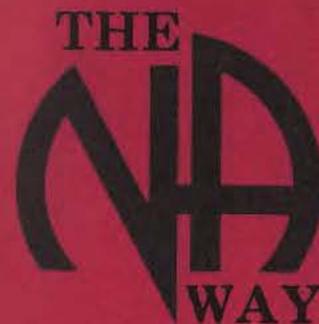


**My Gratitude Speaks
When I Care
And When I Share
With Others
The N.A. Way.**



**FEBRUARY
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Recovery is my Life





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N.A.

N.A. is a non-profit 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 to stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only *one* requirement for membership, the honest desire to stop using. There are no musts in N.A., but 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*.

All members of Narcotics Anonymous are invited to participate in this "meeting in print." Send all input along with a signed copyright release form to: The N.A. Way; World Service Office, Inc.; 16155 Wyandotte St.; Van Nuys, CA 91406

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Recovery

Up until my first high, I never felt comfortable with another human being. I always felt like I was much different from anyone else. I lived in a fantasy-world most of the time, doing just enough to get adequate grades in school. I never had a crowd that I felt a part of. I bounced from one crowd to the next, always looking for a place to fit in. I loved sports, but was uncoordinated. I loved music, but couldn't carry a tune. I grew very negative towards people.

When I was 15, I got a job in a restaurant, and I began to feel like I'd found my niche in life. The people I worked with seemed to like and accept me, and it was through them that I learned the pleasures of getting high. For two years, I worked in restaurants and got high regularly and life was a lot of fun for me. My grades in school plummeted and my family grew distraught, but I felt like I was really living for the first time.

I was in a parochial high school and hated it, so I transferred to the public school where my using friends went, and we got high regularly. On weekends I would hitch-hike to a college, where drugs and parties were never-ending, and life became a real adventure.

One night I threw a big party in my parents' house, and over 100 people showed up. I had visions of Woodstock in my own living room. My parents gave me an ultimatum. They were moving to another state where my father had been transferred, and they told me that I would either come with them, or never be considered a part of the family again. For some reason I decided to go with them. This was the first of many attempts by my family to intervene in my progressing addiction. It worked for a short while.

is My Life

In our new environment, we grew very close as a family. I didn't use for three months, and began to feel the love and acceptance of my family for the first time in my life. I saw using as a phase of growing up that I'd gone through, and now I was mature and above that lifestyle. I finished high school with good grades, found a girl friend and discovered a love of writing. I took trips all over New England, getting off on the history and culture of that whole area. I got involved with a youth group, and for the first time had straight friends I felt comfortable with.

Then, on graduation night, someone offered me a hit of mescaline, and it had been a while, so I figured one time wouldn't hurt. I had my first bumper trip that night, and I became alienated and withdrawn from my family, my new friends and my girlfriend. I didn't want to get high, but I had an overwhelming compulsion to just die. What followed was a long summer of just working and committing slow suicide every night. I became so depressed that I could no longer work, so I quit my job and vegetated for awhile. I tried returning to my old hometown, but it didn't work. My old friends were doing the same things, but I had changed. I reached out to my mother for help—she was a recovering alcoholic. At the time, I thought I had a severe mental disorder. There was no N.A. around then.

She found a psychiatrist, and I began my first of many attempts to figure out what was wrong with me. The psychiatrist put me on anti-depressants, and for a while I began to feel better. I had not yet learned how to be honest, so she couldn't really help me.

I went to college, and felt so isolated and different that I was afraid to be around other students.

Then I went on a weekend retreat with the youth group, and fell in love. I started getting high again that weekend, and turned a lot of my straight friends on to the joys of getting high. Again, I felt a new life surging through me, and I stopped fighting the fact that I felt most comfortable when I was high.

I no longer needed the psychiatrist, and I was off and running. I got involved with the school newspaper, started a coffehouse, got involved with a presidential campaign, and joined a church folk-singing group. As long as I stayed high, I was able to keep going with all of these things.

I grew to truly love my drugs, until they stopped working for me, and everything fell apart again. I would get so high that people began to question my sanity, and friends grew to distrust me. I couldn't find the energy to keep up with all of my new interests, and one by one they fell away from me. I fell back into a worse depression, and this time I felt like I'd never pull out of it. I went back to the psychiatrist, but this time the anti-depressants didn't do anything for me. I still couldn't be honest about my drug usage, so no progress at all was made with her. In despair, I joined the Navy in hopes of changing my life and finding some discipline and peace of mind.

In the service, I learned how to get high regularly and still get up for work. I got into harder drugs, hung out with the hard-partiers, and figured that as long as I did my job and kept my record clean, everything was all right. There were many addicts around me, so I was not alone. I enjoyed traveling all over the world, but I began to notice that it never seemed to matter where in the world I was; if drugs were available, it was a good port, if they were not, I felt stranded. The drug alcohol was always a last resort, as that was available everywhere, but I was never content until I found the best stuff.

I maintained this lifestyle for four years, until my last long cruise to the Mediterranean. In seven months, my ship only pulled into port a few times, and I was forced to stay straight most of the time. This is when I discovered how important drugs had become to my ability to function and get along with people.

During the last month of the cruise, in an act of rage towards the captain of the ship, I shut down the reactor and put the ship "dead-in-the-water" while it was on a search-and-rescue mission. I was never caught, but I found it very difficult to live with the guilt and the fear of being caught.

When we returned to the states, I dove back into my full-blown addiction, using constantly. I could no longer perform my duties in the engine room, and after attempting to kill an officer, I went AWOL. My insanity was at its peak. I traveled all over the country, getting high and getting sicker. I blamed my addiction on the Navy, and swore that when I got my discharge I would stop.

After several months, I was picked up and turned in to the authorities. I managed to con my way into an honorable discharge, and began my attempts to stop using. I could not do it. Everywhere I went, drugs were there, and I couldn't resist picking them up. I got real scared; I kept putting my foot down and swearing that I'd stop tomorrow, but tomorrow never came.

I wound up back in my home port, living in a rundown apartment with 10 other addicts, using as much and as often as I could (which was all day, every day) until I knew I was close to death. I returned home to my parents house to "rest up" for a few days, and it was then that I admitted defeat and asked for help. I believed that I was too far gone to be helped, but I never wanted to use again. I was totally bankrupt in every area. My mother pointed me in the direction of several rehabilitation centers, but I would never stay for longer than a couple days.

I felt hopeless; I couldn't stand to be around people. I tried another Fellowship, but I had trouble relating. My parents told me that if I didn't use, I was welcome to stay with them. Today, I know that this saved my life. Though they couldn't understand the extent of my illness, they were willing to help however they could. For seven months, I just watched T.V. and slept. I was afraid to venture out into the world, for fear that I would get high. (cont. on pg. 20)



The Miracle Lives in Detroit

Dear Family,

My name is M—, and I am an addict. I've been in recovery since August '83, and an active N.A. member since October '83, and I'm very grateful that I get my recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. Metro Detroit N.A. has been alive and kicking for only 30 months, and were growing like a weed.

My first introduction to N.A. was at a ritzy treatment center. This program says the appropriate word for me—"narcotics" but people there said, "Don't go to N.A. they don't have enough credibility." But you know how it is when you tell an addict not to do something. Can you relate? You see I needed the identification of one addict helping another to break down my denial. A strange thing started to happen when I came to N.A. meetings: I could see other addicts getting better, and you know, I can now see myself getting better too.

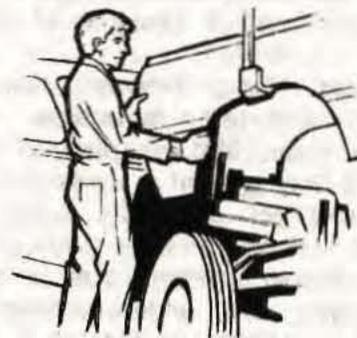
Don't get me wrong—I've had my pitfalls; I've gotten lost in work, in relationships, service, another Fellowship, self-centeredness—lost in space! Like my sponsor said, "don't take this powerlessness and unmanageability for granted." I have learned to work the steps in all my affairs, to the best of my ability, JUST FOR TODAY! The Twelve Steps of N.A. are the only relief I get; the steps are meant to give relief, not to persecute.

When I came to N.A. there were five meetings; now there are 30. We are a very active area; we have a help-line sub-committee, a P.I. sub-committee, H&I sub-committee and a Lit sub-committee. I am very grateful to my God and the Fellowship for letting me be a part of this beautiful experience. When I first came here I never knew it would be this wonderful—and you know what?—it keeps getting better.

I would like to thank everyone in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous for pointing the way to more joy and happiness than I ever imagined, and a freedom that words can't explain.

M.Z.
Michigan

Motor City N.A. -- Truckin'!





Living Steps

Six and Seven

I came into this program with a pretty warped sense of what it meant to be a human being. When I first heard the steps read, I got hung up on the Sixth and Seventh. "What's the difference," I thought, "between a character defect and a shortcoming?" The word conjured up those old feelings of being bad, or evil. I had heard of the "Seven Deadly Sins": pride, anger, lust, gluttony, greed, envy and sloth. I was afraid I was a hopeless case, because I was full of all that stuff.

I was no stranger to asking God to remove my defects. For years before I found my way to N.A., I regularly asked Him to remove my obsession to use. I'd ask—then I'd use. I'd be in jail or in court, or I'd be sick, and I'd ask sincerely for help to stop using; then when it was all over, I'd be high. I felt like one big character defect, and I thought if God was smart, he'd remove me.

When I found N.A., I was offered a solution. Rather than the isolated instances of desperately petitioning God for help, and no plan of action to make use of that help, I was given a systematic, step-by-step way to recognize and act on God's help.

One of the things I have come to love most about the Twelve Steps is their simple depth. They're not complicated, yet my understanding of how they work changes and becomes richer each time I try to apply them. Even though some members have sudden spiritual experiences that remove the obsession to use, most of us slowly put together that spiritual awakening over a period of time by applying the steps. And those whose awakenings are more dramatic must also

use the steps as a framework for keeping and enriching that spiritual gift. I have yet to see anyone stay clean who didn't eventually start applying the principles of recovery in their lives.

My first experiences with Steps Six and Seven were a bit confusing, because I had a hard time distinguishing my character defects from other character traits that were not defects. For example, I knew pride was a central part of my disease, but did that mean I was to have no pride in my work, my family, my membership in N.A.? A closer look at my Fourth and Fifth Steps helped me there. The defect of pride refers to the ego problems that cause me to refuse to accept advice or face my faults. My pride wants what it wants when it wants it; it demands what it feels it deserves; it tries to take all the credit or all the blame; it boasts to mask inadequacy. That other, healthier kind of pride springs from my ability to love, and my self-esteem. Because I learned to work the steps in order, I was able to become clear on which defects I needed to pray to have removed in Steps Six and Seven.

In this new framework for asking God to help, I found that I must follow up my petitions with a willingness to act. For my obsession to use, the action was simple: no dope—no more! Get involved in the lifestyle of recovery, and make use of the support. For my other defects, the solution was perhaps less obvious, but just as action oriented. I needed to read the literature, and carry on with the Steps. That meant making amends, learning to continue to be honest with myself about myself, learning to practice meditation, and learning to help others.

In other words, to have relief from pride, I must practice humility. For me, some examples of that practice include obeying laws, cooperating with the plans of others, not forcing my opinions all the time, practicing frequent acts of kindness, expressing gratitude, and showing that gratitude in my actions. To get out of self, I must meditate on the characters of spiritual people I admire, like Gandhi, Christ, or St. Francis. I read and meditate on the words of spiritual writers. I meditate on the emptiness of fame and

applause, These actions help me to reap the spiritual fruits of Steps Six and Seven.

Some character defects seem more stubborn than others, and just won't seem to go away in spite of these efforts. I guess I'm not ready yet. I don't have to fall into self-loathing about them any more, though, because the steps have allowed me to make a lot of progress over the years. I don't suffer from belligerence and arrogance like I used to. I've learned to accept myself more for what I am, and what I'm becoming, and to reject myself less for what I am not.

T.M.
Hawaii



Service and Recovery

I came to my first N.A. meeting on March 16, 1983. The meeting was held in a church hall. I was quite afraid when I walked in the door. People came up to me and asked me my name and offered me a cup of coffee. When the meeting started they turned out the lights, and the room was dark except for the candles that were on the table. After the meeting was in progress I started to feel a little more comfortable. During the meeting people told me that I never had to go back out there again, a day at a time, and to keep coming back. I liked that because no one ever told me to come back-ever. By that time I knew that I belonged here. I kept going to meetings, got a sponsor, and found a home group. I had about three months clean when I was asked if I would like to be the secretary of my home group. At first I was afraid to say yes, but the other members of my home group told me that it would be a good way to get into service work. I told them that I would do it.

For the first time in my life, I felt that I was doing something good. I kept coming to our business meetings and I was able to put in my two cents worth. I was able to welcome the newcomers to their first meeting the way I was welcomed when I came to my first meeting. I strongly believe that service work has been a big part of my recovery in N.A. I was given a chance to get involved in some subcommittees and do more service work and to further help carry the message of recovery to the addicts who are still out there. The only way I can keep anything is by giving it away to the new person. I am going to be celebrating two years clean on March 16, 1985. I have to give all the credit to the program of Narcotics Anonymous.

D.P.
Oregon



Leadership

in NA

I've always been a rebel. If authority figures believed one way, I would try to help them see the flaws in their thinking (and I wondered why I had feelings of rejection around them). As my addiction progressed, that rebellious nature was often carried to the extremes of belligerence. At my worst, I was a competitive, self-centered person.

I was told at various times growing up that I had "leadership qualities." I could see there was some truth to that. Among friends, I often made the decisions; I served on student council; some people looked to me for advice or support. As my disease progressed, and my rebellious nature worsened, I loved playing the rebel-leader role. I was willing to confront the teacher for a laugh from my peers, or to be a spokesman in class for the drug users. I learned to equate leadership with the power rush that came with commanding center stage.

Eventually, whatever leadership role I used to play among peers was lost to my addiction. People lost respect for me as it became more obvious that addiction had control of me. Any influence I exerted over people (which was minimal) was reduced to manipulation or intimidation. I was in a state of self-hate over that, and I was using heavily on top of all those feelings, when I found N.A.

The first order of business was to clean up. I went to meetings, got a sponsor, and gave my best shot to the Twelve Steps. That gross over-simplification pretty well sums up my first couple of years in N.A. Throughout that time, I regularly heard such things as, "To keep it, you have to give it away," and "Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict

who still suffers." I knew that my continued growth depended upon getting involved in sponsorship and service.

By that time, some life was pumped back into me, and those "leadership qualities," whatever they are, were beginning to re-emerge. People were beginning to ask me to be their sponsor, and I was taking a look at group level service. About then, I noticed a curious thing about Narcotics Anonymous. Members at about that same stage of personal development in recovery were leaving. They were either viewing N.A. as immature and non-conformist, so they were switching over to another Fellowship that had a lot of stable "old-timers" around, or they were "graduating" from N.A., often to come back later after a relapse. That didn't sit too well with me.

Ironically, there was some truth to what they were saying, but that truth stemmed from the fact that people like them wouldn't stick around and change things! If nobody in N.A. who was settling into a lifestyle of stability and maturity stuck around to provide those things to the N.A. community, was it any wonder that the local N.A. atmosphere wasn't stable and mature?

A couple of things were obvious to me. One, I didn't really have the age, maturity or depth in recovery to do much about all of that, and two, I was damn well going to roll up my sleeves and try. First I made a firm commitment not to leave N.A. I was going to stick it out, which was really no sweat, because I love N.A. Secondly, I had to muster some support.

I began to discuss this issue with others who had been around a while. Soon we had a core group of people who were committed to the idea of going to work on the basic atmosphere of our group. We decided that the best approach would be to start a new group from scratch that would be meticulously traditions oriented, that would focus squarely on solutions via the Twelve Steps, and that would actively present service as an attractive opportunity for growth.

We knew we didn't have all the answers to the problems that would arise, so before we ever even held

a meeting of our new group, we began reading every scrap of literature on the traditions that we could find. That meant looking at some the literature of the other Fellowship, since we had none of our own, and the traditions originated there. We met as a steering committee weekly to discuss our reading, and to design our group in a way that best highlighted the steps, the traditions and service. We settled on a speaker meeting format, and began to have regular meetings.

Happily, this is an N.A. success story. The group took off like a rocket, and though there have been some ups and downs as we learned about trusted servant rotation, it remains today, almost five years later, a thriving, recovery-oriented N.A. group. Several other groups have since sprung up in our relatively small city; we formed an area, and then a region. Today there is an abundance of recovering addicts around who go to only N.A., who have a deep commitment to the Fellowship and are becoming productive members of society.

Together, we learned a great deal about leadership through all this. First of all, the phrase, "we have no leaders" is simply incorrect. An older member once challenged that statement in this way: "Who," he asked, "are but trusted servants, according to Tradition Two?" Leadership in N.A. is a living, vital need. Tradition Two simply speaks to leadership style. Our leaders serve, they don't govern.

Another lesson we learned, sometimes the hard way, is that to be a good leader in N.A., one must be an equally good follower. That is, the group will welcome the leadership of a member who is well informed, and open to the opinions of others. A leader needs to be well read in all conference approved literature, and to keep channels of communication open with available "elder statesmen" in the Fellowship. We found, when we had no local N.A. elder statesmen, that those old A.A. fossils often had some pearls of wisdom for us too. Today the N.A. experience is abundant around the country, so the phone has also been a valuable tool.

A good leader, as a good follower, will respect group conscience. In our town, some have tried to

dominate service committee meetings with passionate, power-driven speeches, and usually only succeeded in intimidating and dividing the group. Others have tried to speak from a well-reasoned, well-informed, dispassionate vantage point, and then accepted the democratic decision of group conscience on the matter. The tone of those meeting feels a lot healthier to me.

A leader in N.A. is also a role model. Whether we face it or not, after some clean time, we become an influence on newer members. One challenge of responsible leadership is to become aware of that influence, and learn to "practice these principles in all our affairs," and carry ourselves as "acceptable, responsible and productive members of society."

Finally, a good leader knows when to step back a pace and let someone else don the mantle of leadership. "Trusted servants" who jealously guard their turf, and won't yield the reins to the next generation of members, usually end up in some real trouble with this disease. Their plight is often described as the "bleeding deacon" role. I have felt those growing pains, and I wish them on no one. The elder statesman, on the other hand, will trust group conscience (even when it needs to learn from its own mistakes) and will recede into the background as a resource for the new people on the "front lines."

So I may not be what I could be or what I'm going to be, but thank God I'm not what I used to be. Narcotics Anonymous has given me an arena in which to work out some of those old character defects, and learn how to cooperate with people. Many times I have sat in a staff meeting at work, or a committee meeting for some volunteer organization, and thanked my Higher Power for using N.A. to give me a chance at a new personality. I can be a member of society today without secretly feeling like an infiltrator. I have learned some basic principles of cooperating with others in this world from a rag-tag band of rebels learning from each other at the same time. How we did that is beyond me. Beyond us all . . .

R.H.
North Dakota

FIRM GROUND

Being a clean addict is a blessing, being a clean addict is at times a struggle, and being a clean addict means that when I'm experiencing one of life's pains, I have a place to go for support. N.A. has given me a refuge when life is giving out more than I can handle. We can handle any difficulties that I can't. There have been times in my recovery (the exception rather than the rule) that I have experienced pain and uncertainty. I question what I'm doing and where I'm going. It is those times that N.A. gives me just what I need: unconditional love. N.A. is there to listen without judgement and care without expectation. N.A. provides for me the pit stop for what at times seems to be a real rat-race called life. I've found that N.A. is good firm ground.

I've kept regular contact with my sponsor, my group, and my friends, who are always there for me. These things don't take my pain away, but they do give me the support and encouragement to work through it. Another thing N.A. gives me is a spiritual connection. My growth in a conscious contact with God sometimes becomes stagnant. Seeing my fellow addicts growing spiritually enhances my spiritual growth. My guidance from God seems to flow through conversations about the miracles of this program. I want to thank my sponsor for encouraging me to subscribe to the N.A. Way magazine, and to write articles; that involvement seems to be enhancing my recovery.

In Fellowship,
T.B.
Minnesota

Powerlessness, Unmanageability and Humility



There are three very, very important words within the Twelve Steps of N.A. They were quite mysterious and confusing when they were first presented to me. I wanted to pass over them; I didn't really know what they meant to my life and my recovery. It was only after a newcomer at a panel asked me, "What do powerlessness, unmanageability, and humility mean?" that I became aware of the impact of these words and principles on my life.

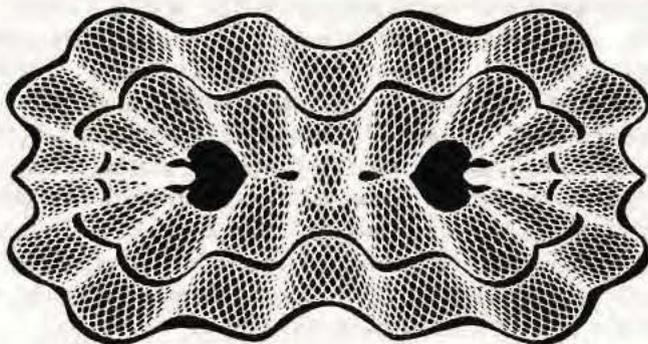
When I initially went through the steps, powerlessness and unmanageability were descriptions of my life of active addiction. My sponsor was quite insistent that I inventory the feelings that I had encountered, not just the situations and the disasters that developed. As I finished Steps Five, Six and Seven, a new view of God, the world, and my life began to develop. I began to experience humility as that vision grew. I began to live my life from an entirely different perspective. My obsession with my own self importance had been invaded by a sense of awe and respect for God's creation.

But it was only as I seriously worked toward the completion of the steps that my spiritual awakening came to me. Powerlessness, unmanageability, and humility were all part of the same thing. They were a description of the spiritual qualities of my life in recovery. I knew that I was then, and that I would always be, powerless—and not simply simply over drugs, addiction, persons, places, and things, but as an essential spiritual truth of my life.

Unmanageability was not a lack of ability, but simply the result of not facing my powerlessness. Humility seemed to bring the whole idea together. I am just a human being, a recovering addict, who through the grace of God has been given a chance to live a clean life in the Fellowship of N.A. This is not a weakness or a defeat. It is simply the natural order of things that my over inflated ego and drug clouded mind could not see.

As I understand God today, He is the creator, the supplier of the power of my recovery, and the One who is in control of the circumstances of my life. It is as though practicing these principles in all my affairs has established a new vantage point from which to judge the quality of my life: in essence, a new sanity has been restored.

P.S.
California



The Twelve Traditions

Help to

Keep Me Clean

We all know that recovery from addiction happens as a direct result of working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous; the Twelve Traditions are often seen as just some "rules" that service committees need to worry about, not as a significant part of personal recovery. The longer I am clean, the more I become aware that the Twelve Traditions are an important part of my recovery. Today I realize that if it were not for the traditions, I could not stay clean.

The traditions insure N.A. unity. Unity means that I don't ever have to feel alone again. Because N.A. maintains unity, I have contact with older members of N.A. who give me guidance in working the steps. My experience of God has come through the channel of a unified N.A. Certainly the traditions make my recovery possible.

N.A. groups are the vehicles for giving away recovery. If they lack unity, they don't do that effectively, and the suffering addict is deprived of the message. Giving away recovery enhances the recovery of the giver. A Unified N.A. group provides the setting for that. Anyone with a desire to stop using can come to a group held together by trusted servants, its primary purpose "to carry the message to addicts who still suffers." The traditions thus safeguard the recovery of both the carrier and the receiver of the message.

The heart of this program is sharing, so our primary purpose is simple. We don't need special training or professional expertise to carry the message. We don't do it for pay or prestige, but simply to stay clean, and as an expression of gratitude to the Fellowship. We don't need any special equipment or facilities. We need no promotion. From the heart of one addict to another, spurred on by a spiritual attraction, we grow and grow. The success of our program speaks for itself.

And anonymity—this simple principle protects us from our own defects of character and personality. When anonymity means genuine humility on a personal level, individual differences have no real power to divide us. Such humility is also the foundation of our silence on social issues and controversies. We take no sides as a Fellowship, so we can keep our energies free to focus on our primary purpose.

So do the traditions keep me clean? Of course they do. They provide the conditions under which we can effectively work the steps together. The spiritual benefits of those principles give me the freedom to live. I can make myself visible and available to serve this Fellowship. I can give freely and gratefully of my time and service and resources. The traditions turn that "I" into "we," and together we recover. In this way, N.A. has given me much more than I could ever have of myself. I thank God for putting N.A. in my life.

J.F.
Washington

Recovery is My Life *(cont. from pg. 4)*

Then, I checked into a V.A. hospital to be treated for depression, and I was put back onto anti-depressant drugs. I found a job, and started working in a paper warehouse. For about a year, I seemed to be doing all right, but then I started to smoke pot on occasion. The occasions grew more frequent, and then I discovered opium and cocaine, and again I was off-and-running. It seemed different this time, but the only thing that had changed was the people and my situation.

I grew to where I had to be high to perform my duties; I was now a warehouse manager. I bought my drugs from the people who worked for me. I lost their respect, and the company began to question my judgement. Fate stepped in when my best friend died. He'd been fighting Hodgkins Disease for two years, and five days before he died, he had pulled me out of a cocaine-induced coma. His death brought me to my knees, and I cried for the first time in years. I felt a very deep loss, and I spent months searching for the meaning of it all. I would just go to work, come home, get high, and cry.

I began to look at his life, at the many good things that people said about him after his death. He was not an addict, yet he had been true and honest to me as a friend for many years. He had lived by spiritual principles, and he had always displayed an inner strength and a love of life which I had truly admired. I asked God why He took him, and not me. I seemed like a worthless human being, whereas he had always given of himself to others.

Somewhere during those long months of looking at his life and my life, I experienced a revelation of sorts. It occurred to me that he had had a disease, and that from the time he had found out about his disease, he had done everything he could to stay alive. I remembered his periods of remission—he would be so calm and serene. Then it occurred to me that that's what we had in common. I, too, had a disease. I didn't understand it, but I could feel it deep inside. I

remember feeling so calm inside that night, when I finally knew what was wrong with me. I'd been exposed to the disease concept of alcoholism, but I knew that what I had was similar, but it involved more than just alcohol.

I started attending meetings of another Twelve Step Fellowship, and the feeling of remission began to come over me during those meetings. I was afraid to talk, because when I did, people didn't seem to know what to say to me. I felt different from them, but they accepted me with love, and told me to keep coming back. I did.

One night a person my age spoke, and he related to drugs in his story, and he referred to his addiction, and he talked in terms of recovery instead of sobriety. I felt an instant kinship with him, and after the meeting I asked him a lot of questions. For the first time, I got answers that made sense to me. He was like me. His thoughts were my thoughts. It blew my mind! He told me about Narcotics Anonymous, and as he talked, I hung on every word. N.A. was just starting up in that area, and he told me about a meeting close by that he and another addict had just started. He asked me to come to it.

For the rest of that week, I was excited about attending that meeting. I could feel that something very special was about to happen to me. For once in my life, I was not let down. At my first N.A. meeting, I knew that I'd finally found what I was looking for. The energy and love and honesty that I felt in that room were something I'd always been looking for in drugs but had never found. Now it was here. I felt like I'd died and gone to N.A.! It truly felt like heaven.

Meetings were few and far between at that time, but my newfound friend would call me up and ask if I wanted to go to a meeting that was two hours away, and I'd say "Yes!" Every meeting, my joy and feeling of newfound life grew.

After a couple of weeks of going to meetings every day, I went back to some old friends to tell them all about my newfound freedom. I wasn't there for five minutes before I got high. It was the only

thing I knew to do in that situation. I thought I'd blown my only chance at recovery! But when I returned to meetings, I was accepted with love and understanding. I made a commitment to make recovery my life, and to let nothing come between me and my recovery. I have been clean ever since.

After my return to meetings, I heard people talking about sponsors, so I asked someone to sponsor me. He was a lot like me, and he helped me a great deal through those first few months of recovery. He was always there when I needed him, and he shared with me the importance of working the steps in my life, and with his guidance, I began to apply them to my life. None of the steps came easy for me, but it seemed that the harder I worked at them, the more positive results I got. I wrote out a Fourth Step, and for the first time in my life, saw the insane patterns that ran through all of my relationships, and began to see some of my character defects for what they were. The relationships that I had begun to develop with God and my sponsor helped a lot while I was writing these things down. Those relationships also helped me to admit to God and to myself the exact nature of my wrongs. The day that I shared my Fifth Step with my sponsor was one that I will always remember. It was the beginning of my journey towards spiritual growth, and I have never felt alone since.

I got involved in service two weeks after I got clean, and this has formed the backbone of my program. I started by cleaning up after meetings and making coffee and dumping ashtrays. Doing this gave me a very warm feeling inside, and made me feel like I was making a contribution to the cause. I made the coffee for two different meetings for three months. This kept me coming around, even when I didn't feel like it. A step meeting I was attending decided to quit violating the Sixth Tradition, and removed the step book of another Fellowship from its tables, setting out to develop material about the Twelve Steps of N.A. This happened when I had several weeks clean, and was my introduction to literature work. We would meet each week in a member's apartment and discuss each step, one per week. Our discussions would be taped,

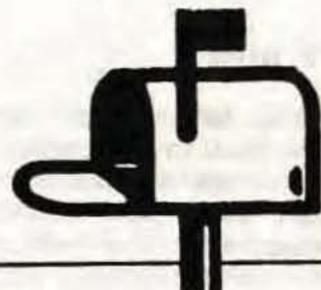
and then I was asked to transcribe these tapes into writing. I felt the importance of this work, and spent every free moment at the typewriter.

A bunch of us went to the first East Coast Convention, and there we met addicts from all over the country who were involved in writing a Basic Text on recovery through N.A. It was a weekend of many miracles, and seeds that were planted that weekend have taken root and grown into thousands of miracles all over the world.

At that time, there were fifteen meetings in the entire Tri-State Area where I was from. In the next year, we would watch N.A. grow to over 75 meetings in that same area. I got involved in public information for N.A., and began to learn how to talk to non-addicts about N.A. We were now part of a Fellowship-wide effort to write our Basic Text, and that year was the most exciting year I have ever lived through. I got to know recovering addicts from all over the world, and the feeling of "We," not "I," became a way of life for me. After many, many conferences and workshops, and a lot of waiting and praying, Our Basic Text became approved by the Fellowship to be printed and published. A year later, I saw the first edition of this book sitting in a fellow member's living room, and experienced a moment of gratitude and hope that I could not describe. Today, I am experiencing feeling happy, joyous and free on a daily basis, and I know that all I have to do to maintain this feeling is to keep attending meetings regularly, work the steps on a daily basis with the guidance of my sponsor, and always be willing to do whatever is necessary to grow in recovery. Recovery is not simply the most important thing in my life today....it IS my life!

A Gratefully Recovering Addict

Letters from Our Readers . . .



Dear N.A. Way,

I am writing on behalf of the N.A. Fellowship here in New Jersey regarding our magazine. I feel there is a serious problem with your depiction of the Fellowship, and I would like someone on staff to address my concern.

The pictures drawn by your artist(s) show, almost without exception, N.A. members as young and white. Except for a very occasional, slightly "spanish-looking" male, no ethnic minority or older person is ever illustrated by the N.A. Way. Your drawings do not do service to us here in New Jersey nor are they an accurate reflection of the Fellowship at large. Please go through your back issues, including those published in Ohio, for verification of this.

I believe it will be far better to stop drawing people at all then to continue this practice. Can anyone be found who is willing and able to draw black men and women or people over 40? A proportionate representation of these groups must be included in each issue; otherwise, you will continue to present a very inaccurate and askewed image of N.A. in our only magazine.

Thank you for a response to this inquiry.

Very Truly Yours,
J.C.
New Jersey

Editor's note:

You have called attention to an ongoing problem we have had in producing the magazine. We have not had an artist on staff, so we have been confined to using art work from a cut-out book that is not designed specifically for our use. The biases you mentioned reflect the limitations of that source. We have been lucky at times to find cut-outs that adequately reflect the theme, but I agree that we need a greater cross-section of types of people to be more representative of our Fellowship. To address this problem, we are now searching for an artist who can design sketches that will more closely reflect the theme of each article and the make-up of our Fellowship. In the meantime, your comments are appreciated, and we will strive for a more diverse selection of cut-outs.

R.H.
Editor

Dear N.A. Way,

I take this opportunity to write you this letter concerning our present situation in the Fellowship. We are meeting regularly at our appointed time and place, and sharing with each other our recovery through the N.A. Steps and Traditions. Using the literature you sent us, we are trying to live our lives, "one day at a time." Our group is the only one of its kind in the area, and as far as I know, the only one in East Africa. Thank you, WSO, for taking the time to be in contact with us. With your help, we are working hard to build a good foundation to keep our group in existence for some time to come.

P.O.
Kenya, Africa

P.S. Please find enclosed our subscription.

Dear N.A. Way,

I read with amazement the letter from the member in Louisanna (November 1984 p. 19) which claimed that the WSC Literature Committee already had enough to do without being asked to work on improving the Basic Text. Surely, the Basic Text surpasses all other literature in its importance to the Fellowship.

I like the name "Basic Text" for our book. However, if we are going to call it a Basic Text, let's make it worthy of the name. In my opinion, any book claiming to be the Basic Text of recovery from addiction should contain all the information needed to work the Twelve Steps. Writing a Fourth Step is a very basic and necessary action. Some people, especially newcomers and some groups and areas, cannot afford multiple pieces of literature. We should have a book about which we can say with confidence, "This will tell you everything you really need to know."

Out here in the flatlands, there is no such thing as "advanced program." One does not move on to different tools after a period of time clean. The basics are always what is needed for recovery for any addict. The Fellowship should begin now revising its book so that it better provides those basics.

B.J.
Kansas

Dear N.A. Way,

I am writing this letter to express my gratitude to our Fellowship for our Basic Text Narcotics Anonymous. Through the grace of my Higher Power, I have just celebrated one year clean, and I wish to thank the world experience of thousands of recovering addicts as expressed in our Basic Text. The book has played a very important part in my recovery—teaching me the N.A. way of life and answering many of my questions when our group had no experience—we are a young group learning together to live life clean. I have worked and am working the steps according to Narcotics Anonymous. By working the steps, I am slowly but surely achieving a freedom from the prison of addiction. I have read at least a chapter a day since I have been clean, and most of the time I feel very close to my Higher Power after feeling the power of the words I have read. The book is more than just words, it is full of feelings—pain, sadness, joy, and hope—feelings I am glad to feel today. The chapter "Recovery and Relapse" blows me away every time I read it (which is often). "Recovery and Relapse" is just an awesome piece of experience, strength, and hope that helped save my life when I first came to N.A. I am sure that our text can be improved as others have expressed—I just wanted to say that I think the book Narcotics Anonymous is great, and that I am clean today because of my home group, my Higher Power, and the book Narcotics Anonymous. Thanks, and love to you all.

Anonymous
North Carolina

P.S. I really get a lot out of the N.A. Way—keep up the super work!

Dear N.A. Way,

In recent issues, several letters to the editor have appeared discussing the merits of the Basic Text. A certain amount of controversy is apparent; some members complain that the book is poorly written, hard to read and amateurish, while others state that the book was divinely inspired and is perfectly adequate. The World Literature Committee has no opinion on any of these comments. We do, however, offer a simple answer. We have begun a process wherein all literature produced by the world Literature Committee will be professionally edited prior to typesetting. This will ensure consistent and correct use of grammatical structures such as punctuation, spelling, capitalization, gender and number usage, etc. This process will begin with the Basic Text.

This process will not, however, include rewriting the text. Major content changes such as revising, inserting or deleting concepts or ideas is a more complicated process. The Procedural Guidelines for the Creation and Development of New Literature, which were approved at WSC-84, allow for the revision of approved literature at least every five years. Any comments or suggestions for the revision of the Basic Text should be directed, in writing, to the World Literature Committee. These comments will be collected and utilized in a future workshop for this purpose.

In Loving Service,
Ginni S., Chair
World Literature Committee

Editor's note:

With these letters we close our discussion of our Basic Text in the Magazine. In August of last year we ran a letter which had some challenging things to say about our book, and as the responses began coming in, we realized that it would be unfair not to print them as well. We therefore printed letters in subsequent issues presenting various views about the issue in question. At this point we feel all sides were given a fair hearing.

This is a "learn as you grow" program, and this magazine is not exempt from that. We never intended that this section of your magazine become a forum for Fellowship debate; we view ourselves as a "portable N.A. meeting," and as such our primary purpose is "to carry the message to the addict who still suffers." Your experience, strength and hope are still needed on an on-going basis to accomplish that. We'd love to hear from you on any aspect of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

R.H.
Editor

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Comin' Up

This space has been reserved for coming events anywhere in N.A. If you wish to list an event, send us a flier or note at least two months in advance. Include title, location, dates, contacts.

ALASKA: 1st Annual Alaskan Convention; Anchorage Intl. Airport Inn; Anchorage, AK; Feb 22-24, 85; call (907) Wendy 346-3767 or Boyd 562-5986. Write Conv. Committee, 423 Lynnwood Dr., Anch., AK 99502

ARIZONA: Western States Unity Convention-2; Phoenix Hilton; Phoenix, AZ; Jun 21-23, 85; Write WSDUNA-2, Box 13311, Tucson, AZ 85732

CALIFORNIA: 1) 7th Annual Northern California Convention; Red Lion Motor Inn; Sacramento, CA; March 22-24, 85.

2) World Service Conference of N.A.; Best Western (Airtel Plaza), 7277 Valjean St, Van Nuys, CA; Apr 29-May 3, 85; for reservations, USA call 1-800-528-1234; Canada call 1-800-288-8993

COLORADO: Colorado Regional Service Conference; Boulder, CO; Mar 16, 85; workshops/meeting/dance; Colette 383-443-6557, Steve 443-8187

GEORGIA: Georgia RCNA 4; Macon Hilton, 188 1st St.; Macon, GA; Feb 14-17, 85; (912) Paul 741-7645 or Andrea 746-4213. Piedmont Area N.A., Box 4362, Macon, GA 31201

HAWAII: 1st Annual Hawaiian Weekend Roundup; Camp Homeland, Oahu; Feb 1-3, 85; Tom 808-254-3718 Write 322 Iliwahi Lp, Kilauea, HI 96734

INDIANA: Mid Coast RCNA; Atkinson Hotel, Indianapolis IN; Nov 1-3, 85; write Box 2182, Indianapolis, IN 46206

LOUISIANA: 3rd Annual Louisiana RCNA; Oak Manor Hotel, Baton Rouge, LA; Mar 8-10, 85; call (504) Tommy 675-8118 or Billy 275-2318.

MARYLAND: 6th East Coast Convention of N.A.; Towson State Univ., Baltimore, MD; Jun 21-23, 85; write Box 26513, Baltimore, MD 21287

MICHIGAN: Central Great Lakes RCNA; Valley Plaza, Midland, MI; July 5-7, 85; call (517) Will 684-9168 or Greg 686-7622.

MINNESOTA: Upper Midwest RCNA-II; Moorhead State University, Moorhead, MN; June 7-9, 85; Gary 781-293-7888; Box 9803 Fargo, ND 58109

OHIO: NAI Awareness Day; Stratford St Paul's United Methodist Church in Delaware, OH; Mar 30, 85 9am; Pete 614-387-7788 Mary 513-323-3357

OKLAHOMA: 3rd Annual Mid-America Convention of N.A.; Sheraton Inn, Tulsa, OK; March 22-24, 85; Bob 417-623-1223; Mark 918-749-2845.

PENNSYLVANIA: Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference of N.A.; George Washington Motor Lodge, Allentown PA; Mar 1-3, 85; call 215-439-8449 or write LAASC, Box 4475, Allentown, PA 18015

WASHINGTON: South Puget Sound Area "New Beginnings"; St. Martin of Tours, Pife WA; Feb 6, 85; Dan 752-5843

WASHINGTON D.C.: 15th Annual World Convention of N.A. (WCNA-15); Aug 29-Sept 1, 85; write WCNA-15, Box 2232, Washington, D.C.

WEST VIRGINIA: West Virginia Convention of N.A.-II; Cedar Lakes Camp and Conference Center, Ripley WV; May 18-12, 85; Call (384) Barry 757-7537 or Phil 292-8896