

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

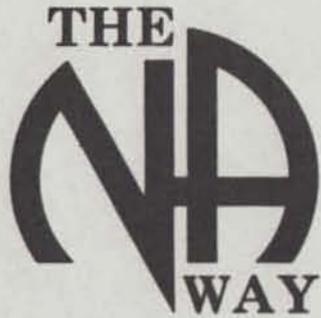
**THE
NA
WAY**

**JANUARY
1986**

VOLUME 4

NUMBER 1





THE INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL OF THE FELLOWSHIP
OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

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What is Narcotics Anonymous?

N.A. is a worldwide 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. It doesn't matter which drugs you used, or what you have done in the past. We are concerned only with how we can help addicts recover. It costs nothing to be a member of N.A.—there are no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. 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*. For more information about the N.A. groups nearest you, write us at the address below.

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. P.O. Box 9999; Van Nuys, CA 91409

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 those steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

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Reservations, No Matter What They Are

Over a year ago I met a man in prison. He was a lot like me: using drugs, hurting, hating covering his feelings, and isolating himself. We wrote to each other and had visits in the prison visiting room. I gave him money sometimes when I had it, and took him clothes. I even let him call collect.

One day after I'd known him a while he told me that his soul was in the hands of the devil, and he couldn't be freed from that power. I walked out on him because even though I used, I believed in God I couldn't accept his ideas. I cut off all contact with him, I didn't write or accept calls.

My life was going to hell all around me. I was losing my job, my apartment, my own self-respect, and finally the respect of my family and friends. I used heavier and heavier trying to escape from my own reality.

After I lost my job, I started looking for another one—anything to keep my habit supplied. I answered an ad for a babysitter job. I had an interview with my potential employer. She asked me, "Do you use drugs?" I gave her the most honest sounding answer I could, "No, I don't do that!" Just to look at me you wouldn't know that I used. She bought it, and I got the job watching her kids. I eventually found out where she went at night. "Meetings." I thought she was an "ex-drunk" or something. One thing was for sure—there was something very different about her that I just couldn't figure out.

I had to move back home to my parents' house because I couldn't pay my bills. That was just fine—one less thing for me to worry about. Good old mom and dad would lend me money to do what I "needed" to do. Things had changed around home though, and I wasn't very comfortable there at all. They were much less tolerant of my using. They didn't hesitate to jump on me about it, and they made sure I knew all the things I wasn't doing around their house for them. I thought they owed me a place to live—they were my parents. I shouldn't have to hassle with them.

I kept babysitting, and things still weren't making much sense to me about what was really going on with this woman. She always got lots of phone calls, and she said things that I really wondered about, but didn't understand.

One night this girl from across the street called, she needed to talk to someone, so I told her to come on over. She did. I did most of the talking though. I told her that I just smoked pot and drank. "I used to do hard drugs, but I don't do them anymore." I lied, and said "it's no problem—too bad you can't handle it!" She told me she had a choice, and that she didn't have to use, and that Narcotics Anonymous was really helping her. For some reason I kept remembering her words for the next couple of weeks. I was hurting.

It was around Christmas and there were lots of parties. I went and couldn't seem to get high enough. I couldn't fill myself up enough to be satisfied. Her words kept returning to my thoughts, so I used more in an attempt to forget them. All the time I wondered... "could those people help me?"

I was supposed to babysit on New Year's Eve, but my employer had called my mom's house to say she didn't need me that day after all. I never got that message because I never went home. I was too ashamed. I had stolen \$20.00 from my mom and she knew I had done it. Because I hadn't gotten the message, I went to babysit that morning. Another lady was there and she asked if I wouldn't like to stay and have some coffee since I was there. I stayed, we talked, and after she had shared quite a bit of herself with me, I admitted to her what had been going on in my life and that I was hurting. I remembered what the girl across the street had said to me, and I asked her what it meant. I wondered if I could do what these other people were doing.

She shared with me, I could tell she meant what she said, and I believed that her new life was right for her. She was happier than she had ever been. She told me I had a choice too, that it was my decision to make. Was I an addict? She explained the symptoms of addiction. I couldn't deny any of them, but I was scared and really wanted to run. I had a New Year's Eve party to go to. "Maybe I'll stop using tomorrow..."

They were busy doing this and that. I got my stuff together, put on my shoes and coat, and was standing by the front door. I couldn't leave without saying good-bye. I told them I wanted to leave. They knew why. They told me it was up to me and that it was okay to be scared of changing. Would I want to try it for today, not to use? They were having a special meeting at their house that night and that I was welcome to stay all day at their house an check out the meeting that night. I stayed, and I liked it. I felt uncomfortable at first, but I listened and could relate. I heard these people share, and realized that whatever it was, it really was working for them. I wanted to know more.

The next day the woman I babysat for—my new friend—told me she would be my temporary sponsor if I wanted her to. I did. She made suggestions to me that I followed. She told me I should go to a meeting, call two recovering addicts with substantial clean time, call her, read "Recovery and Relapse" from the Basic Text and another chapter of my choice. She even suggested that I clean my room and make my bed, get cleaned up and dressed every morning. She shared that all of this had helped her to feel better about herself, so I followed her suggestions; I knew I had to start somewhere. Sometimes I was not willing, but I tried.

Meetings became a part of my life that I could look forward to. I liked them, I felt "wanted" and "a part of" the Fellowship. I got involved with service work right away. I was really busy, and I knew drugs couldn't make me happy. People cared about me and wanted to help me in my recovery. I was feeling happy about me, and the changes that were visible to me.

Later, my "friend" from prison started to write to me again. I wanted to share with him how my life had changed and what was going on in my life now. Deep down, I think I really wanted to "save" him. We started writing, then the calls and visits started again. For a while, that's what my recovery consisted of—approval seeking. He was an escape for me, he altered my mind, moods and thinking.

The guy in prison said he really liked the new part of me I was sharing with him. I was as honest with him as I was capable of, and for some reason expected the same from him. I believed he had the symptoms of the disease of addiction, but I knew he didn't want to believe he had a problem. It was fine for me to live my life in N.A., but he didn't want it for himself. "He could handle his life the way it was." As long as he still got money, letters, visits, calls, and "things," his life was comfortable in his view.

My relationship with him was definitely a reservation in my recovery. I didn't want to look at it for a long time. It really hurt to go to visit and care, then have to leave and hear those bars slam behind me. Of course I was glad to leave, but it bothered me that someone I felt close to was behind bars instead of with me. I felt it could be me behind those bars; I just didn't get caught.

My discomfort lead me to stop visiting. I also slowed down on writing, and told him the phone calls had to stop. I couldn't afford them, in more ways than one. He resented my involvement with N.A. because I was losing interest in him. My whole life was changing. I didn't need to depend on our sick relationship anymore. It had been so comfortable for a long time. There weren't any real commitments, just a dependency that helped us both stay sick.

Our contact became very limited. He finally wrote me a letter. He called me every name in the book. He told me not

to bother writing or visiting, that he didn't want it, he had a new girl from his home town. Deep down I was glad; I was off the hook; but my ego was bruised. My feelings were hurt, yet I wanted to deny it. I wanted to feel anger, not hurt. I was hurting though and felt like using, so I told my sponsor the whole story. First, she told me I never had to keep things from her, then she asked what I expected from a using addict. My expectations were way above what the man was capable of. The pain subsided, faster than I expected. It takes time to let go of my pain and feel my own growth, that's why I'm writing this down, because I need to be rid of it, so I can learn from it. Maybe someone else can even learn from my pain.

My recovery and priorities are in the best order I'm capable of today. I believe what happened to me was my God's will, I am glad to accept it; it feels right. I pray for the man in prison and all the other suffering addicts. I'm grateful, I at least got to plant a seed. Maybe he'll remember the message I tried to carry, when he "needs" it. A line from our Basic Text comes into my mind: "There is no way to graft a new idea on a closed mind." I can only be grateful for what this program has given me, and live it to the best of my ability.

I remember, "Today, I have a choice." I feel good about losing one more reservation, even though losing it was painful. "Reservations, no matter what they are, rob us of obtaining all the benefits this program has to offer." Today, I want all I can get for myself through recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. My Higher Power is lookin' out for me, and has a better way than mine.

Reprinted from the
October, '83 *N.A. Way*



Getting Clean



Hygiene—dental or mental—I've been working on both for the last year and they've both been improving. They're both a little sore around the edges and they're still a little tender. But they're a whole lot brighter 'cause I'm taking care of them. I've been brushing and praying twice a day, which is something I've never done before. I've been seeing a specialist for both, and they have started filling in the decayed areas; now I'm starting to shine. My gums and self esteem were always receding, and white as a ghost, but they're slowly coming back. They're resuming their natural color—which is slightly in the pink.

My tongue is getting much better. It still gives me a little trouble, but I don't have to bite it so much, and that helps keep the pain down.

I've got an appointment next Tuesday for the dental, and one tomorrow night for the mental hygiene. Sometimes these meetings hurt, but that's the only way to fix the areas I've really neglected. Sometimes the areas get real sore and tender and I know I've got to make an appointment right away. I know if I don't take care of these sore spots, the pain becomes excruciating. I know if I wait too long, the only way to stop the pain will be through anesthesia, and I'm allergic to that. I break out in apathy and self pity; the sore parts will never get fixed, they'll just rot away, and it will take a lot of time and a lot of pain to make them well again.

But today these sore spots are doing fine. I'm taking pretty good care of them. There isn't any pain today and the color is in the pink. In fact I think I'm shinning today, so I'm going to take extra good care of myself. I'm going to a meeting.

Anonymous

Willing To Make The Effort to Get It

I'm an addict, and I want to share my story about the use of medication in my recovery. This has been an important issue for me. In my life I have blamed people, things, and ideas for my using. I have learned some hard lessons about this. As our Basic Text says, I am responsible for my own recovery.

I went in the hospital for surgery on my nose before I had any contact with N.A. When they were operating on my nose, a freak accident happened. The ground for the heart monitor and kidney monitor that were attached to my thigh shorted out and severely burned my leg. I was electrocuted while under general anesthetic. Somehow I survived this ordeal, and somehow my leg was saved. The initial electrical shock almost destroyed it, then an infection almost got it, but they did not have to amputate.

When I got home, my situation was frustrating. I couldn't walk without crutches, my driver's license was suspended for medical reasons, I was unable to go back to work. A lot dropped on me all at once. I blamed it on the doctors and started using more and more, with nothing else to do but stay home and get high. The friends who I was using with started to disappear one by one. My feelings were, "What are they gonna do with a guy like me? They have to drive me around, drag me around on crutches, I don't blame them one bit. It would be a hassle for them and I really don't blame them one bit."

Now my friends were gone one by one, I was using harder than ever, I was lonely, feeling sorry for myself, staying home (I didn't find out until later that an addict alone is bad company). Anyway as time passed, I met a member of N.A. who asked me to go to a meeting. I thought, "You're nuts! I'm no addict." Never mind that I couldn't wait until my nose surgery had healed to start snorting again. I had taken off the bandages and re-opened all the wounds. Never mind that my days were filled with staying home alone, getting loaded and sulking. I was no addict.

I am hearing impaired. I can hear slightly, but I mostly read lips. As a result of this, I have learned to listen to my inner feelings about things. I really don't know how to describe it, but a feeling began to come over me as I thought about what that person had said. Maybe I should try one of those meetings she was suggesting. As I see it today, I was forced by a power greater than myself acting on the feelings inside of me to go try N.A. And I did.

I was still using and crippled up when I went to my first meeting. I brought all my self-pity with me. I sat in that room, I couldn't hear, couldn't concentrate enough to read lips, just sat there bored, smoked my cigarettes, drank my coffee, and when it was all over I went home.

But still that feeling stayed with me. I have no real explanation for that. For some reason I tried some more meetings. This time I concentrated on what was being said. To my surprise it paid off! I began to relate.

After going to meetings awhile, I got a sponsor. Best thing I ever did. He was able to help me understand a lot of the things that were still confusing about the program. I made a commitment to stay clean, and I have been clean ever since. I had nerve damage from the accident that was causing severe spasms in my leg. It would go completely out of control a few times a week, and there was no cure in sight. A few times I passed out from the pain. I went to many meetings, but I was afraid that my leg would start shaking and I'd feel awkward and disgusting to look at.

I had to go to the emergency room sixty-eight times to stop the nerve spasms. I had to be administered drugs to stop the spasms. That was the only solution. Some of them were mind altering/mood changing drugs. There was simply no alternative. I went to lots of meetings, stayed close to my sponsor (he even came with me to the doctor sometimes), read the Basic Text every day, and prayed *hard*. Here I was, walking on dangerous ground again, experiencing some of the symptoms of my addiction as a result of these prescribed drugs, and having no other choice.

The N.A. program is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. Thank God I had my sponsor to share this time with. He helped me to see more clearly that I could stay clean throughout all this. I did everything humanly possible to abstain from drugs, and I stayed as willing as possible to work my program. My sponsor's an addict, somebody I trust, I can be confident that he'll know what to do if anything dangerous comes up. That's how I made it through that.

An addict alone is bad company. Even at the hospital undergoing tests (and there were a lot of them, the doctors had never before seen anything like this), this program helped me. One time I got a test taken called a scan. They put me into a tunnel and with two inches all around me, head to toes. That scared me. I yelled to be pulled out and got pulled out. My

sponsor was there to help me through that. He told me how to meditate. I tried it, and it was like a miracle. I completed the test with no more problems.

After a great many tests and procedures, and after they found one medication that I could take in smaller dosages that would prevent the spasms, they finally found another way to help me. I had been real willing to do my physical therapy, and to work my N.A. program of recovery. I had trusted my Higher Power and my sponsor and the principles of this program. I had found a new way of life that I was not going to let go of. Finally I was going to be able to live completely free of medication.

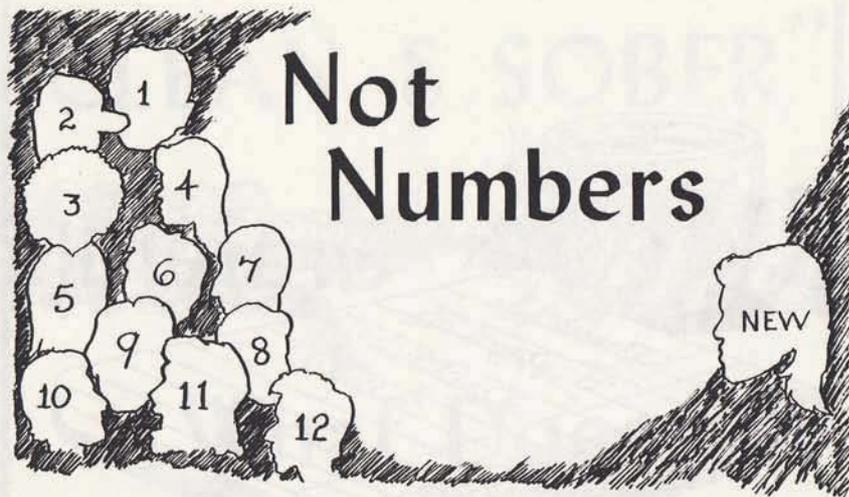
Today I am living drug free, and growing in the N.A. way of life. I am the GSR of a new meeting of N.A. at which we have a sign language interpreter for the hearing impaired. I am one of the fortunate ones who has been able to grow in recovery in spite of some problems, and I feel really free today. The hospital sent me to a psychiatrist a couple of times through all of this, and he just kept looking at me... "Are you sure you're not depressed? How are you making it through all this with no job, no license, no cure in sight?" I told him I have a program and a Higher Power, so I also have a positive attitude. I think he's taking a closer look at Narcotics Anonymous.

But I do want to say something to N.A. members who have to take medications. During that time I was told that I may always have to take these medicines, and I knew I had no choice. I had surrendered, I had become willing, and I had developed a positive attitude about my recovery. I found a sponsor who could understand this issue, and talked to my friends about it. I was truly recovering. My Higher Power was with me through it all. And I know I'm not special. My heart was in my recovery, that's all; if yours is, you can do this too. I was so tired of my old life, and today all of my energy goes into my new one. No one can take that away from me, or from you.

I pray that all addicts will open up to each other and share with whomever they're comfortable, and I think we all can help each other the N.A. way. I'm living proof that despite obstacles, this program works if you're willing to work it.

T.S.
California

Editor's note: Since this article was written, we have heard more from T.S. He has celebrated 9 months clean, he's walking without a cane -- beyond all the doctors' predictions -- he's gone back to work, and we hear he's still lighting up the meeting rooms with that attitude of trust and willingness that is so evident in this article.



Lately, I have had the opportunity to do a great deal of traveling and attend meetings in areas I hadn't visited before. I'm grateful to see the growth of N.A. and meet others recovering on the N.A. Program.

The Fellowship in the area I come from is small. The first time I attended a meeting where there were a lot of people attending I found myself being envious of that area, of the number of people in that room. I had entered that meeting late, and had not spoken to anyone when I came in. I spent much of that meeting in self-pity because comparing the numbers there to the numbers at home, I came up a bit short. I felt cheated, until after the meeting.

At home, when a newcomer walks in the door, we notice. It's hard not to. We are so grateful to see that person and so desperate to share with a newcomer that we have to be careful our enthusiasm doesn't scare them away. That person gets a lot of attention, to put it mildly. In this large group, a new face (mine) seemed to go unnoticed. Not one person made the first move to welcome me, so I initiated some hugs and shared with several people that I was from out of town, and was struggling to not feel alone there. I am grateful that my recovery allowed me to do this, and that I could see that *quality* and not *quantity* is what is important in meetings. The few addicts at home no longer seem so pitifully inadequate in my mind, as they did throughout that meeting. They are special to me, and to each other. I prayed tonight that when our Fellowship grows, as I know that it will, our group will continue to be aware of new faces, of the newcomer, even if that person is an "oldtimer" who is new to our meeting.

In the meantime, I'll be grateful to return home to my small, but adequate, home group.

Anonymous



Grateful?

I am truly grateful to be alive and belong to Narcotics Anonymous. However, I did not always feel this way. When I first came around, I would be sitting in meetings and hear, "I'm grateful for this and I'm grateful for that." I hated that word "grateful." I could not stand to hear it. I thought, "Grateful"... Maybe *happy*, or *thankful*, but Grateful?" I hated that word.

I stayed around and even used that word now and then. My sponsor would ask me what are you grateful for today? Okay, I'm grateful for a roof over my head, I'm grateful for my children, I'm grateful for my health, I'm grateful for my job. But I still hated that word!

The other day I was sitting in a meeting. The word grateful was being used. I felt differently about it. I thought, why do I not hate to hear that word anymore. Why, all of a sudden, (maybe not all of a sudden, but tonight it seemed all of a sudden) did I accept it! Because today I *feel* grateful. I mean *really feel* grateful inside.

By working the Twelve Steps, I have been able to truly feel today. It's real hard to explain what I really mean, because I never felt the way I do today, from the top of my head, to my heart, to my toes. I can't really explain that feeling, you'll just have to work the steps, traditions, work with a sponsor and be a part of this program to know what I mean.

Thank you N.A.,
Thank you God,
C.S.
California

"CLEAN & SOBER"



What Does it Mean?

Recently, at one of our local meetings, an N.A. member from another town came to share his experience, strength and hope. He identified himself as a "drug addict and an alcoholic" and spoke about being "clean and sober." After the meeting, one of the people I sponsor came up to me and asked, "What does 'clean and sober' mean?"

"Well," I said, "in N.A. we refer to ourselves as being clean, and in another Fellowship, they refer to themselves as being sober, and some people who go to both call themselves 'clean and sober.'" The newcomer asked, "Is there a difference between being clean and being sober?" "Not really," I answered, "but I have always associated being sober as being free from alcohol. In N.A., we say clean because it covers freedom from all mind-altering and mood-changing chemicals."

The newcomer asked, "Then why do some people say they are clean and sober, if the words mean the same thing?" I said, "Probably for the same reason that some people identify themselves as 'drug addict/alcoholics' or as 'cross-addicted alcoholics.' You see, in N.A. there is no such thing as "cross-addiction," and we all recognize that alcohol is a drug, so to call yourself a 'drug addict and a drug addict' doesn't make sense, does it?" The newcomer asked, "Then why do so many

members say they are addict/alcoholics and why do they speak in terms of being "clean and sober?"

I thought for awhile and said, "The only reasons that I can think of are that these members were taught to call themselves addict/alcoholics and that they are not yet familiar with the N.A. perspective on recovery. Or maybe they do not realize that there is a difference between the Fellowships, and they think that it really doesn't matter what you call yourself at a meeting. Or maybe nobody ever sat down and explained why we say what we say in N.A. Maybe these addict/alcoholic members don't know what they are saying or why they are saying it."

The newcomer said, "Well, let's go over and ask that guy why he calls himself a 'drug addict and an alcoholic' and let's ask him why he speaks in terms of being 'clean and sober.' Maybe he is as confused as I am about what he was saying during the meeting." "O.K.," I said, "but let's not be too confrontive and be sure to give the guy a warm N.A. hug."

Many addicts are taught that they need to go to "both" programs if they wish to recover. The rehabs often tell their clients that they should identify themselves as addict/alcoholics because this allows them to go to both programs without causing any problems. However, when a newcomer comes to an N.A. meeting, it is our responsibility to explain the program, the philosophy, and the language of N.A. We share our experience, strength, and hope with the newcomers, and we show them by example that N.A. works. In N.A., we admit that we are powerless over addiction, not over drugs, we call ourselves addicts because it lets us all be equal, and it sets none of us apart from each other, we refer to ourselves as being "clean" because that term covers all drugs. And most importantly, we share that N.A. works, and is sufficient for our recovery.

As our Basic Text states over and over, "We are addicts and our problem is addiction." Let's stop carrying a mixed message, and let's stick to carrying a message of N.A. recovery, which is that any addict with the desire to stop using can recover. Let's stop carrying the message of "clean and sober" and "addict/alcoholic." We have one disease and one recovery process. Let's stop contradicting our literature, and let's stop confusing our newcomers.

N.A. is a separate and distinct Fellowship whose primary purpose is to carry the message of recovery from addiction to the addict who still suffers. A message which must remain pure, simple, and undiluted. N.A. is a simple program, may God help us to keep it that way.

J.D.
New Jersey

Balance



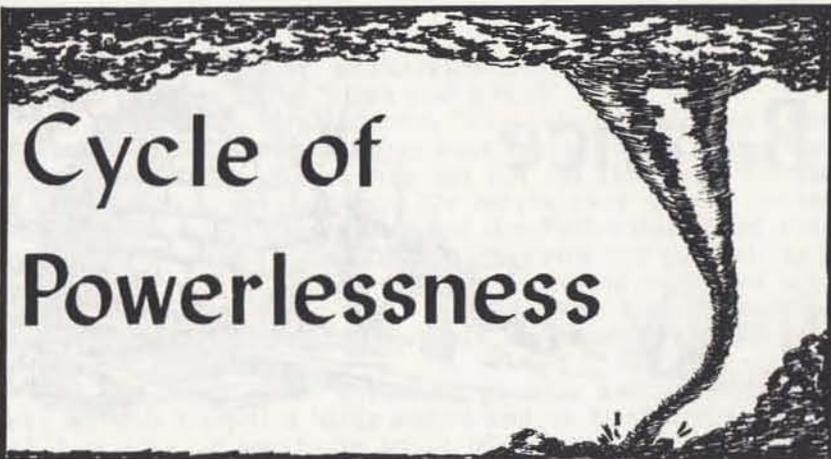
One of the biggest challenges to my program is maintaining a balance in my life. I have several levels of interest and activity that offer challenge and fulfillment. I can easily allow one area to dominate my life and drive me compulsively. I find that maintaining a balance gives me a healthier perspective.

I have my job, my domestic front, and several hobbies, as well as a need and desire for exercise. I also have my recovery, i.e. working the steps, talking to my sponsor, N.A. service, going to meetings, writing for *N.A. Way*. There's nothing I'm willing to give up right now. I like being socially responsible, so I'm involved in a political group. I like knitting and gardening and walking. I know I need recovery or none of the rest would be possible. And I know I need and want to spend time kicking back, relaxing, meditating or dreaming.

My problems start because I tend to focus exclusively on one area, experiencing "tunnel vision," as addicts tend to do. I can become dependent on my political activity, for instance, like a drug. I can get rushes of excitement and lose interest in relationships, responsibilities, and recovery, distorting my attitude. Invariably when this happens I set myself up for disappointment. I construct a series of expectations about people, whose priorities are more survival oriented or family oriented. I've seen the same thing happen to people obsessed with N.A. service.

When I can balance out my activities a little more evenly I find my stress level goes down. My self-esteem (serenity) goes up. Balance doesn't come naturally to me though. I have to schedule my time, to allow myself time for creative expression, knitting or gardening and working my steps. Otherwise the insistent, urgent world would ease out my spiritual outlets. The first three steps have taught me that I can't afford that, so I'll just keep striving for balance each day.

Anonymous



Today for the first time in thirty-two years. I have admitted that I am powerless over my addiction and that my life has become unmanageable. It took me twenty years to come to this simple realization.

I started using drugs when I was twelve years old, and hit my first bottom by the time I reached seventeen. It was at this age that I was institutionalized in a psychiatric ward for three months. I continued to use drugs while undergoing treatment, not realizing—and not being told—I was an addict. Upon release I went into isolation, and quickly relapsed into daily drug use.

Over the next fifteen years I hit several bottoms—each one worse than the previous one. On many occasions I found myself vowing never to use drugs again. However, within a short period of time I went back to using. After many frustrating attempts to quit on my own, I gave in to my addiction and began to smoke pot, incorporating it into my daily life. I eventually came to believe its use was harmless, in fact beneficial.

Speed, cocaine and heroin were also drugs of choice. But as long as I could quit using these drugs for long periods of time, I thought I was clean. I never saw my daily use of pot as a sign of addiction. As time went on, however, my use of harder drugs became more frequent and longer in duration.

Using became a vicious cycle of abstinence and relapse. I would use for a period of time, see the loss of control and unmanageability in my life, abstain, feel the resurfacing pain, remorse and guilt, and pick up that first one to take the edge off of my new "reality." I always forgot why I had quit in the first place, and believed that I could have just one pill, snort or fix.

Towards the end of my using career, the drugs stopped working and started using me. I was compelled to use long after I reached this point. All I ever wanted out of using was

a temporary fix, but I always got trapped in the cycle of powerlessness—forgetting, time and time again, that the first one was never enough, and one always led to another. As the disease progressed, each successive drug foray became longer and longer with shorter and shorter periods of euphoria.

Outwardly, I projected a life of togetherness, hiding my drug addiction from everyone except those closest to me. I supported myself through sporadic employment, graduated from college with honors, and went on to achieve success in my chosen profession. But inside I was plagued with fears and feelings of inadequacy.

I used everything and everybody to get drugs, especially those closest to me. My guilt over this was so great that I was unable to enjoy the good things that did happen in my life, including some professional success. My emotions became distorted and ran to extremes. One moment I would feel like a phony, and the next arrogant and rebellious. In order to feel superior I told myself that I was in the elite of society because I used heroin.

Regardless of where I worked, I always managed to alienate myself from my employer and co-workers. At my last job, my attitude deteriorated to such an extent that people refused to tolerate my arrogance and self-righteousness. They began to ignore me. I became paranoid, thinking they were all scheming behind my back. The feelings of arrogance, coupled with pride, lead me into self-imposed isolation from my co-workers. I felt miserable and alone.

My personal affairs were worse. By this time in my life I had become a master at manipulating men to get money and drugs. I stayed out till all hours of the night, neglecting my son and loved ones. Those closest to me became disgusted with my behavior, hoping to get rid of me somehow, and believing I would never change. After each drug run I would cry and swear that it was the last. Everyone could see that my life was in chaos—everyone except me, of course.

I felt like a derelict walking through the ghetto of my own soul. I didn't know how to live, I didn't know how to belong. The only answer seemed to lie in suicide. Having nothing left to lose, I got down on my knees and begged God to help me. This was the beginning of my new life.

Today I am extremely grateful to N.A. for shattering the illusion in me that I can handle my disease. Narcotics Anonymous reminds me on a daily basis of what I could never remember on my own—"once I use, I am under the control of my disease." Now I know that I will never be cured—nor will I ever be able to control my use of drugs. Thank you for showing me how to live clean, "just for today."

T.Z.
Hawaii

I Never Thought I'd Make It

I was a street whore and a junkie from Virginia, and here I was in a drug treatment center in Florida, not knowing if I wanted to get clean or not. I was real sick. Kicking was tough. I did not know if I wanted to get clean. My parents tricked me into going there. After a couple of weeks of dying pains, I decided I didn't want to feel like that again, but didn't know if I could stop or not. I got mad at the center and left.

I was scared. The first thing I remembered was that we had N.A. meetings in there, so I had better call or I would surely get high. I went to that meeting, then got into a halfway house. I really needed the people and the support. I went to all the meetings I could and read my book. Soon I was going out of town to other area functions. Boy they're great! Before I knew it, I was going to group conscience meetings, area service, and then regional committee meetings. Now I'm alternate GSR and a group coordinator plus I love to help with activities. They are what make some fun times. I wrote my Fourth Step and kept right on moving to Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh. I think it's important to work the steps. I do the First, Second and Third almost daily. You know I never thought I'd make it! I would have surely died without help.

Thanks N.A.
R.C.
Florida

Serenity Prayer

The Serenity Prayer means a lot to me. Sometimes, in the midst of confusion and anger, I say it out loud, centering myself in the situation.

At meetings, when we have a moment of silence to contemplate why we are here, in my empathy for the addict who still suffers, I see myself as I was. Sometimes I see fighting, struggling. Sometimes I see my child, and I am ignoring his needs, yelling at him. Other times, I see that *feeling* I had before coming to N.A.-that total emptiness and despair. I love praying out loud with the N.A. people, after having looked inward, then looking out. Seeing those who have gone before me, my new friends, gives me hope. Like the steps, the Serenity Prayer is so basic and simple. Beautiful. Three things—acceptance, courage, and wisdom. I know I can't change the past. I can, however, change me today, if I open my mind and heart to the help I need. I want the steps to be the basis of my life. I heard someone say about someone else on the N.A. program, "she's like a fanatic about it" and I thought, "Wow, that's what I want to be, an N.A. fanatic."

Another night, at a meeting, the topic was going around about the obsession to use. It dawned on me that night, that I want an obsession for recovery.

All my thanks and gratitude for the people who gave me my life back (better than it ever was), for the Twelve Steps, for loving me, when I hated me, and to the powers that be, for another chance.

Aloha,
C.L.
Hawaii

Clean Dancing

One reason why I found drugs so appealing is that they improved my dancing. When thoroughly intoxicated I lost all fear and created new dances ten years before their time. I believed that drugs would transform me into Mr. Wonderful the dance master. Rejection and ridicule were temporarily deleted from my vocabulary. Without drugs my fear returned big time, and I withdrew into myself.

One obstacle in my social life was my abject terror of asking a girl to dance. Well, I was not as fearful of asking for a dance as I was of the total humiliation I would suffer publicly when she said no. I was sure she would say no, and everyone would laugh at me. Grandiose?-perhaps; low self-esteem?-definitely!

Days before a dance, I would conjure up a vision of devastating social failure and disgrace. I had a planned scenario of travesty for every desirable woman I knew. It was a fear I took out of the dark and nibbled at endlessly but never seemed to consume. Why did I continue this self-torture? Obviously my social life was scant.

But there was a payoff. As long as I knew I would fail there was no point in trying, so most of the time I didn't. Fear of failure and rejection paralyzed me. The more I'd inflate my fear before a dance, the more logical it became to assuage that fear chemically. I didn't just assuage it, I obliterated it and myself.

Today I enjoy dances clean. Our local N.A. groups sponsor many good dances. Often I see the same fear I had in those who attend the dances. The lone male who is intensely interested but somehow can't walk a few feet and say the words that will put an end to his discomfort and help him regain his self-confidence. Perhaps saddest of all is the groups of fellows who seemingly "man talk" their way through an entire evening. Making no contact outside of those they know.

An N.A. dance can be an exercise in recovery. Like all exercises one should warm up first. Greeting and talking to those you know is painless, risk free and sets you in motion. The next step is to do the same thing with someone you know only slightly or not at all. My most frequent social blunders occur when I am talking about something I know nothing about. I know me best so that's where I start. I use the same style with dance partners.

Could a person's behavior at a dance indicate his level of recovery? Maybe so. I know that when I was glued to the wall for the entire evening, something was lacking in my program. And N.A. social events helped me work through that.

R.T.
Missouri

It Works

I am a twenty-three year old addict and a grateful member of Narcotics Anonymous. When I came into the program almost two years ago I thought that I was different. The people in the meetings suggested things to do, things like "get a sponsor, work the steps, find a Higher Power of your understanding, and get involved in service." I wanted to stay clean but I didn't want to do any of these things. As a result of this I almost got with the same attitude and behavior I did while I was on the street--only this time I was clean. I was dishonest with myself and others, I didn't have any self esteem or respect. I felt lost and lonely and was scared to death. It wasn't until I surrendered to my addiction completely that I became willing to try and change. I decided to try what was suggested to me from the beginning. I knew in my heart I had nothing to lose, but I might gain something. I got a sponsor who had five years clean at the time and she had something I wanted. I was scared to work the steps with her, because she might see who I really am. I became trusting in her enough to work the steps, and I started feeling the things which I had lost. My honesty was getting better and the degree of honesty have changed a lot since then. My self-respect started coming back and my self-esteem got a lot better. I felt I had some direction in my life and the fear was being replaced with faith.

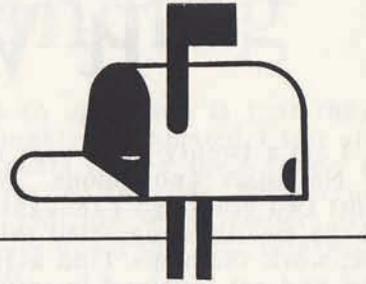
My sponsor knows me really well today and she loves me, not only as another addict or as one of her "babies" but as a person. I found through my sponsor, my Higher Power and the steps, I have also come to love myself.

I haven't lost anything to N.A. but I have gained a whole lot. Today I do the suggested things and I am happy.

It says in our Basic Text that we can only keep what we have by giving it away. I am involved in service, and I work with newcomers. I want to give away what N.A. has given to me. Today I sponsor girls, and its a wonderful experience to watch them change and grow as my sponsor did with me. I love Narcotics Anonymous, my Higher Power, the Fellowship to which I belong, and my sponsor. As long as I do the things that are suggested, and I am willing to grow and change, I will be a member of N.A. one day at a time forever.

In love,
R.R.
Nevada

Letters from Our Readers...



The following letter was written as a cry for help. Usually the articles and letters we print are intended not as cries for help, but, we hope, as answers to those cries that don't reach us. In this instance we decided to print this letter just as it is, without a clear solution outlined. We are sure that this letter will bring to mind someone in your home N.A. community, or perhaps it will speak directly to you. We are confident that the love and compassion this letter generates will put this important set of issues in perspective just a little bit more. We hope this letter generates some loving discussion among you. The solution is left, collectively, to you.

Dear N.A. Way

09205-1

I need some help. Out here on the fringes of civilization, at least as far as the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous is concerned, it is hard for me to keep my sanity. I am the egotistical addict that started the Fellowship here. I got clean and accumulated one and a half years of clean time before moving here twenty months ago.

I realize that it is not my responsibility to go to all of the five meetings we have each week and make sure they start on time, that "proper" meeting format is followed, that the meeting room is cleaned before we leave or that all the other picky details are taken care of, such as traditions and stuff like that that nobody seems to care about, but I am POWERLESS over my addiction.

I know that "We keep what we have only with vigilance..." and meetings don't just happen without the vigilance of all the members of the group, but many in the group keep telling me not to worry, we will be okay. I remind them that the Fellowship has started and folded in two other cities around here, and is down to only one meeting in a third. As best I can find out, our five meetings here are more than the rest of the state combined. I know that God is running the Fellowship, but I hurt when I see people leave to go to the other Fellowship or not come back at all. I wonder if it is my fault, could I have done better, or have I done too much already.

I hurt when I don't have an oldtimer around to talk to. I realize I should just pick up the phone, but I don't have a phone list of oldtimers from whom to choose. And, of course, my situation is different. I am the oldtimer here, and being at the top of the clean time list, being the one who started the group, being the one who is the most outspoken, being the only one who seems to understand that this is a serious business, being the only one who cares, I hurt a lot. And most of the time, when I hurt the most I don't know how to reach out or who to talk to. And when I do reach out I feel a lot like I did in the old days: "You don't understand."

I realize that part of my terminal uniqueness is just that—terminal uniqueness. But please listen carefully. I was always able to find that wonderful understanding and identification from almost anyone in the Fellowship when my hurt and pain was from my *using* days. And even though the hurt and pain *today* is just like those old days—same old feeling in my head and my heart—somehow it's different. One difference I've noticed is that I cannot find that addict with whom I can identify, that addict with whom I can share today's hurt and pain. I can identify with most any newcomer—we have all felt the pains of loneliness and despair while using—but here I sit, a day at a time, wanting to die because I cannot find that identification for my "oldtimer's" problems of today.

I've heard a few of the oldtimers on tape, and I remember how a few of them sounded when I was first getting clean in Miami. I didn't know what the hell they were talking about. I was sure I was different from them, they were talking about feelings, and unity and THE FELLOWSHIP and how we all had better learn all this tradition stuff, and all I wanted to do was go up to them and puke on their clothes and leave. I never, while in Miami or for some time after I got here, ever had the foggiest idea what they were talking about. I could not hear them, and now I sit here and I can hear them from three years ago and 3,000 miles away, but those in the same room cannot hear me. And I hurt like hell.

And just so I don't stay on my pity pot for the full length of this outburst, I have something to say to all the fellow members out there who were the firebrands of your area, all those of you who started the Fellowship in your town or area, all those of you who after starting the Fellowship in your town or area KEPT COMING BACK NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU HURT, all those of you who would not let a tradition violation go unnoticed, all those of you who were vigilant and worried about the Fellowship folding unless we did it your way, all those of you who (if it is anything like the hell I am putting myself through) hurt when we didn't do it your way, I UNDERSTAND AND THANK YOU.

For it is you who gave me my life and the willingness (sometimes feeble) to go on today, right now. It is those of you who, sometimes with your pride and ego sticking out all

over (I thought) who have given me the strength to write this. And if your strength is as I am now feeling it, perhaps I'll even be able to mail this. For it was you who loved and understood Narcotics Anonymous, and it was I who did not.

And even though I now understand what and where you were then, and even though I gain great strength from this understanding, it is still as hard as hell to do it alone. I'm still not well enough to go without a few strokes now and then, and maybe I'm not even well enough to hear them if they are there and I need something that I'm not getting and I'm not sure what it is.

I wanted to get in here also something about how much I know you love the Fellowship and I didn't understand then; and I want you to know I understand now, and that when you love the Fellowship it really shows, and now I love it too and I love you for teaching that love to me.

I've always been a good one for telling others what to do and now I need someone to tell me what to do.

Can you help me?

With love for
Narcotics Anonymous

Dear N.A. Way,

12025-2

Here is some of my story, I am thirty-four years old and come from a sick family. My father is a retired army colonel. My one elder brother has lived in Copenhagen for the past fifteen years. I went to high school here in New Delhi, and after I graduated I left for Germany in 1968. I was there for about three years, and was involved in using mostly street drugs but very little booze. Then I went to Australia where I started drinking heartily. My first marriage broke up there; after 10 months she left me because I used to get drunk and beat her up.

At that time I came back to India, where my drinking progressed and I was introduced to A.A. in 1975. But again I thought I was too young to be an alcoholic and couldn't imagine life without alcohol.

Went to Sweden in 1977. I got married again and turned into a full fledged alcoholic, I mean the consequences of my addiction were all happening, but still I couldn't stop using, wife left me, I attempted suicide, I tried Antabuse, psychiatry, the crazy house, hospitals, prescription drugs, etc.

In 1979 came back to India and swore to myself, "This time I am going to settle down with an Indian Sikh girl," and I did. But I had begun to substitute one drug for another, thinking that would help. I had always been smoking hash, even while I was drinking; and now I started taking opium as

well. This marriage broke up after six months only, and in two years time my use of opium had progressed to such a stage that I had to be taken to hospital as my hands and legs started to get numb and I couldn't walk or even lift a glass of water with my fingers.

Later on I stopped taking the opium but started taking "petuadine." But in six months only it had progressed to such a stage I could no longer afford it. Again hospital and then came pills only, pills and hash. Amphetamines and barbiturates. Then "smack" was being introduced to the Indian people, and was available every one mile here at \$2.50 U.S. dollars a gram. In something like after five months of I using I was using two to five grams a day. Meanwhile I had lost 10 kilos of weight. It was at that time that I was introduced to Narcotics Anonymous, and was given a Basic Text. I used to read from it while I was still high. After reading it, I really wanted to stop. Again I went to hospital as I couldn't on my own because of the withdrawals.

Last time I took my last drink of alcohol been over one year, last time I had my last shot of heroin February 1985, after coming out of hospital after twenty days I haven't taken any pill, but continued to smoke hash. I cut that down after about six months, and its been about one month since my last joint.

I go to A.A. meetings regularly, as there are only two meetings a week and about ten members, I really wish there were more. I have never been to an N.A. meeting. I know there are N.A. meetings in Bombay but I have never had to opportunity to visit Bombay.

I think it's about time we started a group here in New Delhi. I have been meeting with a couple of addicts who were with me in hospital and even given them whatever little literature I had, but they haven't really stopped using. Then there is one guy who got clean, I hope we can get N.A. going soon, because I know that is what I need.

G.G.
India

What was that you were thinking about gratitude? Maybe this is just the right letter to give some perspective on the last one. In any case, you may be interested to know that this person has been included on the mailing list of the loner group, for A Meeting By Mail, and has been contacted by the International Committee to inform him of other N.A. contacts nearby. Members who wish to correspond with isolated addicts in need of N.A. contacts such as G.G. can write to the WSO at our P.O. Box, attn: Loner Group.

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.

CALIFORNIA: Mar 7-9; 8th Annl Northern Cal Conv, Monterey Conference Center; 8th Annl NCCNA, PO Box 223115, Carmel, CA 93922

CONNECTICUT: Jan 3-5; Connecticut's 1st RCNA; Marriott Hotel, Farmington; Mike or Al (203) 347-7856

GEORGIA: Feb 20-23; GRCNA V; NW Area Marriott, I-75 & Windy Hill Rd, Marietta, 30062; Ed (404) 436-0311; Tom (404) 429-0239; Bob (404) 589-0697

HAWAII: Feb 14-16; Camp Himelani on Island of Oahu, N.A. Round Up, P.O. Box 23436, Honolulu, HI 86808; (808) Mark 373-9774; Richard M. 261-1037

LOUISIANA: Mar 7-9; LA RCNA; Bossier-Sheraton Inn, 2015 Old Minden Rd, Bossier City; LA 71111; (318) Bob 686-2270; Marlene 865-0856; Dale 425-7951

MASSACHUSETTS: Mar 28-30; 1st Annl New England RCNA; The Westin Hotel, Copley Place, 10 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02116; Brian P. (617) 452-7875

MICHIGAN: Jul 3-6; RCNA of Michigan; Freedom II; Mich. Inn, Southfield

MISSISSIPPI: Apr 4-6; MRCNA IV; Hilton, Biloxi, MS; Lisa (601) 392-7267; Renee (601) 362-0897; Donna (601) 862-7334

NEVADA: Feb 7-9; 1st S. Nevada Conv for NA; Showboat Hotel, Las Vegas; (702) Corby 737-7357; Anita 382-3550; Dave 870-1357; Box 70591, Las Vegas, NV 89170

NEW JERSEY: May 9-11; The Berkley Carteret, Sunset and Ocean, Asbury Park; Kandi (201) 988-9451; Suzanne (201) 325-1143; Joe (201) 623-6352

NEW YORK: Jun 27-29; 1st Annl Northern New York RCNA; Wells College Campus, Aurora, NY; Mel (315) 548-3610; Ilga (607) 273-8884

NORTH CAROLINA: Jan 3-5; Asheville Area Conv; Holiday Inn West, 275 Smoky Park Hwy, Asheville; Mike R. 191 School Rd, W. Asheville, NC 28806

OHIO: May 23-25; ORCNA IV Conv; Hollenden House, E.6 + Superior; ORCNA IV, P.O. Box 29517, Cleveland, Ohio 44129

PENNSYLVANIA: Mar 1-2; Second Annl Learning Conf; George Wash. Lodge, Allentown; (215) Kristen 867-6827; Barry 433-5866; Bill 398-8438; Dave 791-0773

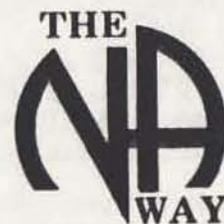
PENNSYLVANIA: Jun 20-22; 7th East Coast Convention; Bloomsburg Univ; 7th ECCNA, Box 211, Taylor, PA 18517; (717) Ron 457-9751; Frank G. 457-0587

TEXAS: Mar 28-30; 1st Lone Star RCNA; Austin Hilton Inn; Jimmy (512) 443-7215; Vic (512) 448-2144; Tary O. (512) 443-0136

VIRGINIA: Jan 9-12; Fourth Annl VA Conv of NA; Omni International Hotel; P.O. Box 3903, Charlottesville, VA 22903; (804) 979-8298

WASHINGTON: Feb 28-Mar 2; First Wash/N Idaho RCNA; Sheraton Tacoma Hotel, 1320 Bdwy Plaza, Tacoma, 98402; US 800-325-3535; Canada 800-268-9330

2) Jun 13-15; First Young Peoples WCNA; Sea Tac Red Lion Inn, Seattle; WHAD, P.O. Box 1601, Kent, WA 9803; (206) Mark 878-8695; Kay 838-4784



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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 N.A. 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 non-professional, 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 *N.A. 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.*