masculine. I'm glad that the German-speaking NA community has a great awareness about sexist language. In our translations we try to eliminate most masculine forms; however, it is a bit complicated. In the German language every word has a gender. That means, for example, that we cannot simply talk about a sponsor because the male designation for that word assumes a sponsor is a man. You have to use a different final syllable if you're talking about a woman. If you want to talk about man and woman you have

say both words. This is what we do. Wherever the word sponsor appears in the literature you see in the German translations "sponsor oder sponsorin." It is complicated, but it reflects an awareness of sexist language.

For me, the gender issue is not the main issue. At the 1993 World Service Conference we brought up another question to discuss: Does the language of the steps and traditions truly reflect the principles of the program?

This is a good question and I would like to see our worldwide fellowship discuss it. I understand why we find the word "God" in this program and not the word "Allah," for instance. It has something to do with the place of origin. NA (and before that, AA) developed in the United States. However, I don't see why we don't use the word "Allah" if we are truly a worldwide fellowship. Or do the countries and cultures with Christian religion have the prerogative? Would you like to read "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of Allah as we understood Him (or Her or whatever)"? I wouldn't like it. It sounds kind of strange for me.

By the way, in the Muslim culture there is no such thing as a personal understanding of a God. Allah is Allah.

How can we expect members in other cultures to relate to our "God"? Even in Germany God is something different than in the United States. People are more influenced by history here. A lot of death and destruction, done in the name of God, has happened in Europe. A lot of people

in NA here don't like the word "God" and use only the words "Higher Power." I do this myself.

I think we have to be more careful with cultural differences. If one part of this world doesn't care what happens in the other part with our program, we end up nurturing our differences. If we try to find a common way we will be united.

I don't know any religion in the world that uses the words "Higher Power." This seems to me the most accurate way in which to convey the spiritual, not religious, nature of our program. I never talked to somebody in the program who had a problem with the words "Higher Power." But I talk to a lot of people in the program who have a problem with the word "God."

I would appreciate a change in the wording of the steps and traditions in this way. There is nothing to be afraid of in a change like that, because we don't change the meaning. Being scared is no reason to go on with a way of talking that discriminates against other cultures, beliefs, and many women in the program. My Higher Power tells me to be careful with and respectful of other people. There can be nothing wrong with changing the language of the program in a way that affords great respect to everyone. If we take care of each other, a Higher Power will take care of us and the program.

BH, Germany

Whose will for whom?

I'm Mike, and I'm a happily recovering addict. I've been reading the January 1994 issue of *The NA Way* while doing my laundry.

Just in that simple act there are the truths of more than one blessing granted to me from God through our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. For one, I'm actually doing the laundry. While active I was a real pig and couldn't care less if I stank or had on dirty clothes. It didn't matter. That was my will at the time. When I did do my laundry, while active, I'd be smoking dope, drinking, shooting up in the laundromat bathroom, or on the phone making a deal to get more. God has done miracles in my life through this program.

I have become more open, honest, and willing to listen and try to do God's will for me. You asked us to write about Motion #39 with the light of our principles shining on our thoughts. What seems most significant to me is the changes proposed to the Second Tradition.

In the new wording we would be reverting into our self-centered disease. The way it is worded and the changes to the steps show self-will wanting to take control again. Instead of only changing the "He" to "God" or "HP," the proposal would change the identification of *whose* will we are to try and follow. The change in Tradition Two would make the meaning change from God's will for us to our will for God being expressed in the group conscience.

There is a difference between staying in recovery or drifting back into active addiction: Us doing God's will for us, or God doing our will for us. Can you see the disease?

MS, Maine

Time out

A fellow addict's recent comment that we read too much at our meetings sent me on a word count of Narcotics Anonymous readings. I compared "Who Is an Addict?" "What Is the NA Program?" "Why Are We Here?" and "How It Works" to the readings done by a similar fellowship. The results revealed that we read about thirty percent more or three minutes longer than the other fellowship during the opening of the meeting.

The addict also implied, in passing, that we should cut to the chase by eliminating some of our reading cards. No! I thought. I bleed at the image of one reading card being amiss. Let he who is free of grins cast out the first card. For What is a Who without a How or a Why? And How rudderless is a What and a Why minus a Who?

The word count revealed that NA's reading cards, including "Just for Today," netted about 1,200 words compared to 850 words from the similar fellowship. The results:

A person reading at an average speed can finish NA's readings in about eight minutes compared to five minutes in a similar fellowship. If an NA group meets 365 times annually, the extra time equals 1,095 minutes or about eighteen hours per year. I believe those eighteen hours are well spent, adding to the meeting rather than detracting from it. The readings are a system whose whole equals more than the sum of its parts. To

remove one would be the same as Elvis proved dead, Joe without DiMaggio, the Tower of Pisa stood straight. I am beaten at the thought.

On another note, a meeting that starts three minutes late each night loses eighteen entire meetings per year—meetings which many addicts may need. Think about it. And pass me a reading card, please.

Anonymous

One addict's experience with prescription medication

Over the last ten years or so, I have heard the topic of prescription medication being brought up for discussion at meetings. There have been as many ideas and judgments generated about this subject as there are NA members. The following is of course only my personal experience and opinion on this somewhat controversial issue. Therefore, please take it that way and keep an open mind.

The program suggests that when we use drugs in any form, we release our addiction all over again. On the other hand, of course, certain health situations may arise that require medication. However, it is a normal reaction for addicts to want to medicate themselves when experiencing any form of discomfort. I have discov-

ered, through my own experience, that my addiction will tell me I am in more pain or discomfort than I really am.

After spending a number of years clean in the program, addictive thinking reared its seductive head. My first mistake was rationalizing that since part of my recovery was to make amends to myself, I needed surgery to correct a physical complication created through active addiction. Of course, we all are aware that if surgery is to be performed, narcotics are usually part of the procedure.

Not being honest about my addiction and recovery with the surgeon, or with myself for that matter, was my second error. Ignoring the progressive nature of addiction completely, I had rationalized that since I had been clean a number of years, I had transcended the disease and, therefore, I was no longer powerless over my addiction.

This insane, progressive, addict-like thinking led me to the operating room feeling the old excitement of an addict ready to score! Coming out of the operating room I felt exactly like I did when I first came through the doors of Narcotics Anonymous: confused, angry, resentful, paranoid, full of blame, guilt, remorse, bitterness, despair, and a mind that would not stop chattering. The old defensiveness was back in full force. When a couple of members of the program came to visit me in the hospital during my so-called recovery, I would not look them in the eyes. The shame and paranoia were overwhelming. My false pride and arrogant ego were in full swing. Yes! I was powerless! I had released my addiction all over again! Honesty—gone! Open-

ness—gone! Willingness—gone! Addiction was in full control of my life once again.

It was a number of very painful years before I once again fell to my knees defeated by the agonizing isolation. As I picked up a white key tag, tears rolling down my cheeks for the first time in many years, the stark reality of my powerlessness was firmly entrenched in my mind.

A number of months passed, two more key tags, and addiction took control once again. The progressive nature of the disease? Everything I was ever told from the experience of fellow addicts was coming up in my own unmanageable life. I came to believe that I could choose between continuing to learn through painful experience or learn through spiritual principles; the decision was my own. Although painful experience was certainly much more familiar—and somehow I still felt more deserving of it—I made a decision to try spiritual principles instead. I constantly try to remind myself that my addiction practices the principle of patience as well and will wait a long time for me to heed its seductive voice.

By the grace of God, I am back in the program, hearing once again the all-too-familiar topic of the use of prescription medication being brought up again and again. As I listen, I hear the patient voice of addiction saying, "Yes, it's okay if it is prescribed by a doctor." But now there is another voice as well which humbly repeats from our literature, "For we know that when we use drugs in any form, or substitute one for another, we release our addiction all over again."

JB, Ontario

From our readers



Cared for

Step Three is a major step in my recovery. What a miracle! I'm blessed to be able to see that my will was sick, unhealthy, manipulative, and insane. Step Three takes a major load off my shoulders. It feels good to know that my God has and will always take care of me. Each day I pray for Him to keep me open-minded and willing to hear His messages. Those messages may come to me in meetings, through others, or maybe just in a gut sense.

I believe that everything happens for a reason: God's reason. All that happens—whether I like it or not—is part of His plan. When I become willing to look past my own will, knowing that self-will is self-defeating, I can see that God's plan is for the best. God has been trying to help me all along, but I was blind; I focused so much on what I thought was best that I couldn't see God's will.

Today I realize that I don't have the power I thought I had in my addiction. I believe my God has all power. God has proven that to me by helping me and keeping me open-minded and clean so far. He has changed my way of thinking, and I'm actually able to be grateful today. Each morning I pray for God to fill my heart, soul, body, mind, thinking, actions, words, and entire being with

His love, serenity, and goodness so that I may do what He wants me to do each day. When God is in charge—and I choose for Him to be one day at a time—I feel an awful lot of the burdens are off my back, and it opens the door for His will to be done, not mine. I'm so very grateful to have God in my life today!

DA, Florida

Nothing to fear

I've just finished reading the July 1993 issue of *The NA Way Magazine*. Actually the word "reading" is an understatement, it is an experience and another learning opportunity in my recovery.

I would like to share my experience, strength, and hope on the Fourth Step, which I am in the process of completing.

As I worked the first Three Steps, I was beset with doubts about my ability to work them "right." When I came to NA, I was determined to be the "perfect" recovering addict, which left me little room for mistakes and, consequently, little room for self-tolerance, patience, and self-love. I had begun to experience glimpses of awareness, of the power of the fellowship, and of God working in the lives of others. One of the things that kept me coming back during those first

scary months was that I believed that you believed that this program works and could work for me.

When I started writing on my Fourth Step, I simply asked the God of my understanding to guide me and help me see his will for me. I believe all the things my sponsor told me: I'm right where I'm supposed to be. What gets written is exactly as it should be.

I experience freedom and truly believe God is with me as I walk again through the moments of my past. Time and time again I have experienced miracles as I've written about the fear and pain of the past. Today, I can see it for what it is and no longer have to carry it with me. I feel compassion for those I've wronged and hurt and am developing compassion for myself as I face my life honestly. I accept that I'm not perfect in any sense.

It's difficult to express my gratitude for the God I have in my life as I'm being guided through this step. Like many addicts I was initially fearful of facing memories of what I believe were the horrors of my past. I now see it took what it took to get me to where I am today. I'm grateful for this program which has given me an awareness of the God in my life. My sponsor says it keeps getting better, and I'm excited and eager to experience more of this miracle called recovery.

Anonymous

Needs to feel safe

I was sitting here at my desk at the end of my day reading *The NA Way* and figured, what the heck, I'll write.

I'm a woman addict who has been around NA for six years, and I have three years clean. What's wrong with this picture? Absolutely nothing. As they say, it takes what it takes, and I am right where I am supposed to be.

Speaking of where I am supposed to be does not feel very inspiring. At two and a half years clean, I began receiving treatment for depression. This happened only after countless attempts to think I could manage on my own, along with denial, fear, anger, and sadness that I may have to take something on a daily basis just to be ok.

I was very abusive to the men in my life, a pattern that began at least ten years ago. I hit bottom with this behavior after a very destructive, insane situation. I finally admitted that maybe I needed more than just NA and weekly therapy sessions. I've been on an antidepressant for about six months now. I haven't been enraged to an insane degree since. It seems that I have the ability to think before I act. I rarely have a problem with the fact that I am on medication. I do, however, get caught up in thinking about what you think of me. The bottom line for me is that I don't get loaded! I take my medication as it is prescribed, but I can only share about it with a select few. A big part of me wants to just take this to a meeting and lay it out on the table. I've stayed clean for three years by not keeping secrets from anyone. Feeling like I can't share freely with everyone and feel safe doing it scares me to death. In my heart of hearts I know that all that really matters is what goes on between me and my HP.

I said a prayer, and I talked with another recovering addict, and I'm still here! If there is anyone out there reading this right now and you have a problem with my choices, please call your sponsor, and please keep your judgements and opinions to yourself because sometimes they hurt.

Anonymous, California

Growing and giving

I'm a grateful recovering addict, today and for the last sixteen months, through the grace of God as I understand him and the program of Narcotics Anonymous. Today I respect the disease of addiction so much that I go to any lengths to stay clean and continue in the process of recovery. I was in and out of the program for four years until 8 August 1992, when the bottom I hit was bad enough to make me surrender. I was the type of addict who only cried out when I was desperate, and God as I understand him led me to an NA meeting in the basement of a church.

It's a must for me to give back to the program what has been given to me. Through making meetings on a regular basis, being involved in service work, and being there for the new members, I'm slowly growing. I have a long way to go but, thanks to NA, I know that I'm never alone. I owe my life to the program. I love you all today because I love myself.

JP, Michigan

We need articles!

Remember that *The NA Way Magazine* is your meeting in print. Like any other meeting of which you're a part, you'll get the most out of this one by participating. Let your voice be part of the message that gets carried during the meeting. Write! We are in need of material right now, so don't wait.

Who writes these articles?

You do!

The articles you see in this magazine are written by NA members like yourself. You need not consider yourself a skilled writer. You don't have to know all the rules of grammar. We have an editorial team whose job it is to take care of those details. What we need is your unique perspective on the NA program. Without it, we don't have a message to carry.

What should I write about?

Write about any topic related to recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Share with our readers the same way you would share with other addicts at any other NA meeting. Is there a topic you've enjoyed hearing or sharing about lately? Are you working a particular step, and having some eye-opening experiences? Has there been a turning point in your recovery? Tell us about it. We'd love to hear from you.

Comin' up

Calendar						
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AUSTRALIA

New South Wales: 30 Sep - 2 Oct; Sydney Combined Area Convention; info 61-2-552-4354; SCACNA, 72 Darghan St, Glebe, NSW, AUSTRALIA 2037

CANADA

British Columbia: 28-30 Oct; 17th Pacific Northwest Convention; Vancouver; rsvns (604) 689-9211; info (604) 876-4055; PNWCNA-17, PO Box 43066, Burnaby, BC V6G 4S2

Quebec: 7-9 Oct; 7th Quebec Regional Convention; rsvns (819) 822-1989; info (819) 563-7809; QRCNA-7, CP 463, Sherbrooke, Quebec J1H 5J7

Saskatchewan: 2-4 Sep; 8th Central Saskatchewan Area Convention; info (306) 652-5216; CSACNA-8, Box 9718, Saskatoon, Sask. S7K 7G5

IRELAND

Dublin: 11-13 Nov; 10th Irish Convention; Hotel Kilkenny; info Irish Convention; c/o Service Office, 4/5 Eustace Street, Dublin 2

MEXICO

Baja California Norte: 14-16 Oct; 2nd Baja California Convention; Tijuana; rsvns (800) 333-3333; info US 011-52-66-80-90-80 or Mexico 66-80-90-80; CBCNA-2; 1329 3rd Avenue #116, Chula Vista, CA 91911

UNITED STATES

Alabama: 8-11 Sep; 1st Greater Birmingham Area Convention; Guntersville; rsvns (205) 571-5444; info GBACNA-1, PO Box 320818, Birmingham, AL 35232

Alaska: 23-25 Sep; 10th Alaska Regional Convention; Anchorage; info (907) 248-7955; Convention Committee, 401 W International #18, Anchorage, AK 99518

Florida: 30 Sep - 3 Oct; 10th Year Anniversary; Tampa; info (813) 875-4357; rsvns (813) 265-2694; Anniversary, Box 9730, Tampa, FL 33674

2) 6-9 Oct; 2nd South Florida Regional Convention; Fort Myers; info (813) 575-7751; SFRCNA-2, PO Box 70155, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33307

3) 3-6 Nov; 13th Serenity in the Sun Convention; info (407) 547-0590; PCNA-13, 314 Plymouth Rd, W Palm Beach, FL 33405

Georgia: 13-15 Jan 1995; 7th Peace in Recovery; Augusta; rsvns (706) 855-8100; info (706) 860-8784

Hawaii: 27-30 Oct; 3rd Hawaii Regional Convention; Maui; info (808) 878-3444; Hawaii Convention, 190 Ali'iolani Street, Pukalani, HI 96768

Iowa: 2-5 Sep; 9th SWINA; Red Oak; info (712) 323-2309 or (712) 243-1628

Louisiana: 21-23 Oct; 2nd New Orleans Area Convention; New Orleans; rsvns (504) 523-0376; info (800) 824-3859; NOACNA-2, PO Box 52212, New Orleans, LA 70152

Maine: 9-11 Sep; 11th South Maine Area Convention; Alfred; rsvns (207) 633-2081; info (207) 882-6114; PO Box 5309, Portland, ME 04101

Maryland: 1-4 Sep; 24th World Convention of Narcotics Anonymous; info WCNA-24, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409

Massachusetts: 30 Sep - 2 Oct; 2nd Cape Cod Area Convention; info (508) 255-1822; CCACNA-2, PO Box 684, Hyannis, MA 02601

2) 15 Oct; Central Massachusetts Area H&I Learning Day; Worcester; info (508) 791-3855 or (508) 792-1621

Michigan: 13-16 Apr 1995; 3rd Detroit Area Convention; Detroit; rsvns (800) 228-3000; hotel (313) 899-0023; info (313) 261-4214; speaker tapes requested (five years clean) send to: DACNA-3 Program Committee, PO Box 241221, Detroit, MI 48224

Missouri: 9-11 Sep; 2nd Tri-Lakes and Branson Campout; Blue Eye; rsvns (417) 779-4154; info (417) 739-2550

2) 11-13 Nov; Show-Me Regional PI Learning Dys; St. Louis; rsvns (314) 821-6600; info (314) 381-5965

Nebraska: 16-18 Sep; 11th Nebraska Regional Convention; Bellevue; hotel (800) 228-5151; info (402) 346-7535; NRCNA, Box 886, Bellevue, NE 68005

North Carolina: 30 Sep -2 Oct; 3rd Central Piedmont Area Convention; Salisbury; rsvns (704) 637-3100; info (704) 892-7233; CPACNA-3, PO Box 282, Landis, NC 28088

Ohio: 9-11 Sep; 8th Serenity in the Wood; Hamilton, info (513) 829-3915; Hamilton/Middletown ASC, PO Box 8594, Middletown, OH 45042

Oregon: 11-13 Nov; 8th Western States PI Learning Days; Portland; info (503) 224-8345; PIC-8, PO Box 262, Eugene, OR 97440

Pennsylvania: 18-20 Nov; 12th Tri-State Area Convention; info call collect (412) 322-5337; TSRSO, 24 Woodville Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15220

Tennessee: 24-27 Nov; 12th Volunteer Regional Convention; Knoxville, helpline (800) 233-1234; info (615) 483-9427; VRC-12, PO Box 53244, Knoxville, TN 37950

2) 11-12 Feb 1995; Upper Cumberland Area 3rd Anniversary; Cookeville; info (615) 498-2885; Cumberland Area Anniversary, PO Box 164, Rickman, TN 38580

Texas: 16-18 Sep; 7th Best Little Regional Convention

Virginia: 8 Oct; Annual Virginia Convention Golf Fundraiser; Richmond; rsvns (804) 273-1611; info (804) 756-7000; AVCNA Golf Fundraiser, PO Box 25244, Richmond, VA 23260

Washington: 16-18 Sep; 11th Spiritual Connection; Oak Harbor; helpline (206) 428-7171; info NPSA, PO Box 1001, Mt. Vernon, WA 98273

Wisconsin: 14-16 Oct; 11th Wisconsin State Convention; rsvns (800) EMBASSY; info (414) 437-5664; WSNAC-11, PO Box 12503, Green Bay, WI 54303

Wyoming: 23-25 Sep; Unity Convention; info (307) 789-7746; CUNA Convention, PO Box 2792, Rock Springs, WY 82901

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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 nonprofit 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
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