

THE N.A. Way[®]

M A G A Z I N E

January 1989

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New "Home Group"
cartoon series

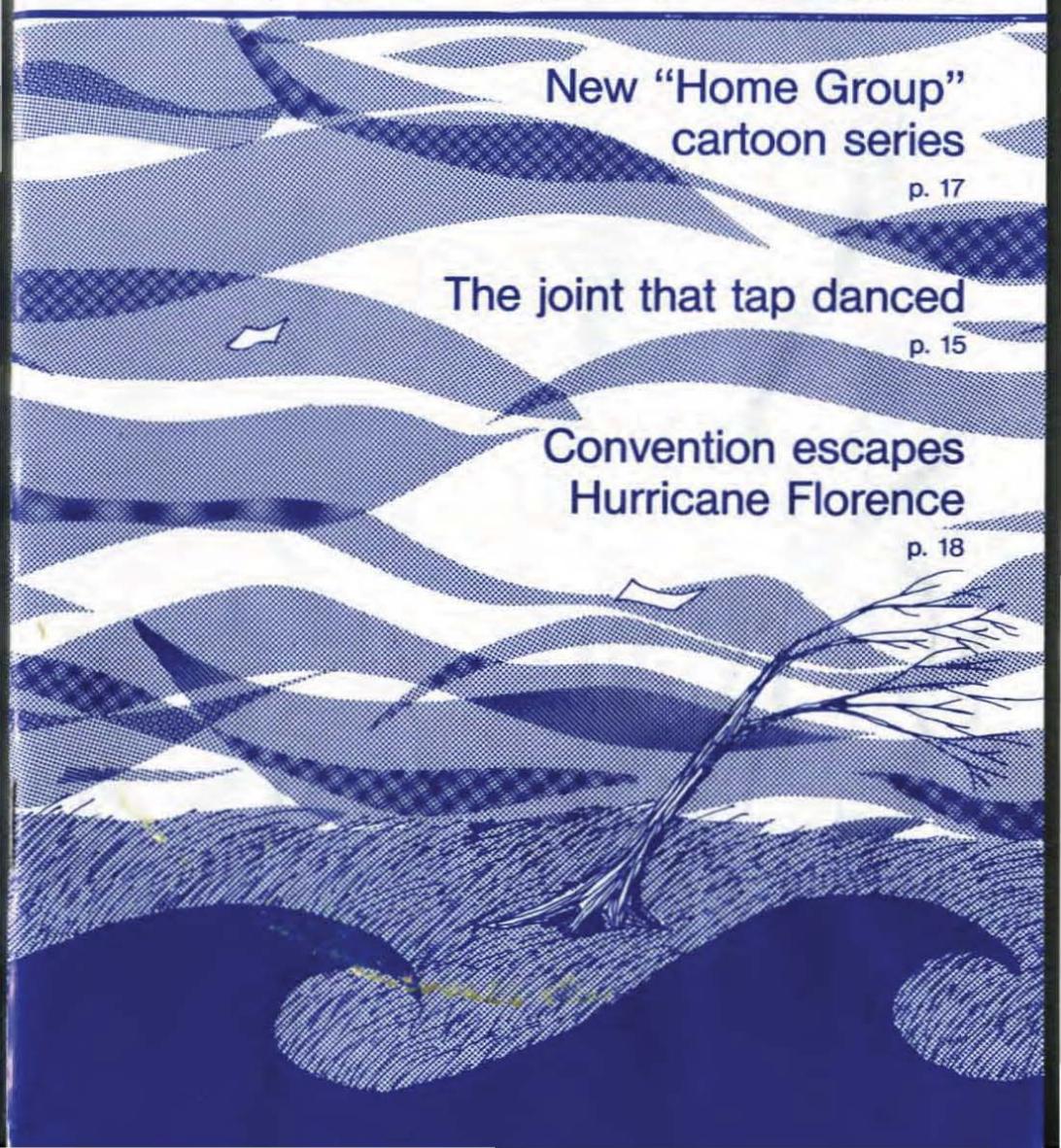
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The joint that tap danced

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Convention escapes
Hurricane Florence

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The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE N.A. Way[®]

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The N.A. Way magazine welcomes the participation of its readers. You are invited to share with the entire N.A. Fellowship in our monthly international journal. Send us your experience in recovery, your views on N.A. matters, and feature items. All manuscripts submitted become the property of World Service Office, Inc.

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Awakening

One Saturday at my father's home, I noticed the grapevines and how they had become overgrown with honeysuckle and briar. My father's recent surgery prevented him from the chore of pruning. I decided I would do the job. I began working and thinking of the similarities of sorting the vines and sorting my life. I felt God with me, speaking with me, as I began separating the vines I would keep from the ones I planned to cut away.

The vines were a maze of thorns, honeysuckle and grape. I began by cutting near the root of the briar and honeysuckle. It soon became a complicated job, sorting out each vine. I thought of my past, and how I needed to sort out my thoughts and emotions, fears and pains. Some of the briars left scratches and cuts on my hands. These became scars and wounds from pains I had long forgotten, buried and overlooked. The fresh blood and tears became real to me again.

There seemed no end to the beauty of the honeysuckle. But its fragrant flower and sweet taste had all but taken over the vine. I saw that too many would choke the plants. Too many would steal the sunlight and rain, preventing each plant from reaching its full potential. This plant became

the "good times" to me. The drugs, the money, and playmates. These so-called "good times" had taken over my life, preventing me from facing life on its own terms.

Many of the branches from the honeysuckle had wrapped so tightly around the grapevine that deep gashes were left when removed. In time I hoped these would heal, as my own life had begun to heal when God removed the bindings I had set in place.

It took much careful separating, sometimes taking it inch by inch, to free each vine. Often briars scratched and pricked my hands and arms. I continued sorting, cutting and pruning each tendril. This reminded me of the

**Constant care of
the vines is
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the fruit we desire.**

mixed up emotions I had carried inside me for so long. It became a long and painful process, discriminating between the desirable and the unwanted. The job of strengthening those I wanted to keep was difficult. The more I searched and got rid of, the more I saw that must go.

Finally getting to the end of the job I had begun, I stepped back to survey the grapevines. I felt sorrow and pity, for each had been stripped bare, left naked for all to see. They were no longer overshadowed by the choking,

life-taking vines of the honeysuckle. The thorns and briars would no longer draw blood from the branches of the grape. I hoped that stronger branches of the grape would reach out and produce new bindings and branches.

This reminded me of the steps I had begun taking, which would allow me to grow and feel again. I began feeling, seeing, and hearing things I never thought I could. I knew the pruning, sorting, and cutting away of dead and unwanted branches and vines was necessary. The searching and sorting of my past was necessary for the rediscovery of who I am today.

Looking again at the work I had begun, I realized in order to keep the honeysuckle and briar away, I would have to remove the roots of each vine. I needed tools for digging as much as I had needed those for cutting. This reminded me of the help I needed with my life. I thought of God, and how often people had entered my life to help me overcome the fears and problems I had begun to face. I knew I had to search my heart and look very deep before I would get any better. I was offered help many times from willing hands and patient ears. The tools I had needed were placed before me. I only had to reach for them.

Constant care of the vines is necessary in order to produce the fruit we desire. Sunshine and water, fertilizer and pruning are small jobs compared to the task of tearing down and replanting. Daily care is needed in order to be aware of when unwanted vines return for their control. These must be taken care of at once.

I realized that constant care and love were necessary parts of my

growth. Like the grapevines, I need daily care and maintenance in order to prevent the fears and pains from controlling my life again.

I close with patience. Like fruit which is eaten too soon, bitterness remains. I had to allow the grapes time to ripen before eating. No matter how much labor and care is put into a plant, it must wait until it's ripe for the harvest. It's the same for me. Often the things I want in life I want immediately, but I must always remember where I came from and the time I spent there. The step-by-step process, the day-by-day care—the grapevine became a symbol of my own life. As it grows and produces its fruit, so I pray that I may continue to reach out, grow, and produce the fruit of life which God so desires for me.

D.H., Alabama



Finding a new way

There was a time when I wanted to be a part of something—anything would have been okay. I just had an empty feeling inside that made me feel useless. I finally found that “something” here in Narcotics Anonymous.

I want to share a feeling I have. I was told early in my recovery to get “involved” in this fellowship, for its survival depended on my service. I learned how to perform at service meetings. I learned how to critique fellow addict’s work—not to see the good that it may be doing, but to find a flaw and be the first to point it out.

This all seemed so normal to me at the time. My disease told me that this was good. I never stopped to think of how I was making others feel. My actions were the result of my not working the steps. I had no concept of the spiritual principles of this program. All I knew was that I had a burning desire to be a part of something.

In my active addiction, being a part of something always meant taking a side. It meant that a line had to be drawn and I had to take a stand. Confrontation was inevitable. I picked a side with the team that was the most popular. Usually it seemed that it was

also the team that was the most hateful.

In my recovery process, I seemed to have followed the same patterns I had found in active addiction, in more ways than one. The self-centeredness and fear that I lived with didn’t miraculously disappear when I got clean. One thing did happen though: I wasn’t in a fog anymore, so I was feeling the pain I was causing myself. I couldn’t escape it.

It was suggested to me that I get a sponsor to get me started on writing the steps. For once—really for the first time—I understood what I was being told to do. I saw it as a way to stop those feelings that were going to lead me to using again.

After months of talking and writing and writing and talking with my sponsor, I completed my second Fourth Step inventory. This time I felt like I

We can’t be of service to each other if we don’t know who we are. It is only through the steps that we can find that out.

had put my heart into it. During my Fifth Step, my sponsor and I pinned down “the exact nature of my wrongs.” I felt like I was starting to find out who I was.

Since then the work has continued. Together, my sponsor and I have formed a clear picture of who I am. We



can see when I am falling into the same negative patterns in my recovery that I brought in with me from my using days. And we can see when I am applying new, positive solutions that I have learned here in the meetings of Narcotics Anonymous.

It is only now that maybe I can start to be some kind of trusted servant of this program. I really believe that without some kind of understanding of where I came from, and of what I was when I came through the doors of this program, I was only capable of doing the same kinds of addictive things I used to do.

Through the steps, and with the help of an N.A. sponsor, I am able to look critically at myself, instead of wrongfully judging other addicts’ work. Now I believe that the best thing I can do for N.A. is to help the people I sponsor to understand that we can’t be of service to each other if we don’t know who we are. It is only through the steps that we can find that out. If we are doing so much service work

that we don’t take the time to write, then it will be just that much longer before we give ourselves that little chance to start recovering.

Today, to the best of my ability, I will look at the good in what you do, and not so much at the errors you make while doing it. I don’t believe that any one of us would intentionally try to hurt this fellowship. It’s my disease that tells me that you’re not as good a trusted servant as the last person in that position. It’s my disease that expects you to recover at the pace I set for you.

These are some of the things that I brought with me to N.A., and now I see that they are some of the things that others brought with them, too. We are much more alike than we are different. I only hope that, together, we can grow out of those things that hurt us. My first few years were centered around not using and losing the desire to use. Now I can focus on another gift of our program: finding a new way of life.

M.C., Virginia

Healing my insides through N.A.

I spent most of my adolescent life feeling "less than" and different. I was tall, skinny, and awkward. I found that drugs took away those feelings and made me feel "a part of."

Soon after I started using, I started getting arrested. The next seventeen years I went in and out of county jail. The last couple of years were also spent in and out of treatment, trying to quit using drugs. But I just wasn't ready to surrender.

Finally, I lost my job—the last justification I had. As long as I could keep a job, I thought I was okay.

I was able to get the job back by going through treatment again. I had no intention of quitting using; I just wanted to get my life back in order. Then I would be able to use, and everything would be okay.

By the time I was ready to leave treatment, I was scared. I didn't know what I was going to do. I was beginning to want to stay clean, but didn't think I could.

I started going to meetings every day. I got a sponsor, and talked with

him often. He pointed out that powerlessness over my addiction was something that related not just to drugs, but to everything, and that my life was unmanageable.

I had spent a lot of years trying to prove to people that I was powerful, mostly because I felt so inadequate on the inside. I had a real hard time with that. I finally realized that the only real power I have is what I get by turning things over to my *Higher Power*.

At first, I also fought the Second Step. Because I had never been in a mental institution, I didn't think I was insane. But it was pointed out to me that my actions were far from being sane, and that doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results is insanity.

At first, when it was suggested that I turn my will and my life to the care of God as I understood Him, I wasn't

**I was scared.
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totally willing. I was willing to turn over *some* parts of my will and life, but I wanted to keep a few of my sickest behaviors. But when the pain finally became great enough, I turned it all over to him.

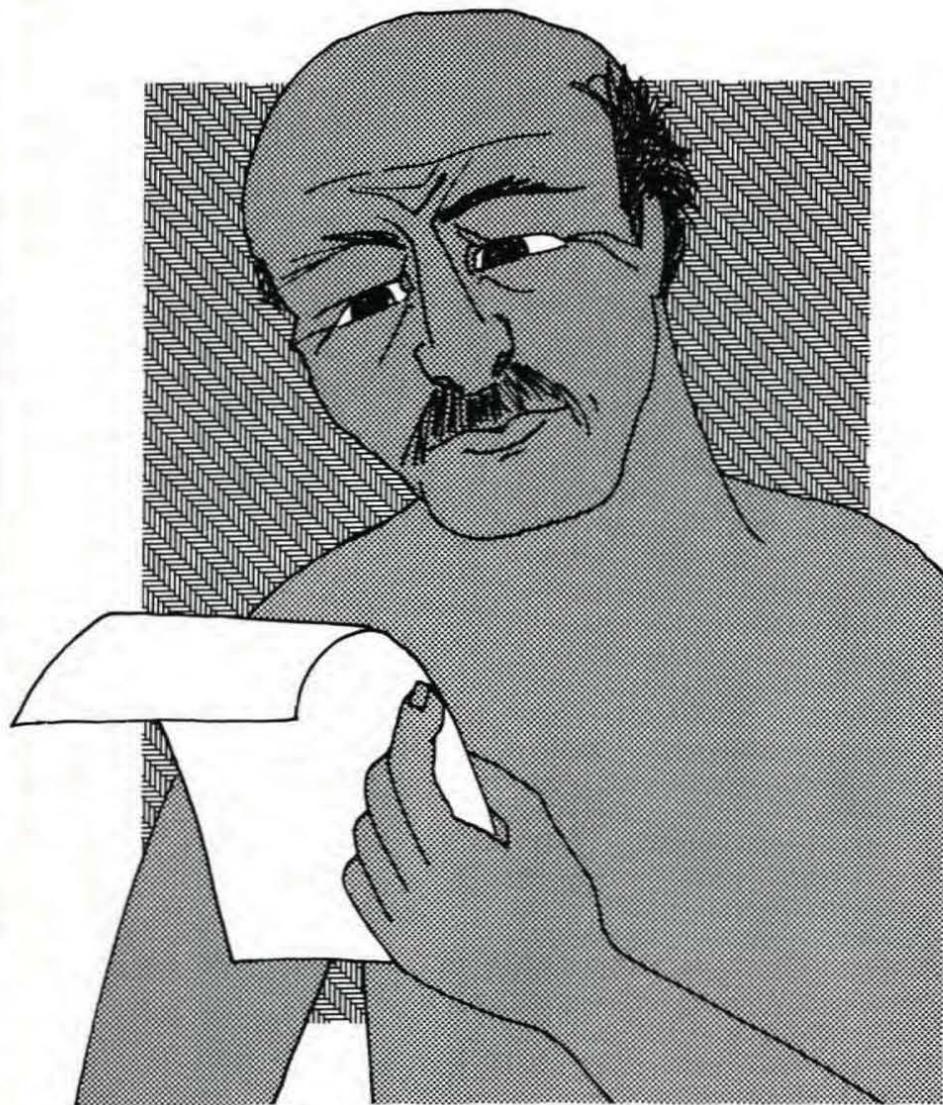
By practising these steps, I have found my life immensely improved. I have started to feel good about myself. I no longer have to impress

people—or hurt them—to feel good about myself. This program is the only thing that has ever worked for me. I now have friends all over the world who will be there for me if I'm hurting.

I am forever grateful that I have been chosen by my Higher Power to recover from this disease, and to be

there to help others who suffer. It is only through a Higher Power, working through the *we* of this program, that any of this has been possible. I must always remember that, alone, *I* accomplished very little; but *we* can do anything.

D.H., Ohio



Growth and recovery in Puerto Rico

I attended my first N.A. meeting on March 25, 1987 here in Puerto Rico. I walked into that meeting not even aware that I was full of fear and anger. The five people who were there shook my hand and told me that I don't have to suffer anymore.

When they spoke about their experience, I compared instead of identifying. I listened for the differences rather than the similarities. So I went out and did some more "research," which led to nothing but pain and suffering.

I came back, and again they shook my hand. But I didn't feel entirely welcome, especially when I heard a person say that alcohol is a drug. I said, "Not for me. I don't have a problem with alcohol. I can drink."

I still attended the meetings, but continued drinking. After several more episodes, I became willing to do whatever they suggested. I finally surrendered in December of 1987 while I was in New York City. There, everyone hugged me and showed that they really cared.

Today, I know that those five or six people in Puerto Rico also cared; I just wasn't ready to surrender. Since then, the fellowship in Puerto Rico has grown incredibly. Now we have learned to hug—especially the newcomers. We receive them with an N.A. embrace.

From the two meetings we had in March of 1987, we now have grown to twenty-one meetings in thirteen different towns. The meeting I first attended has grown from those five or six people to an average of eighty or ninety addicts. I have become group service representative of that meeting. I'm deeply grateful to those people for keeping the doors open. They saved my life.

Today we have an H&I committee and an area service committee. We are a miracle. Addicts are now beginning to live in Puerto Rico, thanks to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

The message is simple: keep the doors open and H.P. will bring them in, the same way he brought me in. Today I have more than nine months clean, and I'm extremely grateful. A hug to N.A. from Puerto Rico.

Sigue Viniendo—Keep Coming Back!
R.M., Puerto Rico



Breaking out of the egg

I live with another recovering addict in Western Australia, four hours drive from a large city where there are N.A. meetings every day. I came here about one year ago to move into a house I had bought when I was still using.

What makes it more difficult for me, I think, is that I am an addict and a lesbian—two labels that are bound to get people's prejudices raging.

Since moving here I have stepped out of my safe, comfortable niche in

I didn't get clean to huddle in a small group like an egg under a chicken, but to hatch and live in the world.

the lesbian community within a larger N.A. structure, and into the wide world. It's difficult, but I am so glad that I can survive without such specialized support. I love having my gay

support, both in and outside of N.A. But ultimately I believe that my H.P. didn't get me clean to huddle in a small group like an egg under a chicken (although this was initially necessary, and I need to know it's there), but to hatch and live in the world.

Thank you for being there to share the difficulties and strengths with me. And thanks for being the only people who can really understand, because without that, I'm done for.



The woman I live with has started to write to the N.A. Loner Group, and I have been fascinated and inspired by all the letters she has received. We have started a meeting here, and we do get to meetings in the city every couple of months, but the letters have made it so much easier to be here. I guess it's like yet another special interest group—isolated addicts interested in helping one another stay clean.

I have two years up, and know that without this program I wouldn't be worrying about fitting into the community. I'd be off in my own little world, numb and useless. I have been given another chance, and I intend to make the most of it.

W.R., Australia

One addict's experience with the Loner Group

The Loner Group is a Narcotics Anonymous meeting for addicts living in isolated areas where few or no regular meetings are available. Our World Service Office coordinates this effort by making available a monthly newsletter, *Meeting by Mail*. This publication is mailed to any addict requesting to be a part of the Loner Group and willing to share their experience, strength and hope with other addicts around the world.

I first joined the group in 1985. I am what is classified as a "non-loner." Living in Washington, D.C., I have the option of attending any of the over one hundred weekly N.A. meetings.

For almost three years, I did nothing but "shoplift" recovery from the *Meeting by Mail*. I exchanged letters with not one addict. My only thoughts were about what I could get. I did not think about what I might have to give. The *Meeting by Mail* comforted me



many a day. Some days I would come home after a rough day at the office, spirits dragging, and lo and behold: a copy of *Meeting by Mail* hot off the press!

In the April 1988 issue, there was a plea for help from an addict in Michigan who had just started the only N.A. meeting in that area some six weeks prior. However, each meeting night he had been the only addict present. I sensed his despair and discouragement. Finally, it was time to give back what had been so freely given to me.

I found myself with pen in hand and a prayer in my heart, writing him a letter. I simply wrote:

My name is... and I am an addict. I just want to share with you the theme of the first Almost Heaven Area Convention of Narcotics Anonymous: "Don't give up five minutes before the miracle happens." I love you.

Three weeks later, at a time when I felt like I just couldn't go on, a letter was slid under my door. My spirits were lifted immediately. Someone had thought about me and written me a letter. I asked myself, "Who do I know in Michigan?" Expectantly, I opened the letter. It read,

"My name is... and I am an addict. Since receiving your letter there have been exactly five addicts at every meeting! Thank you, and I love you."

Coincidence? I truly don't believe in them—but I do believe in miracles.

I have since written to another addict whose letter I had read in the *Meeting by Mail*, a Canadian woman with three months clean. She reminded me of myself when I had the same clean

time. I wrote and shared my story with her.

She wrote back and shared that she had gone into town to cop some drugs, but something had prompted her to stop at the post office first. There in her box was a letter from the United States—mine! As a result of God, in his infinite wisdom and foresight, working through people, she did not use! She has just celebrated nine months clean.

In yet another letter, this same addict expressed that the closest meeting was ninety-three miles away, at 9:00 in the morning, on Wednesdays only. I mean, can you imagine? I couldn't. However, she was saving her money to go and spend the night in a hotel room so she would be there in time for that N.A. meeting.

I asked myself, is that going to any lengths for recovery, or what? Honestly, sometimes it's an effort for me to just walk down the street to a meeting. Wow! did she give me something. I immediately got dressed, went to a meeting and shared this remarkable gift with the group.

I am now sponsoring her. Our newfound relationship has really been a blessing. We share recovery through letters, N.A. literature, and occasional phone calls. This experience has been made possible through my Higher Power working through the N.A. Loner Group—truly a blessing to loners and non-loners alike.

Want to become a part of? Write the World Service Office, P.O. Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409. Be good to yourself! Our gratitude does indeed speak when we care and share the N.A. way.

S.G., Washington, D.C.

But I didn't steal anything!

"We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

I can remember my first reaction upon reading this step: "I guess I have to do it sometime, but it sure doesn't sound like much fun." Everyone at the meetings seemed to emphasize doing *all* the steps. I sort of accepted Step Eight as being necessary for healing, as one accepts the necessity of a gall bladder operation for relieving pain.

My first hang-up with Step Eight (the *list*) was trying to swallow it together with Step Nine (the *amends*). Our Basic Text took care of that: "We do this step as if there were no Ninth Step. We do not even think about making the amends but just concentrate on exactly what the Eighth Step says: make a list and become willing."

I experienced difficulty understanding and accepting the ideas of other members, but I tried. Others around

me seemed to pick up the program, then move on to major job promotions and such. I loved it when I finally heard, "Slow growth is good growth." Looking back at my early days, I believe that I was just too sick to quickly grasp the program. I just stumbled around, going to meetings and refusing to quit, because for the first time in my life I saw a glimmer of hope for better days, if I did as I was told. I wanted what the old-timers had.

My Step Eight list was difficult. After all, I had cash register honesty: I never stole money or property, and I went to work every day. Nevertheless, I did find a few cases where I had destroyed property while in a blackout. My job performance had been so poor that on some days, the company would have come out further ahead if I had stayed home. And I discovered a few devious means I'd used to get money, like calling my mother with a hard luck story when I was sick (I called when my voice sounded the worst).

Most of all, I was made aware that I had to make amends to myself. Burning the candle at both ends for years had caused me much stress. My weak

I had cash register honesty: I never stole money, and I went to work every day.

self-image had to be fluffed up; I forced myself to be all things to all people. This all got me hospitalized in

a locked ward, where I became addicted to various drugs.

Step Eight is just a list of amends to be made. The actual amends come later—maybe much later. I did not move on to many direct amends until I had stayed clean for some time. I needed to first build up my credibility. In my using days, I made many

apologies, grand promises of reform, then repeated the same nasty behavior over and over again. My word was not worth much.

A superficial stab at Step Eight was not good enough for me. Even though the wrongs I had done to people were not obvious, I'd still done them. And they still had to be put on paper.

J.S., New York



Spiritual, not religious

I had just turned thirty-seven when I started going to N.A. meetings. After using drugs for nineteen years, God and religion were not part of my life. As a matter of fact, at the age of thirty-two, after the death of my mom, I made a personal vow to myself that I would never pray to or believe in God again.

I had a very hard time with the "spiritual end" of the program during my first few months clean. At first, I would not say the opening or closing prayers at meetings. (Remember my vow?) Then I started saying them, just because everyone else at the meeting was doing it.

The step meeting I attended dealt only with the first four steps, over and over again, one each week. Even though I was there every week, it seemed that they were always on the Third Step. How I hated that step!

I had no problem with Step One—admitting my powerlessness and my unmanageability—although as time goes on, I see more clearly just *how* powerless and unmanageable I really was.

In Step Two, the power greater than

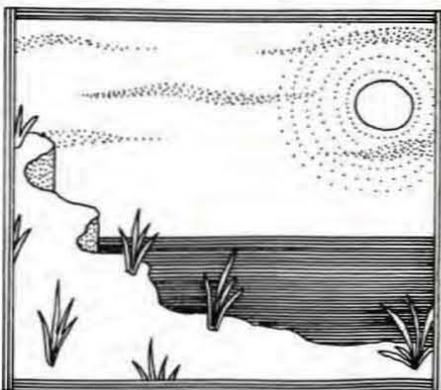
myself restoring me to sanity was always the people in the rooms, never God. It wasn't until just before I celebrated my one year anniversary that I realized it was God that was restoring me to sanity through the people in the rooms. How else could I be getting answers to my questions at meetings without even asking the questions?!

Then came Step Three. How could I turn my life and my will over to something I did not believe in? I fought this step tooth and nail, hand and fist. It wasn't until one night at a meeting, a woman told me to look at the *letters* in the word God, and when I heard that word to think of Good, Orderly Direction. This I could relate to, and it made Step Three much easier.

Then one night, a funny thing happened. I was lying in bed alone and depressed, staring up at the dark ceiling talking aloud about my problems, when suddenly I thought, "If there's no God, then who am I talking to?"

Today, I have a Higher Power I choose to call God. I'm not a religious person, but I do consider myself a spiritual person.

G.B., New Jersey



The joint that tap danced

It was in October of 1986 that I came to my first N.A. meeting. I couldn't see for myself that I was addicted or that my life was unmanageable. All I knew was that I was lonely and very depressed. I didn't want to quit using drugs. The only reason I went was that my friend told me there were girls there, so I went with him. I went to this meeting once or twice a week for a month. My only time clean was at the meetings.

I remember going to meetings with joints hidden in my cigarette pack. I had no Higher Power, and didn't want to hear about God. Fortunately, God had not given up on me.

I found an eye doctor who could do corrective surgery so I wouldn't have to wear glasses anymore. I always believed in being honest with doctors, so I told him of my long term use of pot and cocaine. The doctor told me I could drink, but I couldn't use drugs for six weeks after the surgery, or it would mess up my recovery and I would end up still wearing my glasses.

I wanted this surgery more than

anything, so I decided to quit. I knew N.A. could help. So on November 19th I started my clean time, one day before my surgery.

In December, I celebrated thirty days. I had abstained from all drugs for that long, even alcohol. Then came New Year's Eve, and I had to throw my annual New Year's Eve party. I still wasn't ready to give up all my old people, places, or things yet. I drank that night, but didn't tell anyone in N.A. I felt my problem was drugs, not alcohol, even though at meetings I had heard that alcohol is a drug, and any drug can release my addiction all over again. I still held that old misconception.

In January, I lied and celebrated sixty days. At the end of that month, I went to Florida and drank again, still not telling anyone in N.A., and keeping my same clean date.

In March, I went back to Florida. I

In my mind
the joint was tap
dancing, saying,
"Take me,
take me!"

stayed with two old friends who smoked pot and drank beer. One night I was sitting on the couch watching T.V. On the coffee table was their stash box, with a joint sitting on top of it. One of my friends asked me, is the pot sitting there bothering me? I said no, I could handle it.

We went to dinner and I had two drinks with dinner. Back at their

house, I sat on the couch and looked down at the joint. In my mind, it was as if it were standing up, tap dancing in front of me, and saying, "Take me, take me!" It got so bad, I had to ask my friends to get it out of the room. At that point, I found out for myself—the hard way—that alcohol is a drug. And I saw how any drug triggers my addiction.

I came back home to N.A., and got honest with myself and the people in the program. I admitted I had been using and had a new clean date: March 17.

At the time of this writing, I have an honest eighteen months of clean time. I go to meetings for recovery, not for the girls—and I stay out of the bars.

G.B., New Jersey



New funny pages!

JAKE: Good-looking, even-tempered, everyone's sponsor, 327 years of continuous abstinence, the Higher Power's golfing partner.

SLUGG: The perpetually angry, the eternally resistant, the extraordinarily miserable member.

DENILAH: "But N.A.? I'm not that bad!!"

You probably already know these people—you see them every week in your own home group. Now you'll be seeing them every month in the N.A. Way's new comic strip, "Home Group."

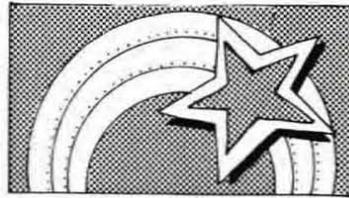
Will Slugg ever connect with "the therapeutic value of one addict helping another?" Will Denilah break through her denial and into the meeting room? Be watching—you'll find out.

In creating this comic strip we combed local newsletters in our files, borrowing characters and ideas. Our thanks to:

N.A. Today, Australasian region; Clean Times, United Kingdom; No Name, San Diego, California; Color My World, Columbus, Ohio; The Rolling Paper, Phoenix, Arizona.



Feature



Fleeing Flo

Or, how to produce a regional convention/hurricane party in four days at two hotels that are 150 miles apart

January 1988

The Alabama-Northwest Florida Regional Convention Committee is charged. The conscience of the fellowship in our region to produce a regional convention at a hotel site is unanimous! The site and date are set: September 8-11, at Gulf Shores, Alabama, a resort community on the Alabama coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

The convention committee has produced a smaller, weekend convention called "Surrender" for several years now, and it has been a great success. However, a big, fancy hotel convention had yet to be realized. Our neighbor regions have been producing regional conventions for several years, so our regional convention was overdue. As we began a nine-month preparation period, it was early in this time that I remember someone in a conven-

tion committee meeting jokingly remark, "Wouldn't it be fun if we had a hurricane at the convention?"

Thursday evening, September 8

Months of preparation and planning had culminated with the opening of the convention that day. It was late that evening, and the deejay dance was hot and kicking. A depression in the Gulf of Mexico had kicked up, too, and we realized that we may have to cancel the scheduled Saturday morning chartered deep sea fishing trip if the depression didn't dissipate.

Friday morning

We awoke to a dark, swirling, mean-looking sky. The wind had kicked the surf up, and the waves were angrily crashing on the beach. For most of us landlubber addicts, it was an impressive sight. I quickly turned on the radio weather channel and learned that the depression in the gulf had taken on strength and had been upgraded to a tropical storm. It was given a name: Florence.

The storm had started moving north, toward the convention site. The convention committee had a quick meeting and decided the convention would go on as planned, without the scheduled fishing trip. We would keep a close eye on things, but except for the

bad weather, everything was fine.

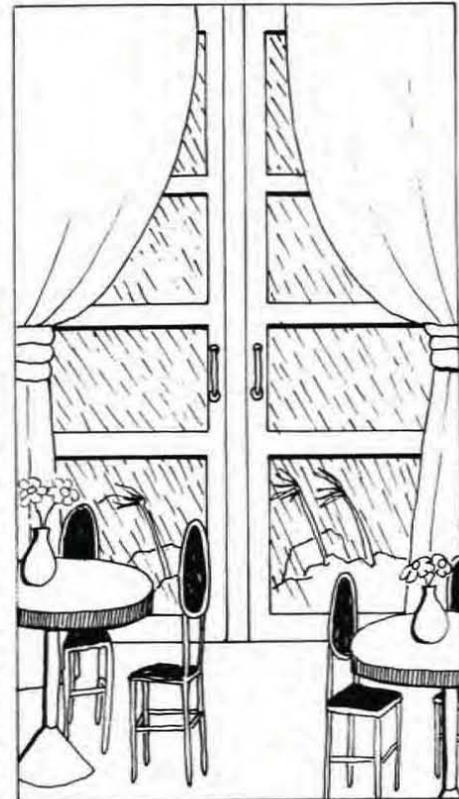
Friday noon

The bad news came. Florence had been upgraded to hurricane status. Landfall would be close enough that the authorities notified the hotel that evacuation was imminent. The convention committee had a few moments of bewilderment, confusion and frustration. Then someone spoke up. "Let's move the convention!"

The first thing everyone wanted to say was, "Not possible." But it wasn't said. So we moved the convention 150 miles north to Montgomery, Alabama.

When I say "we," I don't mean just the committee. Everyone at the convention seemed to pitch in and help. People hauled supplies, and helped set up when we got there. It was an all-out effort, an inspiring spectacle. Both the hotel staffs were very helpful, and went out of their way to help out.

Saturday and Sunday's convention schedules went almost exactly as



move, and there were about five hundred at the convention in Montgomery. Not bad, all things considered! We were also financially secure after the convention.

Of course we had a few problems. The convention store didn't sell a whole lot of visors, frisbees or other beach items, and we've had to reimburse everyone for the fishing trip. And some folks cancelled their registration altogether. But other than that, everything went just great!

Well, that's what happened. So I guess it proves that we can do a lot when we work together!

In gratitude to our fellowship,
*Alabama-Northwest Florida
Regional Convention Committee*

The depression in the gulf had taken on strength and had been upgraded to a tropical storm: Florence.

planned. (The banquet meal was prime rib instead of seafood buffet.) We also had our Sunday morning buffet. There were about three hundred people in Gulf Shores when we decided to

A moving experience!

A story from the first Alabama-Northwest Florida Regional Convention

"Hey George! Are you going to the convention?"

"I don't know. Funds are low, as usual, and I don't know of any way to get up the money. But I haven't shut the door on it yet. If the Spirit wants me there, I'll be there. I really have been looking forward to my first convention, especially since it's our first regional convention."

Five days passed. George realized there was some craftwork he had started some time earlier, that he hadn't finished. Maybe he could finish it and sell it. He did. Friday morning, early, a member was at his house picking him up for the convention.

Leaving early that morning, there were reservations in George's mind as to whether he should use the money in other ways. There were the extra car payments he could make, and he still owed some people who had lent him money. But the decision was made. He was in the car, and they were off.

Sharing and listening to speaker tapes made the trip seem short. When they turned on the radio, they heard about a hurricane that was heading toward land. With news like that, will anyone show up at the convention? Or will everyone have to leave? "No. People will be in off the beach. We'll just stay close and ride it out together. Next year we will all be talking about how we survived Hurricane Florence."

They arrived before noon. There were plenty of people, some who they hadn't seen in a long time. The warm fuzzy feeling started growing. It was great to be home with the family!

They talked and hugged friends on the way to registration. After many hello's, George was getting hungry. Luckily, a friend was standing in line waiting to be seated. "Would you join me for lunch?"

"Sure."

They talked, and watched the waves pounding the shore. The view from

They talked, and watched the waves pounding the shore. The view from the restaurant was great.

the restaurant was great. The waves almost rose to the top of the pier. Everywhere you looked, members were hugging, laughing and sharing. "I'm really glad I came," George thought.

While they ate, a member from the convention committee came in. He

announced that there would be a group conscience meeting at 1:00 p.m. in the conference room to decide what to do about Florence.

"Maybe I really did self-will this one! Now I'm here and I'll have to go back." George panicked. "I think I'll go to the store before I leave and grab a few shirts and mugs."

The timing was great. Everything in the store was half price. "Who did I tell at home I'd get what?" After two runs through the store he went to unload at the car and make the meeting.

"Meeting in the conference room in a couple of minutes, folks," came the call from the committee member.

They are going to evacuate this hotel. "We've got a place in Montgomery to go to. We can get back underway as soon as everyone is moved. All in favor..." The vote was unanimous. The convention was moving 150 miles to Montgomery.

Everyone was packing up and heading out. Directions were given, and rides were provided for people who didn't have a way. Everyone was pulling together. George found a ride with some people from his old home group. Off to Montgomery—moving a convention! Will people come? What about the others due in tonight? It was in the hands of a loving Spirit; nothing else to do but pray.

When they arrived, rooms were secured and bags were put away. Time to go to work! The most-asked question in the halls was, "Is there anything we can do to help?"

It was amazing how quickly everything came together. By 8:00 that evening, the convention had been moved, the hotel was full, and a nearby hotel was handling the overflow. The halls and rooms were filled with talk and laughter.

The feelings were flooding the new convention site.

By Saturday night, there were four to five hundred people attending. Every-

where you looked people were hugging and talking, smiling and laughing.

When you

did see someone on the down side, there were other members huddled

around, sharing. Never had George seen this much unity and strength. He knew why he was there!

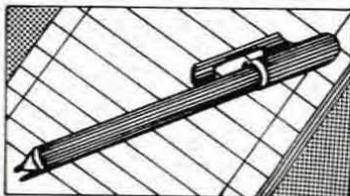
Sunday came so quickly, everyone hugging and saying goodbye. A couple of people stayed behind to rest up before the trip home—there hadn't been much sleep that weekend. As George sat there Monday morning, looking out over the courtyard, the visions of the past few days and all the people he'd met ran through his mind.

It was so quiet and still. The whole convention was moved. And, just thinking about it, so was George.

Anonymous, Alabama



Viewpoint



Unity and language

The medium is the message

In August and September's *N.A. Way* I have read with great interest various articles regarding N.A. purity and language. It seems that the writers of these articles feel that asking that N.A. language be used causes disunity. One writer states that he/she doesn't want to make someone from another fellowship feel unwanted because of the way they might say things. Another article tells about a speaker who carried a strong message of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous, yet used the word "sobriety" frequently. I will try to comment on these things, based on *our* steps and traditions.

For me, recovery has been a process of surrendering my will to the program of Narcotics Anonymous. Putting myself in alignment with the N.A. way of recovery is how I surrender. Language is one of the ways in which I reflect that alignment.

Part of the N.A. way of recovery is carrying the message. I feel it is impossible to separate the message

from our language of recovery. As the saying goes, "the medium is the message."

In learning to become a medium for the N.A. message of recovery, I have had to go through a lot of changes. I have learned here in N.A. that change is necessary for ongoing recovery.

I myself did not come into N.A. and immediately start referring to my abstinence as "clean time," and my practicing the steps as "recovery." However, as I learned in N.A., I have the disease of addiction. Plain and simple. When I don't use, I am clean, period.

I have learned to take the emphasis off the drugs I used in order to be better able to relate to other addicts. I have also learned to use the N.A. language of recovery as a conscious way of expressing my surrender to this way of recovery. This process of learning to carry the N.A. message has taken me about three years; it didn't happen immediately.

When I first got clean, I went to more than one fellowship. I was told at one of them that it was inappropriate to identify as an addict. So, I started identifying as an addict and an alcoholic. My sponsor very gently pointed out the redundancy of identifying in that manner.

So then I identified myself as an addict at N.A. meetings, and as an alcoholic at A.A. meetings, out of

respect for the traditions of each. But as my recovery progressed, and carrying the message became more important to me in my personal program, it became necessary for me to decide what message I was going to carry.

In working my First Step, I admitted my powerlessness over my addiction. It has become clear to me through N.A. that using is only a symptom of my disease. This is part of the message I try to carry today. I use the traditions of Narcotics Anonymous to guide me in carrying that message.

In keeping with our First Tradition, I try to keep the focus on what unites me with other recovering addicts in Narcotics Anonymous. I see how my feelings of uniqueness, and my resistance to changing my thinking and behavior, are part of my disease. For my own recovery I need to share the N.A. way. "Personal recovery depends on N.A. unity."

Part of this, for me, means not using the term *sobriety* to refer to my recovery, not so much because of what

As my recovery progressed, it became necessary for me to decide what message I was going to carry.

the dictionary says, but because it was suggested that I do so to carry a clear message of N.A. recovery. For those who ask, "Where does it say we don't say 'sober/sobriety'?" I suggest that they read our handbook on literature.

It states quite clearly what our language of recovery consists of.

As to whether a speaker can carry a strong message of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous and yet still use the word *sobriety* to refer to her recovery, I don't think so. It seems like a contradiction to me. It may be true that such a speaker carries a twelve step message of some kind, but does not, in any way I can see, demonstrate a clear message of N.A. recovery.



For me, unity within N.A. is what I strive for. That unity is not enhanced by identifying myself in ways that imply I have different diseases based on what drugs I used. Unity is enhanced by language that does not dilute our message of recovery.

M.M., California

The marathon meeting

I recently spent three days at WCNA-18 in Anaheim, California. I felt that unmistakable sense of unity most of the time, especially at the main meetings. But when I went to the marathon meetings, the feelings were very different. I spent a lot of time in those rooms—the ones where the newcomer goes because the other meetings are crowded and frightening; where relapsers go to lighten their burden and recommit themselves to N.A.; the rooms where N.A. members go to feel more “a part of” by sharing their gratitude.

As I expected, I did hear some of that gratitude. What I didn't expect, and frankly what I heard the most, were political and ideological views: N.A. members' opinions on what the problems were—and not what the solutions are. I heard a lot about differences, and very little about similarities. What I heard most was a lot of fear and anger.

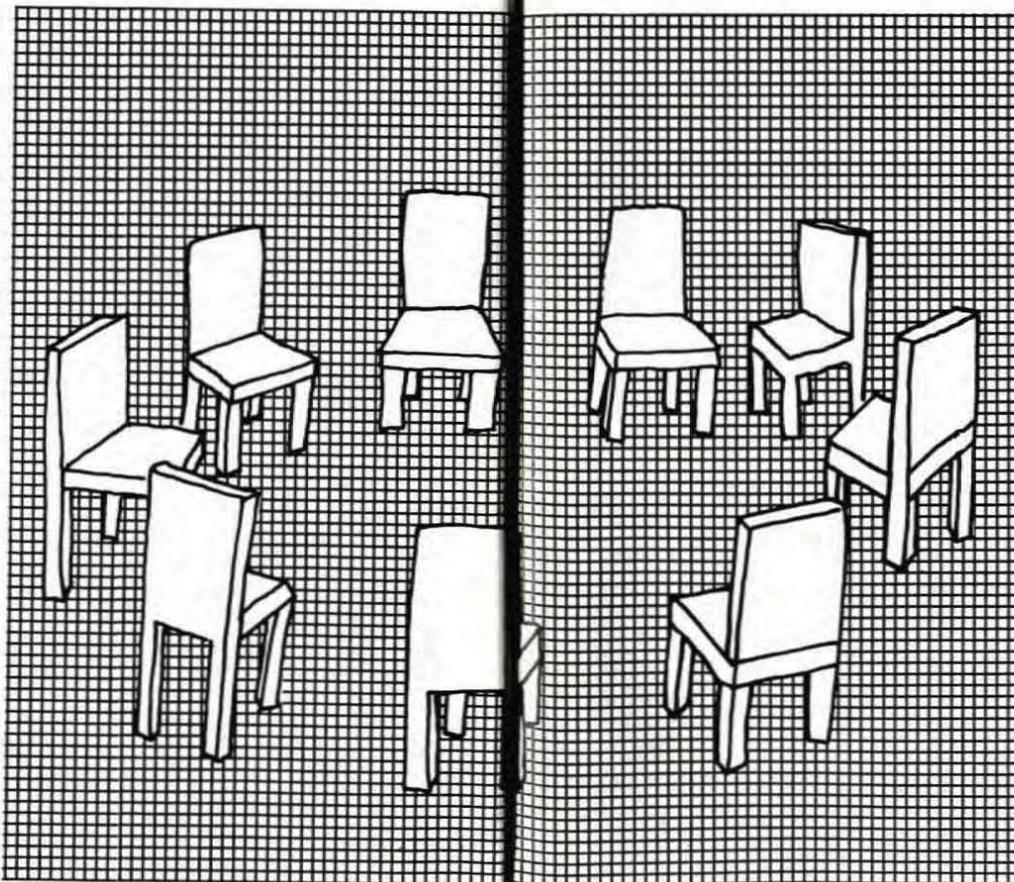
Before I continue, let me say this. I'm an “N.A. baby.” I grew up in this fellowship, and it is the only fellowship I go to. I agreed with just about everything I heard down there. I also want us to be our own autonomous program. My disagreement is about where it is appropriate for members to voice their opinions or views.

Our Fifth Tradition states, “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.” I don't see how criticizing those members who believe they have two diseases, or who use two names for the same disease, carries our message. I don't see how embarrassing members in front of

others carries our message.

We say we don't discriminate, but when we criticize other members at our meetings, we do. We discriminate against the most important member—the newcomer. What we create is an atmosphere of fear, anger and disunity, not one of safety, security and love.

So enough criticizing. The marathon meeting can be used as one of the tools that carry the message of N.A. recovery. It can be used to help those addicts who still suffer to take a risk on a new way of life, a way of life that many of us have grown to cherish and hold onto no matter what.



I remember how scared I was when I first came around, and how the safety in those meetings made it easier to “keep coming back.” I remember how badly I wanted to belong to this special place and fellowship. If I hadn't been treated with patience, tolerance, love and care, I dread the thought of where I would be today.

In this program I learned about such spiritual principles as humility, tolerance, acceptance. It's time I use them, especially when it comes to people with whom I disagree. My Fourth Step tells me to see my part—my motives, and what I did to facilitate the insanity. I need to do this

when I feel the need to criticize.

N.A. recovery is a process of learning, a process of change in percep-

**Let me use my
recovery
to help rather
than hinder,
to love rather
than fear,
to attract rather
than promote.**

tions, a process of love. When I am maliciously critical, I sacrifice my principles. When I become intolerant of others, I sacrifice my principles. When I become insistent that my way is right, I sacrifice my principles. When I sacrifice my principles, what do I have to keep me clean and recovering. And what happens to my primary purpose? We all need to answer these questions for ourselves.

I feel that those of us who seem to be “protecting” our traditions cause more harm and disunity than those who seem to be “violating” them. Let me use my recovery to help rather than hinder, to love rather than fear, to attract rather than promote. Let me use my recovery with humility, patience, tolerance and understanding, to teach as I have been taught—with love.

The marathon meeting at a convention is a place where I can do this, thereby carrying the N.A. message that no addict need die without having the opportunity to find a new way of life.

D.M., California

What happened to the Seventh Tradition?

We have a trend in our fellowship which I feel runs counter to the spiritual intent of our Seventh Tradition. This trend seems to be getting more ingrained and worse in scope every day. It is the notion that our Seventh Tradition equals making a purchase. The basic idea of freely placing money in the basket passed around at meetings is losing ground. In its place, we're getting inundated with a new atmosphere of hucksterism and sales pressure.

I don't come to a meeting of Narcotics Anonymous to buy a product. But, nowadays, some of the meetings I attend are announcing that, "next to the Basic Texts and N.A. pamphlets are the T-shirts, and boy-oh-boy, the T-shirts are really a good deal! And don't forget to buy your convention tickets! And also we really, really need for you to buy a ticket to the fundraiser next week—don't forget all the money we made from the one six months ago—so don't miss it, we need you to support your fellowship, buy, buy, buy, spend, spend, spend, we've

got lots of goodies!" I can get a similar feeling by walking into an average used car lot. (No offense meant to you car sales persons.)

Tradition Seven reads, "Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." This was practiced in the past by taking a collection at regular N.A. meetings. Members like you and I voluntarily donated money to help defray our group's expenses, and to help support the Narcotics Anonymous service effort.

We put money in the basket because we believe in Narcotics Anonymous. It is a privilege to freely choose to support the ongoing functioning of N.A. through a monetary contribution. It is another form of service.

The way we practice the tradition of self-support sets an example. I'm afraid we are currently setting some bad examples.

N.A. helped me to be able to work and have an income. I take pride in my work, and so I willingly give some of my personal funds to N.A. I try to bring to every meeting an amount which I feel is fair, based on what I have to give.

What I get in return for my money is

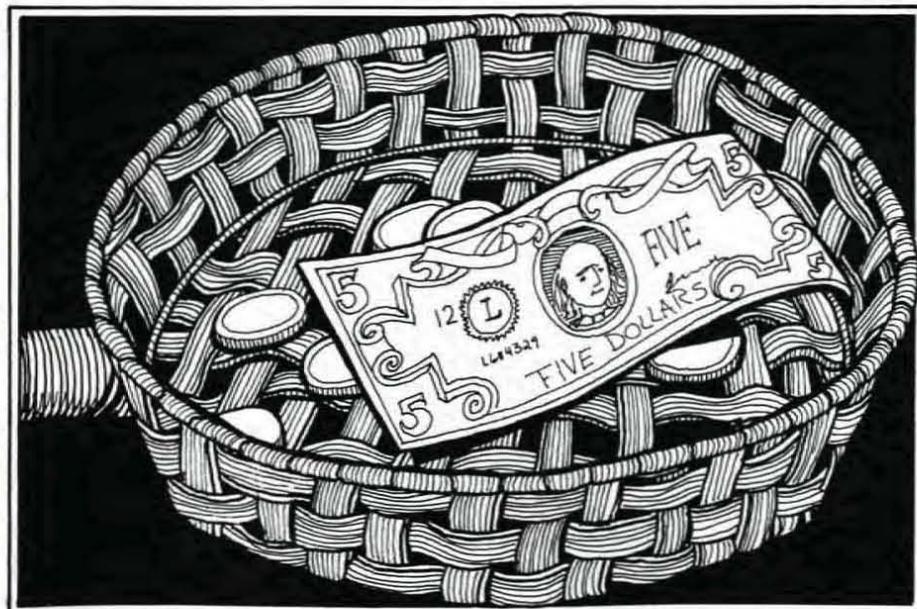
the continuing existence of N.A., which means support both for my survival and for my personal growth. I also get some personal satisfaction from doing my part as a responsible member of this fellowship. I don't get a product that I can show off to prove how spiritual or "cool" I am, and I don't get a weekend at a hotel or resort. What I get in return for practicing the Seventh Tradition is something greater than material possessions or fancy weekends.

Some say, "It all goes to the fellowship anyway, so why should I put money in the basket when I could be buying all kinds of great stuff instead?" That robs us—individually and collectively—of one of the most important spiritual foundations we stand on.

sponsor see. People who are at their first meeting see. The way we practice the tradition of self-support sets an example. I'm afraid we are currently setting some bad examples, and many newer members are getting the idea that this is the way it's supposed to be done.

I fear for what we may be doing to people who are coming into N.A., like I did, broke. I learned during my first days in N.A. that when I made my best effort to contribute, I was equal to any other member, and I could feel good about doing my part to observe the Seventh Tradition. I felt no pressure to spend money I didn't have just so I could fit in.

I'm glad I didn't have to feel inadequate because I couldn't afford



When we practice the Seventh Tradition, our voluntary donations are almost anonymous. *Almost*, because others notice whether or not we put something in the basket. People we

to buy T-shirts and banquet tickets and other miscellaneous stuff. I'm glad I didn't walk into an environment where I immediately met people who were trying to peddle goods.

I have been at meetings where I felt that someone judged me a less than 100% solid supporter of the group because I didn't want to buy a T-shirt or go to a convention. I don't make my contribution to N.A. by attending conventions or buying merchandise; I do it when the basket is passed at my home group!

The atmosphere of recovery is compromised when a meeting becomes a marketplace. Our primary purpose is forced to compete with a tacky side-show for attention. I pray for the day when every group, area, and region gets rid of the practice of looking to conventions, fund-raisers and sales of merchandise to supply the much-needed funds for our services.

I pray for the day when the only thing for sale at N.A. meetings is N.A. literature and the *N.A. Way* magazine. I pray for the day when our social events and functions become celebrations of recovery, where we strive to keep all prices as low as possible and break even.

However, before these prayers can become a reality, we all will have to work together to rid ourselves of the pernicious desire to have "something to show" for our contribution to N.A. We already have something to show; we have a fellowship!

We must reevaluate our donation to the basket at our home group. For most of us, recovery brings increased financial stability. If we were unemployed or in financial trouble when we arrived in N.A., maybe a quarter or fifty cents (or nothing, some days) was as much as we could give then. But if, today, we have a regular income and are learning to be responsible, maybe

\$2, \$3, \$5 or more is appropriate. Remember, your behavior sets an example!

If every member of N.A. contributed a reasonable amount into the basket at meetings, we wouldn't need fundraisers. We would enjoy a renewed sense of spiritual quality and dignity in our meetings, and we would help create a more loving and hospitable climate for the person walking in our door for the first time.

Come on, my friend, think about it! Make a motion at your group to get rid of the T-shirts and paraphernalia. Ask your region to discuss the idea of getting regional funds from donations instead of conventions. Get the ball

**I'm glad that
when I was new
I wasn't made
to feel inadequate
because I couldn't
afford to buy
T-shirts.**

rolling in your newsletter and in your reports. Maybe it means fewer services at first, but it will mean more quality. We've got to start somewhere. Don't give up if you aren't greeted warmly at first.

And, by the way, don't forget to bring some money with you to your home group. There's an opportunity awaiting you there to quietly express your gratitude and your pride in your fellowship, by helping to support it. It's called the Seventh Tradition.

Anonymous, New Jersey

From the editor



Group subscription drive

The group subscription drive we did early last year was very successful. Ten to fifteen thousand people got a chance to read the magazine for the first time, and our circulation grew by fully one third. Evidently, plenty of people are interested in the magazine—all we have to do is find the right way to bring it to them.

We've decided to do that same sort of group mailing a couple of times a year. We send packets to area service committees for distribution to the groups. We offer N.A. members a "free trial" subscription. Normally, when someone sends us a "bill-me" order, that order represents a commitment on that person's part to pay for the full subscription. During these free trial offers, that commitment is not made. People who take us up on the offer may instead choose to cancel the subscription within a couple of months, with no obligation to pay for the magazines they've already received.

As you read this issue, we're in the tail end of a trial offer good through the end of this month. If your group has not yet taken advantage of the offer, make sure your GSR passes the sign-up sheet around at your next meeting and puts it in the mailbox to us as soon as possible.

Fulfillment

The term "subscription fulfillment" refers to everything from managing

the *N.A. Way* subscription list to mailing the magazine. Up until recently, we had been doing all of that in-house. As our circulation grew, the task became more difficult to manage and much more expensive. We began to take a serious look at outside fulfillment houses.

We did a thorough search, and chose a service that had an excellent, long-standing reputation. We then entered into a process of converting from our computer system to theirs.

We had been warned that this kind of conversion was extremely complicated and that problems should be expected. Our first batch of bills accidentally included a mailing to a whole group of people who had tried our free trial offer last spring but had decided not to subscribe. To make matters worse, the wrong prices were quoted on the bills. Because the prices were lower than our regular rates, many subscribed—and we will honor those subscriptions. We apologize to anyone who may have been confused by this accident.

There were a couple of smaller problems with those first billings too, but all have now been corrected. It was a little rocky making the switch, but service to our subscribers should be much better for having made it.

R.H., Editor

Comin' up



AUSTRALIA: Jan. 27-29, 1989; Victoria Area Convention; Fitzroy Community Oval, Brunswick Street, Melbourne; Victoria ASC, P.O. Box 2470-V, Melbourne 3001, Victoria AUSTRALIA

CALIFORNIA: Apr. 24-28, 1989; World Service Conference Annual Meeting; AirTel Plaza Hotel, Van Nuys, (818) 997-7676

CONNECTICUT: Jan. 6-8, 1989; 4th Connecticut Regional Convention, Sheridan Stamford Hotel & Towers, Stamford, (203)967-2222; phoneline (203)454-1122; 4th CTCNA, P.O. Box 1206, Middletown, CT 06457

HAWAII: Feb. 10-12, 1989; 5th Gathering of the Fellowship; Camp Erdman, Honolulu; Hawaii RSC, Attn. Fellowship Gathering, P.O. Box 27909, Honolulu, HI 96827

IDAHO: Apr. 21-23, 1989; 4th Washington/Northern Idaho Regional Convention; A Resort on the Lake, Coeur d'Alene ID 83814, (206) 765-4000; helpline (509) 458-7767; WNIRCNA-4, P.O. Box 807, Spokane, WA 99210

KANSAS: Feb. 17-19, 1989; Sixth Mid-America Regional Convention; Holiday Inn Holidome Convention Center, Salina, (913) 823-1739; Mid-America Convention, P.O. Box 383, Salina, KS 67401

KENTUCKY: Mar. 24-26, 1989; 3rd Kentuckiana Regional Convention; Hyatt Regency, 320 W. Jefferson St., Louisville KY 40202; KRCNA-3, P.O. Box 35063, Louisville, KY 40232

LOUISIANA: May 27-29, 1989; 7th Louisiana Purchase Regional Convention; Landmark Hotel, 2601 Severn Ave., Metairie LA 70002, (800) 535-8840; LPRCNA-7, P.O. Box 750237, New Orleans, LA 70175-0237

MARYLAND: Mar. 10-12, 1989; 3rd Chesapeake-Potomac Regional Convention; Hyatt Regency Bethesda, 1 Bethesda Metro Center, Bethesda MD 20814, (800) 228-9000; CPRCNA-3, P.O. Box 9145, Silver Spring, MD 20906

MISSOURI: Jun. 9-11, 1989; 4th Show Me Regional Convention; Hilton Inn of the Ozarks, 3050 N. Kentwood Ave., Springfield

NEVADA: Jan. 27-29, 1989; 3rd Southern

Nevada Convention; Showboat Hotel, 2800 Fremont Street, Las Vegas, (800)826-2800; Helpline (702) 369-3362; SNCC, P.O. Box 4771, Las Vegas, NV 89127-0771

2) Jul. 28-30, 1989; 2nd Sierra Sage Regional Convention; John Ascuaga's Nugget, Sparks; phoneline (702) 322-4811; Sierra Sage RSC, P.O. Box 11913, Reno, NV 89510-1913

NEW YORK: Apr. 28-30, 1989; 5th Grtr. New York Regional Convention; Concord Resort Hotel, Kiamesha Lake NY 12751, (800) 431-3850

2) Jun. 23-25, 1989; 10th East Coast Convention; University of Buffalo, Amherst Campus; ECCNA-10, P.O. Box 141, Buffalo, NY 14216-0141

NEW ZEALAND: Jan. 14-15, 1989; 2nd New Zealand Area Rally; North Shore Teachers Training College, Auckland; New Zealand Rally, P.O. Box 47087, Ponsonby, Auckland NEW ZEALAND

PENNSYLVANIA: Feb. 16-18, 1989; 7th Grtr. Phila. Regional Convention; Adams Mark Hotel, City Line & Monument Rd., Phila. PA 19131, (800) 231-5858; GPRCNA-7, P.O. Box 42628, Philadelphia, PA 19101-2628

2) Feb. 24-26, 1989; 5th Mid-Atlantic Regional Learning Conference; Sheraton Resort and Conference Center, Lancaster; Helpline 393-4546; Conference 5, P.O. Box 7651, Lancaster, PA 17604

TEXAS: Feb. 18-19, 1989; 5th Texarkana Area Convention; Sheraton Texarkana, I-30 and State Line Ave., Texarkana TX 75501

2) Mar. 24-26, 1989; 4th Lone Star Regional Convention; Hyatt Regency Riverwalk, 123 Loya, San Antonio 78205, (512) 222-1234; LSRCNA-4, 2186 Jackson Keller, Suite 327, San Antonio, TX 78213

VIRGINIA: Jan. 6-8, 1989; 7th Annual Virginia Convention; Williamsburg Hilton and National Conference Center; Virginia Convention, P.O. Box 1373, Hampton, VA 23661



N.A. Way

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9TEA

The Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
6. An N.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. N.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

*My gratitude speaks
when I care
and when I share with others
the N.A. way*

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 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 belong to N.A.—there are no fees or dues. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using drugs. 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 N.A., see your local phone directory, or write us at the address inside.