

THE
NAA Way[®]
M A G A Z I N E

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**NEWS
LETTER
ISSUE**

The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous

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

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THE **NA Way** MAGAZINE

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Note to newer members

I remember how hard it was to even walk into an NA meeting in the beginning. I thought about it for a long time and it took a while to get up enough courage. And then after I knew how a certain meeting went, it took more courage to go to a different meeting. I really didn't want to talk to anyone or have any eye contact with people. I just wanted to listen and watch, and learn. I sat very still and had to have a smoke. I even tried to ignore the part about "alcohol being a drug that we must abstain from in order to recover," and I calmed my nerves with a little booze in my drinks.

Fortunately, I kept some hope and some of the words I heard stayed in my mind enough to get me back into the rooms. I tried harder and went to more meetings a week and when the emotions got too much, I was able to actually pick up the phone and talk to someone who was nice enough to give me their number!

This is a life-saver program, and there is no way I could get off drugs by myself! An addict is always willing to help another addict and there is so much to gain by reaching out and just telling them that you need someone to talk to. You don't have to make any promises to anyone and you can go at whatever speed you are able to. As long as you don't pick up a drug and keep going to meetings you will gain some help.

It's hard for some of us to meet people and feel comfortable talking to others at the meetings when we're getting used to going without drugs at the same time. I didn't know how to fit in. I was relieved when someone said that all you need to do is just say "Hello" to the person next to you and introduce yourself, maybe.

Little by little, you see the same faces and start to remember names and get to know them. Just try a little more and try not to let the unknown make you back out! Read some of the literature. If you get some hope, hold on to it! You'll be surprised at how giving some of the fellow addicts are, and everybody gives out their phone numbers! It's hard to catch people at home but

nobody will be able to know what's going on unless we make the calls. And don't let any of the old gang put you down for trying something new. A real friend wants you to succeed and be well. If they don't have the hope, maybe they will someday. Hopefully, there comes a time when we have to do what is best for ourselves.

If you are really sick of the shit you have to go through to get your fix, tired of having to feed your brain just to make it through the day and night, can't live with the destruction of yourself and your life, tired of killing yourself slowly, you *do* have a choice. NA has helped many others just like you, so give yourself a break! One day at a time, it is possible. I am amazed how long I've been clean and those who really love me are glad to see me among the living again. Nobody has been there like the fellow addicts in NA. Only people who are going through the same thing or who have gone through it before can be trusted and relate like the fellow members of NA. Please keep coming back, because I know it works if you let it!

One more thing I forgot to say that's very important: There is life after drugs! Your brain will start to work better and you can enjoy life clean. There are so many things to do to have fun and my paranoia doesn't get in the way anymore. I have a new self-worth, most of the time, that I lost using. Can't feel good all the time, but that's only human. But, if I let myself, I can go out and do things and see more, hear more and love and be loved more. I even talk more!

Give yourself a chance,

Maria

From: Just For Today

Western Wayne County Area
Southgate, Michigan

With the help of friends

I feel I have been addicted to one thing or another all of my life. In my active addiction, I had always considered myself a social user. When I finally hit my emotional bottom, I sought help through Narcotics Anonymous. These are the events which led to my ongoing recovery.

I have two very good friends. They had been in the fellowship for about six months. I had been avoiding them. Being an addict, I was very cunning, and would go to great lengths to throw them off. I would make up excuses why we could not get together or I'd cancel our plans at the last minute, until that fateful day.

When I was coming down from my last crack binge, I cried for hours. I thought a lot about how many times in previous months I would say, "I quit—I'm tearing my life apart." I had thrown away everything connected with crack, only to have my addiction rear its ugly head once again.

"What's wrong with me?" I'd ask myself. All I had to do was quit smoking cocaine. Between sobs I reached for a joint. As I smoked it, I thought, "This is a drug." Alcohol is a drug as well. Maybe they all work together for, it seems, every time it had become more prominent. I put the joint down;

then the guilt and thoughts of low self-esteem and inadequacy filled my mind. I was disgusted with myself. I told myself for the last time "I'm going to quit!" At that moment, I believe I had hit my all time low. I reached for the phone and, in a desperate frenzy, I dialed the number of the friends that I knew could help me: clean friends.

C answered and before she could speak, in a tear-filled voice, I asked her if I could come over and talk with her. She assured me that we could have some privacy and told me she had been waiting for my call.

Once I arrived, I was greeted by my friends with hugs. They took their children downstairs so that C. and I could be alone. She asked me what was wrong? I told her that I was fed up with myself and that I didn't know what to do about it. She reached for the NA book.

C. never lectured me. Being an addict herself, she knew just what pages and passages to mark for me to read. As I read, she went about her routine, stopping from time to time to ask me if I thought that anything I had read hit home. "Are you kidding?" I said. "This is my life in black and white." It was as if someone had looked right into my heart and mind. The feelings of guilt and shame. Blaming other people, manipulating circumstances and taking advantage of people. Always looking for an excuse to justify using drugs. The hopelessness, the despair, and the frustration. The feeling that it will never get any better so why even try.

When I had finished reading, we talked some more. She told me that

everyone in NA has had these feelings at one time or another. She said the only difference between her and I was the fact that she had a support group and when she got the urge to use, she would call someone in the program or go to a meeting and share her feelings.

I was so relieved to know that I was not alone in the world. There are people who would understand me and would be willing to help me stop using drugs. So all I had to do was take the first step. I did. I said to my friend, "I'm an addict and I want recovery." She was so happy for me, and she said that we could go to a meeting within the hour.

I was nervous and scared at first, but the people were very nice and warm. We could hardly walk five feet without someone hugging us. When it came time for the "Newcomers" to be recognized, my heart was beating so loudly I thought everyone could hear it. As I stood up, the applause was overwhelming. That walk to the podium seemed so far I thought that I'd never get there. I have never felt so much warmth and support from my own family, let alone from total strangers. As I received my "Surrender Chip," I knew that I'd found what I'd needed for so long; I knew I would never need to use again. I had a choice; and I chose life.

It's been some time since that first meeting. My friends are still clean, and by the grace of God, so am I. I will be forever grateful to them for being there for me when I needed them, for bringing me to recovery through NA.

Debbie M.



From a member of the fellowship

- 1) *Through my own inability to accept personal responsibility, I was creating my own problems.*
- 2) *Personal recovery must come first.*
- 3) *Spirituality is the key.*

It took me almost two years in recovery before I was able to comprehend the importance of these three statements. They came to me while I was searching for a way to fix my relationship and while I was trying to find a way to straighten out all the hassles going on in our area, mostly about service.

I had heard these three statements many times in the three years I've been in NA. But, like so many other things I had heard or read, I thought they didn't apply to me. I believed that if I could only straighten out the area service committee, or if I could get my girlfriend to do what I thought she needed to do, I wouldn't have any problems.

So, when it came to me that spirituality was the key, I was shown the importance of spiritual principles. The first of these was honesty. When I was able to get really honest with myself I found that, through my indifference towards spiritual principles, and my own inability to work my own program, I was creating my own problems.

The moment I came to take a closer look at my own program, I was shown how important it is that personal recovery must come first. While I was spending so much time trying to work everyone else's program, I was being closed-minded to the possibility that there might be another way than mine. I was being unwilling to live and let live. And I was being dishonest to myself and others, believing I could fix everyone. I was becoming hostile and resentful, spiteful and vindictive. And I mercilessly judged, criticized and complained about everybody and everything. And these were my problems, not anyone else's. I prayed for willingness, open-mindedness and another way to do things. My Higher Power answered my prayers with these three little statements.

With these statements I was able to find another way. I took responsibility for my own actions and reactions. I put my own personal recovery ahead of everything else. I dropped my indifference and intolerance towards spiritual principles. And, for the first time, I looked really deeply into the mirror and concentrated hard on changing my attitudes and beliefs.

I looked inward instead of outward. This allowed me to live and let live. I have found a new peace through working my own program. My life continues to improve every time I remember those three simple things.

a member

Cycling to freedom

While reading an article the other day, I came across a reference to cycling, or rather learning to ride a bicycle, as having some similarities to recovering from addiction. This set me thinking about this analogy and the more I think about it the more sense it seems to make.

On first coming into NA—or, I suppose any recovery program—the addict is like a child first learning to ride a bicycle. Such a child needs training wheels and a lot of support and encouragement. To that child, it seems almost impossible to imagine staying upright without the help of the wheels. So it is that we support and encourage the newcomer in every way we can.

In due course the child finds that he, or she, can stay upright without training wheels. And we find that the newcomer gradually needs less support and is ready to take responsibility for his or her own program.

What then? To stay upright the cyclist must keep moving. To slow down too much causes the bike to wobble. If it gets even slower the rider will fall off altogether. If the bike is station-

ary it inevitably falls over. WE can't cycle standing still.

Nor can we recovery standing still, or without pedalling. The cyclist who stops pedalling falls off. Maybe not if it's a downhill stretch, but as soon as the challenge of a hill—or even of a fair distance of level ground—appears, it's pedal or fall off—or give up trying to cycle altogether.

In recovery, standing still is doing nothing. Not bothering to go to meetings or to work the steps. Not bothering to keep in touch with our sponsors, maybe not even bothering to have a sponsor.

On the other hand, the faster we pedal the more stable our ride becomes, and the more we can do. The bike is more maneuverable. We get places more quickly. We come to feel proud of the cycling skills we have acquired.

All this leads me to think about how fast I'm cycling. Am I wobbling or am I proceeding along at a good pace? Am I paying attention to my cycling or have I gone into a sort of cruise control, just hoping that habit will keep me going? Surely cyclists who don't look where they are going, and don't bother to pay attention to the terrain, are likely to run into trouble of one sort or another!

No analogy is perfect, of course, and there's certainly more to recovery than there is to cycling. But, I'm finding it helpful to think of myself as having come into the program like a child who didn't know how to ride a bike—a person who didn't know how to live a stable life without too many wobbles. I think I'm wobbling less nowadays.

Anonymous

NORTHERN WAY NEWSLETTER

SURVIVOR GROUP

Kincheloe, Minnesota

Tradition Four

"Each group should be autonomous. . .

Here in prison this is not completely possible at this time. A dictionary defines autonomous as "having the right or power of self government, undertaken or carried on without outside control."

At this time we try to be as self supporting as we can be, but literature costs money, as well as our keytags. We have been urging members to return literature after they have finished reading it, or to pass it along to other members to help cut our costs, thereby helping ourselves to remain as self supporting as possible.

But even these measures can only help to reduce our dependency on outside sources. We still must take financial support for coffee, books, speaker tapes and literature. And, the correctional authorities put some other limitations on our meetings, too.

Our traditions are a set of spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous, and without them NA does not exist. Autonomy or self support gives our groups the freedom to act on their own to create an atmosphere of recovery, serve our members, and fulfill our primary purpose. It is for these reasons we try to gain and guard our autonomy so carefully.

J.P.

THE RECOVERER

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Self-sufficiency is a lie

On August 2, 1991, I celebrated one year clean from all mind and mood altering drugs. I was involved in service in many areas, I sponsored women, attended meetings regularly, and had a life worth living. Then the bottom fell out. A long-term relationship that I was in came to an end and I almost immediately got involved with another man.

I tried to fill that empty space with all kinds of different things—money, a relationship, material possessions—all the time forgetting that the only thing that will fill that void is the love of the fellowship as a whole and the love of a Higher Power. I could come to meetings regularly because I knew I had something to offer you and forgot that I needed what you had to offer me. I wouldn't share pain or fear.

I was hiding behind those masks that we, as addicts, wear so well and so often. My pride and ego prevented me from getting honest with myself or you. I had myself convinced that, because I had over a year clean and I knew what the Basic Text said, I was okay.

My new relationship very quickly became an obsession, taking me further and further from the people in Narcotics Anonymous. My daily program failed.

Eventually I became "recovered" in my own mind and the inevitable happened and I used. That first drug released my disease and I was totally in its grip. I was using every day, in front of my children. My bills weren't being paid. I was doing whatever it took to get loaded. The getting and using and finding ways and means to get more were my only thoughts. Despair, fear and self-pity began to pervade my life. I felt lost, like there was nothing left to live for, no hope.

One day, I went into convulsive seizures. An ambulance was called. But I refused to go to the hospital. I remember hearing the police talk about who would call Child Protective Services. My whole life was falling apart and all I wanted to do was get loaded again. It got progressively worse. "Just let me live through this one and I'll stop," I said to myself. But I never did.

Finally, the man that I was with got arrested and I knew that it wouldn't be long before my disease took me to those promised ends. . . jails, institutions, or death. I picked up the phone, my disease fighting me all the way, and I called my sponsor. She suggested that I get detoxed, so I called another family member and I had them come and get my children. I went to the detox facility, but didn't stay. My disease is so cunning that it told me that I was okay and didn't have to stop using until I had lost everything.

I left detox and walked to the home I had lived in for the last five years and that was now totally devastated by my using. I watched the light flash on my answering machine and felt that familiar feeling of hopelessness, helplessness and despair. I felt that I really had nothing left to live for. Somewhere I got up the courage—or maybe it was just fear—but I called another addict who got help in bringing me back.

I learned that "self-sufficiency is a lie," and about the therapeutic value of one addict helping another.

This addict has opened her home to me and has been with me almost constantly for the last nine days. Today, I sit in a meeting with nine days clean and as I look back at that time just a few short days ago I am reminded of why I'm here and why I want to keep coming back. Today, I can't afford to believe that I know how to do this alone and I must be willing to do whatever it takes to stay clean and not allow pride and ego to push me out the door again.

Today I am grateful. My gratitude goes out to the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous and to those many addicts who have died, so that I might live.

Thank you for loving me no matter what and for teaching me how to live.

Teresa B.

Decisions

I attended an NA meeting last night that was concerned about making big decisions during the first year of clean time, and why it's suggested these decisions be avoided when possible.

I came to my first several NA meeting riding a very tall horse, wood chips balanced precariously on both shoulders. It wasn't long before I fell off my horse, and I got tired of daring

addicts around the tables to knock the chips off my shoulders. They just kept saying, "Don't use, work the steps, keep coming to meetings."

Eventually I was able to take the first step. I admitted I was powerless over my addiction, and that my life was unmanageable. I came to understand that I had a disease, and that my life was unmanageable because I had made it so... and that it didn't have to be unmanageable anymore.

I kept coming back to meetings, I worked the steps to the best of my ability. I listened, and I learned... slowly. It took over a year to become aware of how fogged and musty my mind had been, and how it slowly but surely cleared with time in the program.

I came into Narcotics Anonymous with the walls of about seventeen years of addiction encasing me in denial, anger, fear. Not only did I have to somehow dispose of all the garbage, I had to begin to recover enough to learn what to replace the garbage with, and how to do that.

NA offered Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, a bunch of recovering addicts, the concept of a Higher Power and more, tools for me to learn to use so I could not only stay clean, but so that I could learn how to live in active recovery.

Between learning how to surrender, how to work the steps, how to apply the principles of recovery to my life outside meetings, how to develop a working relationship with the Higher Power of my understanding, and how to live my life one day at a time, I was

boggled. Talking the talk is not difficult; understanding the talk, living the talk—that's hard work.

The only concrete, whole-hearted, feel-good decision I was capable of making during my first year was to stay clean no matter what.

I didn't know how to make decisions. For me, making a decision is akin to making a commitment, which is a first cousin to accepting responsibility. As a using addict, it was completely against my nature to make commitments or accept responsibilities. Both scared me, confused me, and were best avoided, so I could keep myself to myself, keep my time open, promised to no one and nothing.

I spent the first year of my recovery detoxing from the mindlessness of leading a life built on drug use and the distortions in thinking and reasoning my disease encouraged and embellished.

I didn't know how to be open-minded, knew next to nothing about willingness, and had an innate fear of honesty. I didn't know how to make rational decisions, I operated on impulse.

So I'm grateful I had to make no big decisions my first year... I just had to stay clean and learn to live in NA recovery. That was plenty!!

Anonymous



Emotion & "HALT"

When I first came into NA, after 35 years of active addiction, about the only emotion I had left was *rage*.

While I was still using, if I wanted to "feel" one way I took one chemical, if I wanted to feel different, I used a different chemical. The overpowering feeling of rage against everyone and everything including myself seemed to be the only thing I couldn't blot out with drugs unless I OD'd. This I did, on more than one occasion.

It was almost three weeks into recovery before I experienced my first "honest" and totally spontaneous emotion. It was a feeling of compassion for another human being, and it scared the hell out of me. What it reminded me of most was a bum trip on acid. I had no idea of how long it would last, how much worse it was going to get, and the worst thing about it was the fact that I felt that I had no control whatsoever over it. I vividly remember thinking, while almost paralyzed with panic, that if this was the way recovery was going to be—I didn't want any part of it.

Well, I did survive it, and I didn't have to use drugs over it, and I have found with time, that each succeeding emotional experience has been a little easier to handle. Still the obsessive and compulsive behavior which, at least for me, is still very close to the surface, will once in a while break loose. I have found that this is usually when I haven't been keeping track of a sub-program called "HALT," Hungry, Angry, Lonely, & Tired.

Like any other part of my program, I can cut corners a little bit on this HALT program, but when I do I am putting my recovery in jeopardy. Even after years of recovery, when I find that one of these problems is affecting me, if I put off doing something about it, the rest of them will show up in

a very short time. I have found that when I cut those corners on the HALT program, my negative emotions—the ones that usually cause me problems—are a lot quicker to not only appear, but also to grow in intensity. I have found that my emotions take a certain amount of time to grow in intensity to the point where they can take control of me, and that the amount of time this takes is directly proportional to how my physical and mental state was when the emotions first appeared. I have found that as long as I do not allow my emotions to control me but instead I control them, I am usually in pretty fair shape. But the longer I put off taking care of my HALT problems, the easier it is for these emotions to take me over, until at a certain point it becomes inevitable that they will do so, and do it instantaneously.

When my emotions take over, I no longer have the ability to say no to that first fix, pill, or drink. If I have also been stupid enough to put myself around “using people and places,” there is nothing between me and “doing drugs” except a loving God or, if you prefer, call it luck. There is an old expression that God helps those who help themselves, and luck can be damn fickle at times. So, if I have any intention of staying clean, I have to do my best to keep in touch with where I am at, both physically and emotionally, and take care of my HALT program.

“Chuck” B.

From : Mid-America

Disappointment

Recovery is the joyous expression of life, on life's terms. The ability to manage, cope, or turn over problems today is the direct result of the experience, strength and hope of the Narcotics Anonymous literature, members and program. This ability was lost in the active phase of my addiction. I needed chemicals to deal with the imperfect world outside of and within myself. They drowned out feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, fear and self-loathing. Little would phase me in my active using career, as long as I had the proper chemical to mediate my emotional, physical and spiritual state. Today is different.

Today I feel. I am. I do. I feel the joys of life and living and being a part of the whole. I also can experience the pain of emotional growth, disappointment, anger, etc., without having to rely on chemicals.

I received a letter in the mail today. It was disappointing news. As I slowly but surely lifted the lid and sat upon my gilded throne (pity-pot), I was reminded of an old friend of mine.

He and I had met ten years ago in a half-way house for men in recovery. I was thirty-six days new to the

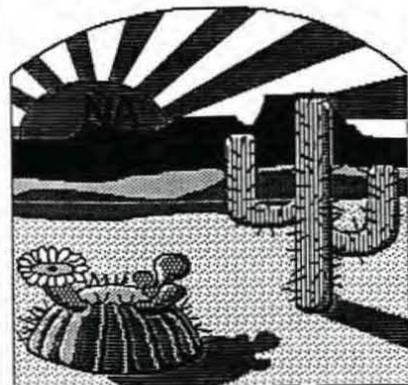
program—bewildered, confused and somewhat lost. He took me under his wing and showed me the ropes and the walk of recovery. We spent many hours in deep conversation and discussion and I became very fond of him. Looking back, I can say that he was my first NA sponsor. Soon after we met he graduated from the house and moved away to Arizona. We kept in touch by phone as best we could for a few months, but lost track of each other after a while as people separated by distance can. About a year or so later, I decided to try to locate him. He had moved several times since his last known address. After numerous phone calls to friends and family, I located him in New Mexico. We were excited to share details of the past year or so with each other, so I ask him what he was up to. He replied that he had gotten married (I congratulated him), divorced, started a new career (again, congrats), failed at it, owed back taxes and that his new girlfriend was pregnant (congrats?), but she had left him. “Oh, my God!”, I said. “That’s terrible.” (I was afraid to ask if he had stayed clean through all this.) “Not at all,” said he, “On the contrary, things are GREAT!” “What do you mean,” I said (now totally confused). “What I mean is that things are great because I am still clean and I am actually experiencing and feeling what’s happening in my life—rather than being a numbed-out observer to what’s going on.” (Silence on my end.) “Sure, some of the feelings hurt,” he went on to explain, “but I’ve been able to learn and grow from each

experience.” We talked for about an hour and when I hung up the receiver, I realized that he had taught me something about recovery again. I realized that I must know the Yin and the Yang (positive and negative) of life to really experience it on its terms. If excitement is the Yin, then the disappointment is the Yang. The key for serenity is in living the whole experience, rather than just the positive side. If I was to expect to really feel my emotions, I would have to take the painful ones with the pleasurable ones.

As I close the lid on my pity-pot one more time, I’m thinking of him and wondering where and how he is. I’m doing great! I just celebrated ten years clean, and I got a letter in the mail today. . .

Nate F.

Mid-America Newsletter



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sanity



Volume V

November, 1991

Number 7

Perspectives

My biggest surprise and maybe the most important eye-opener that I've had in my time in Narcotics Anonymous has been the ability, via the program, to change my perspective of things.

Back in my dark ages, the way I perceived myself and the world around me was so one dimensional and limited that it amazes me now that I could have been so blind. Inconceivable! Me, an upstanding member of the '60s counter-culture. Closed-minded, never! It was all the straights that had a limited field of vision. I was part of the "New Age" that saw things in a new light. My perception of the world was perfect.

Now I look back at that time, which was not that long ago, shake my head and laugh. Sometimes feeling foolish for being that way but mostly being very grateful for my new and changing views of life and of myself. I've learned through meetings and my sponsor that no matter what happens to me or around me, the way I choose to view it will determine the way I act or how I feel about the situation.

At first, the idea of being able to change my outlook on how I viewed different situations was difficult to grasp. I thought I perceived things a certain way and that was it. That was my reality. Reality, or my perception of it, possibly being a matter of choice, never entered my mind. Things in my environment affected me, period. It was not a matter of choice.

Now I've learned different. I've learned that although I cannot always change situations or events in my life, the way I choose to look at these or perceive them can make the difference between sanity and insanity. I can't always turn it over but I can always turn me over.

Example: On my way to work in the morning, someone cuts me off on the highway. Now I have a choice. Do I take this as an opportunity to focus on how stupid and inconsiderate people are and how dare they get in my way

and then plot a course for retaliatory action? Or do I perceive this as an opportunity to practice my patience and tolerance realizing that people do make mistakes.

I reflect on my own driving skills and how, at times, they left a lot to be desired. Now I know this is very simply stated, maybe too simply, but I think the point is valid. On some level I have an opportunity to select my own reality and I can make myself as happy or unhappy as I choose to be.

I know this sounds all well and good and perhaps a bit mystic. But I don't mean to say that you or I will be able to walk around in a state of bliss or totally oblivious to the world around us. I just know that with practice I have found this a helpful tool in my recovery. It helps keep my day balanced and helps keep the important things in focus.

S.B.

powerful than a switch engine, is just as fast as a speeding bullet, walks on water if the sea is calm, talks to God personally.

Area Service Representative (ASR)—Leaps short buildings with a running start and favorable winds, is almost as powerful as a switch engine, is faster than a speeding BB, walks on water in an indoor swimming pool, talks to God if special request is approved.

Area Service Representative Alternate (ASR-A)—Barely clears a Quonset hut, loses tug of war with a locomotive, can fire a speeding bullet, swims well, is occasionally addressed by God.

Chairperson—Makes high marks on the wall when trying to leap buildings, is run over by locomotives, can sometimes handle a gun without inflicting self-injury, dog paddles, talks to animals.

Vice-Chairperson—Runs into buildings, recognizes locomotives two out of three times, is not issued ammunition, can stay afloat with a life jacket, talks to walls.

Treasurer—Falls over doorsteps when trying to enter buildings, says, "Look at the Choo Choo," wets self with a water pistol, mumbles to self.

Secretary—Lifts buildings and walks under them, kicks locomotives off the tracks, catches speeding bullets in her teeth and eats them, freezes water with a single glance, She is God.

Attributed to the Wisconsin Region

Descriptions of our trusted servants

Regional Service Representative (RSR)—Leaps tall buildings in a single bound, is more powerful than a locomotive, is faster than a speeding bullet, walks on water, gives policy to God.

Regional Service Representative Alternate (RSR-A)—Leaps short buildings in a single bound, is more

The Bottom Line

MAR-APR '92

GOLD COAST AREA NEWSLETTER, P.O. BOX 24724, FT. LAUDERDALE, FL 33307, 24 HR. HELPLINE: 476-9297

On anonymity

I was asked if I had some thoughts on anonymity and it turns out I do. Like, we tend to take it too lightly. We're proud of our recovery. We want the world to know we did it! At least that's the way I am. This is the longest I've been clean, straight-thinking and able to make decisions that make sense. Also, I am now able to recognize when I need to let others make those decisions for me and I'm proud of it. I want the world to know!

But! That world out there is not like us. For example, a few weeks ago my bicycle was stolen. I need it for my work. I had just been hired as a bicycle courier. Was I mad! My boss and I jumped in his car and took off after the guy. We found him a few blocks away. The police already had him in custody, along with my bike. He was known in the neighborhood as a thief and a "crack-head." I wanted at him so bad! I wanted to kill him. My disease had kicked in to the max. Then I got a look at him. With hands locked behind his back, he sat in the back seat of the police car, behind the cage. He was half-naked. The only thing he had on was a dirty pair of sweatpants. He was dirty from his head to his feet. In an instant, upon seeing him, I saw so much. I saw me, or what I might have been had it not been for this program. I wanted to go to him and tell him there was hope for him. I asked the officer if I could talk to him. He responded quickly, "No!" I said that all I wanted was to tell him to go to NA when he got out of jail. The policeman drew himself up, and in a loud voice, with my boss standing right there, said, "NA is a bunch of crap! It's a waste of time. I've seen these guys go to NA and within days they're back on the street. NA doesn't do anything."

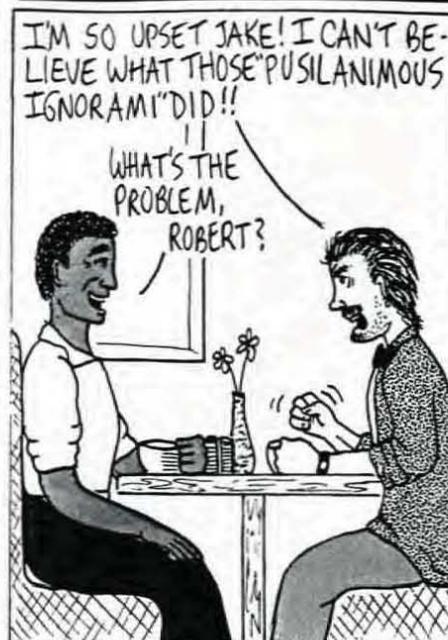
I wanted to say something but didn't because my boss was there and he does not know that I'm in NA. So, I remained silent. But it hurt. There it was, from a policeman: "NA is a waste of time."

Now, if someone were to tell my boss that I'm in NA, I wonder what the outcome would be. I was at a meeting just recently and the chairperson said someone had blown his anonymity recently. He didn't say what happened as a result of that, but he shared all the pain and worry it caused him. So remember what we say at the close of many of our meetings. We say it for a very good reason: "What you heard here, stays here." It's alright to say you were here and you are an addict. It is not alright to say someone else was here or that they are an addict.

Chris C.

Home Group

Robert contributes



The broad perspective

Putting together the "Newsletter Issue" this year gave us cause for much thought. First we had to decide whether to skip it altogether, in order to devote space to a celebration of the tenth anniversary of *The NA Way Magazine*. Also, among choices, was the possibility of a "Newsletter Issue" that included some sort of celebratory feature, or a series of writings, on the topic of our "first ten years." The first issue of *The NA Way Magazine* was published in September, 1982.

Deeming discretion the better part of valor, we elected to meet the standard schedule of spotlighting local newsletters in September, and present some kind of ten-year recognition event *next* month.

The newsletter stories and articles re-printed here are as intact as we could practically keep them. Except in the instances noted below, the articles are printed exactly as they first appeared, including original titles, and stylistic choices. Syntax edits we might have more readily made for a first-time publication in *The NA Way* were not applied to this material.

The changes:

1. "Note to newer members," page 2—an ambiguous sentence that might have been misconstrued was deleted.
2. "From a member of the fellowship,"

page 5—A final paragraph that repeated the three numbered statements beginning the article was deleted;

3. "Tradition Four," page 7—This piece began with a complete version of Tradition Four. It was shortened to get the whole piece on that page. The "Survivor Group" mentioned in the title is inside a corrections facility in Minnesota;
4. Though there were no changes made in the humorous piece "Descriptions of our trusted servants," page 15—mention seems appropriate that we found it in the "Sanity Newsletter," New Jersey, where it was "attributed to the Wisconsin region." At this writing we are not sure whether the article was actually printed in a Wisconsin newsletter, or if the attribution was made for some other reason.
5. Commas, commas, commas! These little fellows, and some of their cousins of punctuation, ran around everywhere. We put a few in places they had not been, and asked some of them to vacate a few spots where they seemed uncomfortable. Any license taken with the local newsletter editors' work was calculated to further enhance clarity of the authors' intentions. If we seem to have failed to achieve that end, bring it to the attention of the staff, and it will be redressed in print, upon request.
6. Names, other than the authors' chosen signature, were omitted.

Several things became more evident as the newsletter issue was compiled. The first of these is that the files we

maintain are almost inadequate for the task of producing a singularly-focused *newsletter issue*. Most of the newsletters we've received this year included, at most, only one or two original pieces of recovery-oriented material. What might be termed "viewpoints" or opinion pieces usually outnumber the articles on basic recovery. Most newsletters understandably give lots of space to announcements, and many depend on featuring excerpts from the Basic Text or other NA literature to fill out their columns.

Not only are most newsletters made up of material we can't reasonably make a part of the *NA Way* annual effort, only a part of the NA fellowship's newsletters get sent to the *NA Way* staff. It's hard to realistically estimate the number being published, but it's probably safe to say the amount is twice as many as were considered for this issue.

As you may have guessed, we're building toward a pitch here. How about a concerted effort to make your local newsletter available to the *NA Way*, not just as part of an annual reprint issue, but as part of an on-going system for the publication of our membership's written sharing?

If we all start now (the staff by maintaining a kind of casual "archives" for newsletters and nurturing ties with newsletter committees; and local newsletter editors and committees as a front-line of reporters, we might build a process by which newsletter articles get featured in the *NA Way*, *all year round*. Please consider this and call or write if you have hopes or concerns about the idea. A much more extensive description of these conditions and possibilities, and

any ideas we receive from you, will be a part of the October ten-year critique.

WSC Workshop

In a letter released August 5th announcement was made that the fall WSC workshop is set for October 30, 31 and November 1 in Cincinnati, Ohio. The site is the Clarion Hotel, 141 West Sixth Street. The hotel number is (513) 352-2110. Room rates are about \$65 per night, single, double, triple or quad.

Most committees will begin meeting at 9 a.m. Friday and will schedule some of their time for a committee open forum. A WSC general forum is tentatively planned for Saturday from 1-6 p.m. During that forum WSC committee chairpeople will answer questions about committee projects, and time will be allotted for discussions of WSO sales policy, WSC Ad Hoc Committee on NA Service, and the Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust.

If you are funded by world services (or in need of a roommate) and plan to attend, you should make lodging arrangements through Jeff G at the WSO.

NA video

At the 1991 WSC an ad hoc committee (known as the NA Video Group) was formed to oversee the production of a video about Narcotics Anonymous. The NA Video Group is currently looking for production companies who are interested in producing this video. A *Request for Proposal* can be made available by contacting the WSO Public Information Department.

**Recovering in Prison
Excerpts from letters**

**FEBRUARY
1992**

My name is Jim. I am a convict and a recovering addict . . . just before our regular Sunday morning meeting of the Hole in the Wall Narcotics Anonymous Group, I was talking to our group's secretary and (during the course of conversation) he mentioned that you may be interested in corresponding with a person here who is into recovery.

I was intrigued by the idea of writing someone outside with whom I could share some things about myself, my recovery, and from whom I could learn some more about getting and living clean. You see, since my junior year of high school, I really have never been totally clean except for a couple of short stretches while incarcerated and even then I was not in recovery as I was really only concerned about getting out and continuing my using/abusing.

But now I am actively involved with NA and it's showing me that there is hope. Hope for a future that can be worthwhile, clean, and free; full of enjoyment for myself and others.

There is so much more that I want to learn that I don't even really know where to begin. Growing every day mentally and physically and morally is such a treat that it's hard to under-

stand and communicate the differences and the downright wonder involved to someone who hasn't been on the same road.



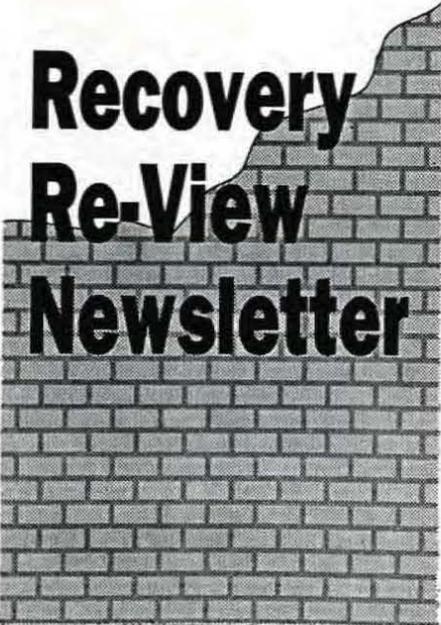
You know that part where you referred to being in NA as an adventure? Well, in many ways, it feels like that to me also. But the main adventure that I'm experiencing is in the living. Maybe I'm not really explaining that right. When I am at the NA meetings, I meet people, learn about them and myself, share and learn, and get educated on ways and means to get and grow in recovery. But the adventure comes in trodding new ground, in experiencing life with a new perspective, and greeting people with nothing but interest and curiosity. Maybe it's the difference between just-not-being-high and deciding-to-be-clean. Things aren't always going to be pretty, places aren't always going to be fun, and people certainly aren't always going to be entertaining or nice. But now I can go a long way towards acceptance of them as they are and not as I wish them to be. Does this make sense? Sometimes what are actually simple things get awfully complicated when I try to express them. . .

. . . When I first started to read the Basic Text and some of the personal stories, etc., I had a real crummy way of looking at what was being said. What kept running through my mind was "I never did that," or "that never happened to me" or "I never felt that way." It took a while to grasp the fact that there was something in each sto-

ry, in every step, and all the chapters, that applied directly to me. Maybe that's something like you were saying regarding listening and paying attention.

. . . Listening is tough, but if I can learn to do it better, there is so much more that I'll learn and it will be so much easier to connect with folks. And maybe people won't act like I'm such an arrogant a-hole. That last used to be the way that most people reacted to me, now it's kind of a standing joke among my friends and me. Hey, today I even have friends, not using/crime partners. That's new and improved! It was a long empty road there for a while. What's really odd about it is that up until I started looking for recovery, I figured that it would be easier to like people if they weren't such a bunch of losers, squares, nerds, straights, etc. Nowadays, I'm finding a lot less difficulty in really enjoying folks and even liking 'em, and get this: *they* haven't changed!

My addictive lifestyle and incarceration resulting therefrom only seemed to breed and foster a sense of isolation and separateness. Like I was different from everyone. On the streets, it was me against the "straights," the "squares;" in here it was me against the "cops," "man" and "rafe-o's." The strange thing about it, that I am learning as I go along, is that most often it was really me against myself. When you said when I'm trying to change people, places and things, I'm "just avoiding dealing with me," I was just going "Yeah, yeah, so true!" All the time it's something that I really have to be on guard

A graphic of a brick wall with a jagged, torn edge on the right side. The text "Recovery Re-View Newsletter" is overlaid on the wall.

**Recovery
Re-View
Newsletter**

Note: Featured here is the complete article printed in the July 1992 edition of Recovery Re-View. Though these are but excerpts from a series of longer letters, they are presented as the author approved them, and in the originally published sequence.

against. Now that drugs are not what's hindering my growth and change, it's like I get wrapped up at times in worrying about the negative crap that someone else has, rather than deal with my own issues. Oh, it would be easy to just say "Well, my life is all screwed up and I'm in prison because I did drugs," or some other blaming and minimizing stuff. But, in reality, drugs only aggravated the problems that I already had and didn't deal with. Thank God that over the years my brain did not become so fried that I'm not now able to recognize or deal with them now. That's something else that amazes me every day; as big a mess as I've made of things, I've still got so much going for me. Sometimes it's hard to believe just how blessed I've been and still am. . .

You wrote about/quoted some things from the Basic Text that you found that had helped you. Let me share with you a couple of the things that I have come across in the chapter entitled *Just For Today—Living The Program*: "In the past we believed desperation would give us the strength to survive. Now we accept responsibility for our solutions." —pg. 94.

And all the thoughts under *Just For Today* on pg. 96, but especially "Just for today my thoughts will be on my new associations, people who are not using and who have found a new way of life. So long as I follow that way, I have nothing to fear."

One of the biggest that I am trying to deal with is my feelings of wanting to be in control. Now I'm not talking about actually doing it 'cause through

being in prison or in active addiction I always knew that I really wasn't, but the desire to control always put me in some serious contention with something or someone: the law, the administration here, other cons, the guards, cops, etc. Now it's all about keeping the Serenity Prayer in front of me at all times. Maybe what it's really all about is growing up; I cannot always have what I want when and how I want it. You know, that old dope-fiend self-centeredness, the world is my oyster and it better kick with the pearls. The world is still my oyster, but now I'm the grain of sand that someday may produce that pearl. Am I being clear?

There are some days, like this morning, when I have to drag myself up and out. I don't feel like using up my twice a week sleep-in mornings to go be in a meeting; but then I realize that the others are counting on me to get the coffee, set up the circle of chairs, and have things ready when the a.m. movement line is called. So I get under the shower and do my little bit of service work and end up glad that I did, cause there is not one meeting from which I don't learn something, not one time I don't come out just a tad bit better than I went in. Even though it's now been just two weeks more than a year that I have been clean, I'm really just a newcomer to recovery. There is so much to learn, and so much to unlearn. Like that part of the reading *How It Works* says: ". . . we can't do it all at once. We didn't become addicted in one day, so remember, easy does it." There are times when I have to remind myself that deciding/realizing that I can

never use again is not enough...when that little, crazy, self-destructive voice in the back of my head says "It's just a joint," or "You can do just one when you get out."

Then it becomes really necessary to just focus in on that minute and stay clean for that minute. Five years, ten years, one year down the road all of a sudden is not important; that minute and the next and the next are. And in those minutes that's when the program gets real important! With the help of God and the things the program has taught me, those minutes come less often and are easier to get through. I doubt that they'll ever totally go away, but they'll be dealt with when they happen.

MARCH 1992

I am like totally blown away. You see, at our regular Sunday morning meeting this week, the guy chairing suggested that we take as our topic "love and what it meant to us!"

Well, you can imagine that topic tossed into a roomful of dope fiends! Anyway, in the hour and a half that was available after readings, etc., about four guys shared, and man, it was like getting pealed. In slightly different ways and words, each one of these guys talked about stuff going all the way back to childhood that could have come right out of my life. What was really scary was that these were issues and things that I thought were

unique to me alone, and things that I really have never shared with anybody.

In the Basic Text, the chapter called "I Was Unique," on page 127, second paragraph: "How could I relate to them? They did not come from my background. They had not achieved what I had achieved. Yet when I listened, I heard my story, again and again. These people experienced the same feelings, the sense of loss, doom, and degradation, as I did. They, too, had been helpless, hopeless, and beaten down by the same hideous monster as I had." Constantly, through NA, I find my personal stuff related, and relating to other people's. If there is something bugging me or twisting my head, that problem will either be that week's topic, or be brought up by somebody in discussion or reading. It's really weird.

One of the main things he emphasized was that in order to really progress down recovery road, I would need to really work the steps. Since our time was so limited, I figured that maybe I would keep my mouth shut, listen to what he had to say, and think about it. So that's what I did. Really unusual for me! Anyway, I wanted to say to him, "But I do work the program; I go to meetings; I attend step study; I do service work; I don't use!" But instead of all that argumentative stuff, I spent some time just thinking about it and letting it all sink into my thick ol' head. After a while, it really dawned on me, agreeing with the program is not living it, and believing

the steps are a good way to go is not working them. That's kind of where I am right now.

I just took a few minutes out to go over Step Four in the text and it suddenly occurred to me that a large part of my letters to you have been involved with my ongoing inventory. Not that it has all been in these little jottings, but as I write you about these various things spinning about in this mix-master head of mine, the more clearly I can see what's going on and deal with them. Like it says on page 30: "The more we live our program, the more God seems to put us in positions where issues surface. When issues surface, we write about them. We begin enjoying our recovery because we have a way to resolve shame, guilt, or resentment!" And then further down the page: "We develop the ability to survive our emotions," and it's true, every time I start to deal with some of this stuff and write about it, I feel better, about myself and just in general.

This whole past week I've been weirding out and definitely getting bent. Apparently, at first I was only reliving some of my past emotional turmoil, then trying to stuff 'em away, and it really wasn't working. . . So I had to get with a couple of people I knew who wouldn't make me feel worse, and tell them just how weird I was feeling. It didn't solve everything, but it helped a lot cause I never used to let people know what was happening with me emotionally, as a rule. I guess I thought that I'd be "safer"

that way, or something. But I went ahead and felt the pain and touched the sorrow/regret and I'm still OK, so I guess I'll survive.

I got the two issues (February and March) of *The NA Way Magazine* this evening. Haven't had time yet to read all of the one, it's not really something I can adequately digest in one fell swoop; but I did do the graphics issue. Sharp!...

Something that I feel I need to say to people (as I did this morning in group) who, for no other reason than that I am another addict trying to get some recovery, allow me to tell them just how depressed/weird and hurt I was feeling for a couple of weeks (including one guy with whom I work every day!) — *Thank you for being open and caring enough to listen.*

Reading (one of my) letters makes you almost as much a captive audience to all that stuff as working next to me in prison. Although the poor guy got a lot more of it! But it's kind of a new trip sharing all that crap and still being accepted anyway. I always had the idea that I always had to be certain kinds of people to be accepted by certain people. . . It's kinda nice just going ahead and trusting people, and God, enough to be me.

"Reaching out is the beginning of the struggle that will set us free. It will break down the walls that imprison us. A symptom of our disease is alienation, and honest sharing will free us to recover.

"If we are hurting, and most of us do from time to time, we learn to ask

for help. We find that pain shared is pain lessened," page 80.

I'm attending NA meetings, drug and alcohol treatment groups, and now consciously working the steps so that I will be better prepared to deal with the world as it is and have a chance of staying out and living. If these accounts are not kept balanced on the plus side, jails, institutions, and (sooner rather than later) death, are going to be my only future. Who was it who said "The insanity of addiction is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results"? Oh, how true. Once the truth of this becomes evident, then the question is how to break the cycle. Fortunately there is a way: NA. . .

The first thing I had to admit and believe was that I truly had no control over my addiction and that, through my own best efforts, I had an unmanageable life. Then I came to believe that a power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. Then I said, "Wait a minute, those are the first two steps!" So I figured, what the heck, let's see what's next: turn my will and my life over to the care of God, as I understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will, and the power to carry it out. Then that old addled addict started up again! OK, let's go back to Step One, and that's how I came to believe that unless I started to get into NA, I was only going to repeat my own worst history and relive my past miseries for ever. And anytime that I find that I am starting to slip back into that old

ridiculous chain of thought, I have only to refer to Step One and then Step Two. You might say that my program is like a dance sequence. . . Step One-Step Two, Step ONE-Step TWO, Step THREE, cha-cha-cha!

Anyway, I'm doing, myself, the Fourth Step for the first time. Maybe some of the stuff I'm going through might be the same, maybe it isn't, but there is some stuff I'm learning. All the stuff that I felt (pain, humiliation, shame, anger, etc.) that I did not express at the time I was feeling it with the persons(s) involved for whatever reason (embarrassment, fear) only showed up at a later time via inappropriate and/or self-destructive behavior. I need not seek approval from others (although it is nice) and if I don't get, it I am not necessarily being rejected as an individual. Rejection is preferable than what occurs if I were to go to any lengths to avoid it. I, as a person, am no less or more than any other person; actions are either desirable or not, not the individual.

The physical action of writing or speaking about things historically kept in the dark creates an amazing sense of freedom; the more carefully hidden/suppressed something is, the more important it is to communicate that something. Otherwise, rather than just being hidden, it is able to become controlling. In other words, my deepest, darkest secrets become a sort of power behind the throne and it will never be a good counselor, but rather like an evil grand vizier in an old fairy tale.

The Jefferson Starship had a song "Go Ask Alice" in which they had a

line. ". . . remember what the Good Book said, feed your head." Maybe that line would be better if instead it was: free your head!

The Fourth Step also seems to free emotions. For example, just today I was able to tell a friend that even though I really do like him, there are days when I just want to kick his butt! Now even though in the past I would probably have hidden my anger from him, fearing that we wouldn't be friends anymore, I now realize that such stuff results in a relationship based on dishonesty. Not only that, but that anger would have probably been released against some poor unsuspecting person who wouldn't have had the faintest idea, or in some other wrong way. We are still friends, even though, according to him, there are days that he not only wants to kick my butt, but hit me with something, too! Ah, progress and honesty are so refreshing!



Now back to what's happening with me on Step Four: nothing concrete. I'm obviously not saying that I haven't done anything, just not for days. I pull out the pages on which I had gotten a lot of stuff down, and just stare at them. When working or playing or doing something else, I will think of something that I should put down and when the paperwork gets pulled, that item(s) gets noted under the appropriate section-head but then I draw a blank. I'll just sit and stare until I eventually give up and put

everything away. When I first started writing, it just seemed like I could go on forever. Now it's piecemeal. I want to do this and go on, but it just seems to drag. Maybe I'm expecting it to happen instead of making it happen. Maybe I shouldn't have any expectations and just accept what occurs. Maybe I need to stop analyzing and just do it. I don't know. I expect it will all work out, and probably for the best, if I just keep pluggin' away. . .

. . . as the text tells us, "In recovery, failures are only temporary setbacks rather than links in an unbreakable chain," and further on, "We deal with what is at hand and try not force solutions." I guess that what that all means is to just keep plugging away, don't force the issue, because if it is worthwhile, it will all eventually work out if we don't give up. So I will be putting some more time in on Step Four and see what happens. I know my mind won't block forever. I just need to be ready with my pen and paper catch-basket when it busts loose!

APRIL 1992

Good morning! I just got back from our meeting. It was great! We had six or seven new people and a couple of folks just back for their second meeting! As one of the guys who has been

in the group for about a year, I found that I was really able to give and get some good info and feedback. I'm finally starting to understand the deal about keeping what you have by giving it away! I only hope that we were able to get across to the newcomers just how glad all of us were to have them attend, and how much we hope they will keep coming back.

I tried to emphasize that even though there were a lot of different programs/groups/clubs/classes, that this place offered to help guys help themselves to change the way they thought/did/reacted, that this program of NA was open, without a waiting list, and was available everyday, everywhere; they could learn things about themselves now and later, and establish habits and thoughts that would not only improve how they did time, but could carry with them to improve how they lived and to keep from ever doing time again. So, anyway, it was a good meeting; I feel energized and better for being there. . .

MAY 1992

Another thing that I have noticed is the difficulty that I've had in staying focused on recovery in the way that I feel I ought. There are days when I just have to tell myself to get on with it, and days that I don't even do that. As we all know, lack of

progress is not stasis, but regression.

I enjoyed, as always, *The NA Way Magazine*. An article in particular really touched me deep in the old emotions. That was the one, "Don't let me go." It was such a cry in the wilderness. I wanted to reach out my hand to her, wherever she was, give her a big hug, and a ride wherever she needed. I would like to suggest to her that maybe the best thing for her to do would be to start her own no-smoking group. Even though I'm in prison, I know that there is a good shot at forming a group here. (Note: this letter written following a transfer to another correctional facility in Oregon.) Sure she can do so where she is. But most of all I'd like to tell her that yes, I hear her, her pain and loneliness, and that I care.

There were a lot of other good things, too. "Armadillos," and the accompanying letter from Jeanne V in Texas; a letter to the fellowship from the Ocean ASC in New Jersey; and the beautiful letter from RR in Indiana, "Simplicity is the key." It's really great hearing things that other addicts write to say, kinda like a meeting in a booklet form.

Yeah, I guess that I've had a couple of meetings today. First, this morning, I read the new booklet, *An Introductory Guide to NA*, then starting writing a letter. Then this afternoon I read your letter and *The NA Way* and continued writing my letter to you. Maybe that's three meetings. I don't know. Anyway, what matters I guess, is the sharing and stuff; even though sometimes I don't understand

everything, like the letters about the Twelve Concepts of Service, the message is the thing. And almost all of the messages, letters, etc., are about hope and growth and love and serenity; that's good and that's what I need to hear. Maybe someday I'll be able to bring some of the same light into someone else's life. Thanks for sending the "Way."



Imagine spending all but a couple hours each day for x-number of years locked in your bathroom with nonabsorbent toilet paper. Admittedly, some people have no business being out and about and among others, but I really wouldn't wish it on anyone. I don't think that at any time for the rest of my life that it will be possible to lose the horrible, hollow, lonely feeling

that crawls up my spine and hits me in my heart and gut every time that I hear cell doors slam/clang shut. My worst enemy should never have to feel that! It is just too sad to believe and sometimes almost too hard to bear.

But it must be a case of not only doing whatever it takes to stay clean, but also doing whatever it takes to stay out. It also takes telling yourself every day that it can be done. But it also takes help, someone who believes and loves and gives. The similarities to getting clean and recovering to getting out and staying straight are too incredible; so is the success rate: fifty percent of parolees are back inside within six months, and fifty percent of the remaining are back in the following six. Only 15% make it. Horrible odds, but with enough work, faith, love, and help, the odds can be beaten. I know I will and believe me, if I can, anyone can.

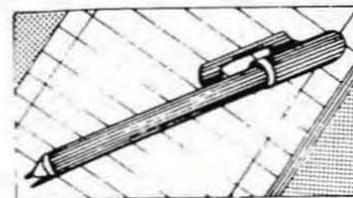
June 1992

I read somewhere that in order to have friends, it is imperative to allow them to have at least one major failing; well, they (the Hole in the Wall NA Group at OSP) allowed me to have quite a few and I consider them all my friends.

The other day I was doing some thinking about some things that people were doing and their attitudes and how it was ticking me off. Rather than doing my usual shut down and thinking something like, "oh well, it's their problem," to justify my ignoring of what was happening, I started thinking about why this stuff bothered me. Was the problem really theirs or did it arise out of my perception of the whole thing? Would you believe it, what came out of this was the realization that at the core of this was that by alienating myself spiritually from them, I was looking at myself as being different, somewhat apart, and therefore superior, and what I was doing was running them down for having feelings and attributes that I myself had and didn't like to own. Ah-ha! Click! So then it became necessary to deal with the issue rather than turn away from it: how would I want someone to react to me in the same situation? Using that as a basis, it was extremely easy to see what I should do (and not do). All of a sudden it was so simple.

J.W., EOCI

Viewpoint



Maverick meetings

Picture this: a friend calls you up, offering to take you to a different NA meeting tonight. You say, sure, you'd like to go someplace other than the same ol' homegroup. Your friend picks you up and you drive downtown to a small freestanding building on Anystreet. When you enter you notice there are AA posters of the steps and traditions on the wall. On the table, however, is the NA text and some NA pamphlets, but no NA meeting schedules.

When the meeting opens, the preamble is not quite the same as other NA meetings in this area. The body of the meeting seems like most others, everybody taking turns to share, but when the basket is passed, it is stated "this money goes to buy literature and coffee." You go ahead and place a dollar in the basket. At

the close of the meeting, NA chips are handed out, but no NA announcements are made, no mention of the upcoming convention or any business meetings, no nominations for who will lead the meeting next month. In fact, there are no flyers posted on any NA activities, dances, etc. Is this a Narcotics Anonymous meeting you just attended? Chances are you have just sat in on what is sometimes referred to as a "maverick meeting."

There may indeed be good recovery, but such meetings are not part of the NA service structure, do not send a GSR to the area service meetings and typically do not donate any money to the area service committee. These meetings are not listed in the meeting schedule and usually are semi-affiliated with some type of recovery center such as a halfway house or hospital. Sometimes employees of such centers are the exclusive leaders of the meetings.

Maybe you decide to visit the meeting again, with the purpose of gently guiding the members to consider becoming a participatory group in the area. The operative words here being "gently guiding." It serves no useful purpose to try and angrily force such meetings to comply or be driven out of existence. We need not carry a big stick into such meetings shouting "Tradition Violations!" Group

conscience is the only "police force" our fellowship has, or needs. Let's consider another situation.

Let's say a few women decide to start an NA women's meeting. They find a location and purchase some NA literature. After a few meetings they elect a GSR to attend the next area service meeting with intentions of petitioning for group membership. They pass the basket at their meeting and earmark a certain amount to be donated to the area in the future. This is a common scenario for any fledgling NA group. In a sense, all NA meetings are "maverick meetings" in their first few months of existence. These meetings, however, have every intention of participating in the service structure and NA as a whole.

A third example on this topic is what might be called the "drop-out group." These are established groups, active in the area, that for some reason choose to withdraw from the area service committee. They quit sending a GSR and stop making donations, in effect, boycotting the ASC. When this becomes a regular problem for an area, that area needs to ask itself "why is this happening?" If NA growth is based on attraction, rather than promotion, we need to examine what is making our service structure unattractive. Are our meetings too long? Are certain powerful personalities having too much influence? Is the minorities' (or smaller groups) viewpoint being ignored? Consideration of the minority position is one thing that sets "group conscience" apart from mere "majority vote."

By the same token, if your group decides to boycott the area service, you

would do well to ask "Is this action being action for self-serving reasons, or truly because we believe it for the good of NA as a whole? Boycotting can be an effective tool for change if used wisely and for the right reasons.

This NA member will close with one last comment. Fellow recovering addicts are not our enemy. We may disagree without going to "war" over controversial issues. Unity and division cannot comfortably coexist. When you vote, let the Higher Power "express Himself in our group conscience."

Diana J.

Clean Times, London Region

On the regional office

In early recovery I began as a helpline volunteer at the London Regional Office. I remember being absolutely terrified by what seemed, at the time, such a huge responsibility.

Having never worked in an office before, I thought how awesome it must be to run. And, as I'm sure you've experienced your Higher Power working in your life, I became the chairperson of that committee. As a helpline volunteer I have been given

a lot and learnt a lot about sharing my experience of recovery with suffering addicts, NA members, family members and professionals. I have also experienced my limits and character defects.

I would also recommend being a helpline volunteer as being one of the most rewarding service commitments. I am, however, very angry at the total apathy I experienced whilst as chairperson of the LRO. Yeah, I know, someone complaining again, yet I do feel very strongly about this.

I have spent the whole of my commitment with constant complaints about the office either being understaffed, not giving the correct answerphone information or problems with the twelve-step system, for example, lack of area support.

It was a thankless task! What really got to me was the expectation from the fellowship for the service prospectively offered by the LRO but when confronted by "Well, it's your helpline (meaning London's), what are you doing to support it?" I got blank replies. For the last two years the LRO committee has been between two and six people. This office costs the fellowship in the region of 650.00 pounds per month to run. When requests for support from the areas was asked, complaints were the feedback. It was so utterly frustrating attempting to keep something going that has been struggling with a few committed people. It is also unfair.

If the 56 volunteer spots were filled and they all attended the LRO committee as a serious commitment, plus the areas each have an office representative and twelve-step coor-

dinator who attends also, the LRO committee would be bigger and stronger than any other committee. Just imagine sixty people sharing in a group conscience, quite a difference! And as a result, London would have a healthy, functioning and communicating fellowship where other subcommittees of the region would be able to grow and develop — instead of floundering or collapsing completely, as in the case of regional PI and H&I.

NA in London is shrinking. A lot of this is to do with the negative attitude to service and the lack of commitment. When I cleaned up I was told to get to meetings, get a sponsor, and do some service. I still do this.

It infuriates me that most of the people who complain are not involved in any NA service. This is only my opinion.

I do think that as the LRO stands, it should close and an answering service be used, until the London fellowship wakes up, and supports and nurtures its service structure with the individuals it needs, which is each one of us! Until this happens NA will carry on being dysfunctional. Committed individuals will carry on burning out and give up attempting to hold it all together. I find it saddening. I love NA. It has given me my life. Maybe this letter will stir you or inspire you to want NA to be strong from within. Go grab your GSR, the voice of your group, and find out how you can get involved or hassle your area about what they're doing to help.

Yours in fellowship and service.

Wendy H

Institutions

It has come to my attention that a very large number of our active membership is tied up in some kind of convention committee or other. Surely it has to be said: Why aren't these people in institutions where they belong?

We have convention committees and subcommittees and bid committees. There's a UK convention, a London Region convention, and even, heaven help us, a committee bidding to host a world convention. Then there's all the little local conventions. I am amazed we're not out to take on the European Service Conference as well!

Now I go to conventions like everybody else. I like the little ones where you actually get to meet people, and which seem to do so much to unify the areas that hold them.

Nor do I mean to knock the individuals doing service and doing their best. Few enough people care to do any kind of service.

Too many seem to be fully (pre-)occupied servicing the needs of their inner child (if that's still the flavor of the month in pseudotherapy circles). How nice it would be if they would only give it some potty training before they took it to NA meetings!

But I digress.

When I go to a convention committee meeting and see all the experience gathered there, each person no doubt preparing to gather more people in pyramid fashion, when I hear the ever grander proposals for venues, I start to wonder.

I wonder how it is that conventions can gather to themselves all the strength, enthusiasm and experience when our bread-and-butter service

structure is desperate for people to come and do some twelve-step work. I wonder how it is that a convention can raise its own Public Information team, to talk to the odd journalist over a couple of days. The UK Assembly and London Region haven't got a complete National or Regional PI structure between them!

I wonder how it is that letters from prisons and hospitals asking for information and recovery meetings go unanswered for months on end. And meetings in these places close for lack of people to hold them.

Still suffering addicts are rotting in institutions and no one is there with a message of recovery.

Meanwhile our best and brightest are putting in fantastic efforts getting ready to throw ever-bigger parties. The main function for the most important person will be the The Countdown. A ritual demonstration better suited to a Nuremberg Rally than a spiritual fellowship. And then half an afternoon of self-congratulation.

There is not a lot of glamour or applause in carrying the message, simply, where it is needed. But up to 70% of the fellowship comes to NA through H&I.

Over the last two or three years our conventions have gone forth and multiplied and our meeting lists have dwindled.

Perhaps we all belong in institutions!

I remain, as ever,

Disgusted, Tunbridge Wells

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Comin' up



ALABAMA: Oct. 16-18, 1992; Surrender in the Mountains IX; Mount Cheaha, Alabama; info (205) 922-0680; Surrender in the Mountains, PO Box 678, Huntsville, AL 35804

AUSTRALIA: Oct. 2-4, 1992; Sydney Combined Areas Convention; "Faith, Hope and Hilarity"; Hurstville Civic Centre, Hurstville, Sydney, Australia; Convention, PO Box 198, Petersham NSW, AUSTRALIA, 2049

CALIFORNIA: Nov. 20-22, 1992; 6th Annual Western States Public Information Learning Days; "The Connecting Link"; info (714) 776-0996 or (714) 449-0950

CANADA—ALSASK: Nov. 6th Annual Al-sask Regional Convention; "Catch the Train"; Polish Veterans Hall, 9203—144th Avenue; Edmonton, Alberta; info (403) 421-4429; ARCNA VI, BSMT 10022-103rd Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 0X2

ENGLAND: Oct. 2-4, 1992; 6th Annual United Kingdom Convention; "The Voyage of Recovery"; Duke of Cornwall Hotel, Plymouth, Devon; rsvn.s directly with hotel (total anonymity is assured) 0852 266256; fax 0752 600062 quoting NA Convention; UCKNA VI, PO Box 1980, London, ENGLAND, N19 3LS

FLORIDA: Oct. 2-4 1992; 5th Annual Florida Regional Hospitals and Institutions Awareness Weekend; Riverside Inn Resort, Homosassa, Florida; rsvn.s (800) 442-2040; info (813) 547-0444

2) Oct. 2-4, 1992; 10th Orlando Area Celebration; "Decade of Dreams"; Hilton Gateway, 7470 Highway 192 West; info (407) 382-8784; OACFR, PO Box 5022, Winter Park, FL 32793

3) Oct. 16-18, 1992; South Dade Area Unity Weekend; Marco Polo Resort and Hotel, 192 Street and Collins Avenue (Ocean Front), Sunny Isles, Florida; info (305) 221-1198; hotel (800) 327-6363; Unity Weekend, PO Box 141514, Coral Gables, FL 33114

FRANCE: Sep. 18-20, 1992; 3rd Paris Area Bilingual Convention; Cite Universitaire, 19Bd Jourdan, 75014 Paris; info 33-1-42 37 57 79; Narcotiques Anonymes, CBPNA 3, B P 630-04, 75160 PARIS Cedex 04

HAWAII: Oct. 2-4, 1992; 5th Annual Maui NA Gathering; Camp Maluhia, Maui, Hawaii; info (808) 874-8566; NA Maui, PO Box 1994, Kihei, Maui, HI 96753

INDIANA: Sep. 25, 1992; 13th Annual Aquarius Group Dance; Wicker Park Pavilion, Highland, Indiana; 7 pm Speaker; info (219) 392-9650

2) Nov. 14, 1992; Indiana Multi. Regional H&I Awareness Day; Donner Center, Donner Park, Columbus; phoneline (812) 331-3974

IRELAND: Nov. 6-8, 1992; 8th Irish Convention of NA; "It's Crystal Clear"; Jurys Hotel, Waterford; IRCNA, PO Box 1368, Sherriff St Dublin 1, Ireland

KANSAS: Sep. 18-20, 1992; Multi Regional Learning Day; Wichita Plaza Hotel, 250 West Douglas, Wichita, KS 67202; rsvn.s (316) 264-1181; info (918) 664-4883

KENTUCKY: Sep. 25-27, 1992; 5th Annual "Freedom Between The Lakes"; Energy Lake Campground, Kentucky Lake; info (502) 898-6054; WKANA, PO Box 2866, Paducah, KY 42003

MAINE: Sep. 11-13, 1992; We're A Miracle IX; Notre Dame Spiritual Center, Alfred, ME; info (207) 721-0516; SMASC, Convention Committee, PO Box 5309, Portland, ME 04101-5309

MISSISSIPPI: Nov. 13-15, 1992; Surrender by the Seashore Gulfcoast Area; Biloxu, MS; Speakers and Workshops interpreted in ASL; info (601) 863-6285 or (601) 868-8595

NEW YORK: Sep. 11-13, 1992; Recovery in the Catskill Three; Friar Tuck Inn, Catskill, NY; info (800) 832-7600; A combined recovery effort of Mid-Hudson Area and Greater NY Regional Council; Convention, Route 32, Rural Delivery 1, Catskill, NY 12414

2) Sep. 26, 1992; Here and Now in the Plains Group, Theatre of the Absurd presents "Fun" Raiser for the WSC; Saint Peter's Parish Hall, 53 Saint Mark's Place, Staten Island, NY; info (718) 296-1357 or (718) 667-3827

NEW ZEALAND: Oct. 24-26, 1992; 2nd Aotearoa Regional Convention; "Spring Clean"; Manawatu College of Education, Centennial Drive, Palmerston North; Aotearoa NZRC III, PO Box 133, Palmerston North, New Zealand

NORTH CAROLINA: Sep. 25-27, 1992; 1st Annual Central Piedmont Area Outdoor Convention; Acres of Recovery One; Van Hoy Farm's Family Campground, Union Grove, NC; info (704) 278-9536

OREGON: Nov. 13-15, 1992; 15th Pacific Northwest Convention; info (503) 344-6040; EASC, PO Box 262, Eugene, OR 97440

PENNSYLVANIA: Sep. 25-27, 1992; 4th BCACNA; "The Growth of Recovery"; Royce Hotel, 400 Oxford Valley Road, Longhorne, PA, 19047; rsvn.s (215) 547-4100; info (215) 547-1640; Bucks County ASC, PO Box 12, Morrisville, PA 19067

SWEDEN: Oct. 16-18, 1992; 1st Service Conference; "Try Service-It Works"; Kirsebergs Fritidsgard, Dalhemsgatan 5, Malmo, Sweden

TEXAS: Oct. 23-25, 1992; 5th Annual Best Little Regional Convention; Abilene, Texas; need speaker tapes minimum five years clean, workshops three years

2) Apr. 9-11, 1993; LSRCNA VIII; Hyatt-Regency, Town Lake, Austin; if you wish to speak at meeting or workshops write by November 30, 1992; Two years clean time requirement for workshops, five years for main speakers; Programming LSRCNA VIII, PO Box 19444, Austin, TX 78760

VIRGINIA: Sep. 25-27, 1992; OLANA UNITYFEST I; Holiday Inn, Chesapeake; info (804) 569-9498

WEST VIRGINIA: Oct. 30—Nov. 1, 1992; Mountaineer Regional Service Convention; "True Colors"; Cedar Lakes, Ripley, WV; info (304) 343-8143; MRSCNA, PO Box 2381, Morgantown, WV 26502-2381

WISCONSIN: Oct. 9-11, 1992; 9th Annual Wisconsin State Convention; Holiday Inn Convention and Civic Center, 205 South Barstow Street, Eau Claire, WI 54701; info (175) 356-3123; rsvn.s (800)950-6121; WSNAC IX, PO Box 381, Woodruff, WI 54568

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We'll be happy to announce your up-coming events. Just let us know at least three months in advance. Include dates, event name and location, NA office or phone-line number, and a post office box. (Sorry, but we can't print personal phone numbers or addresses.)

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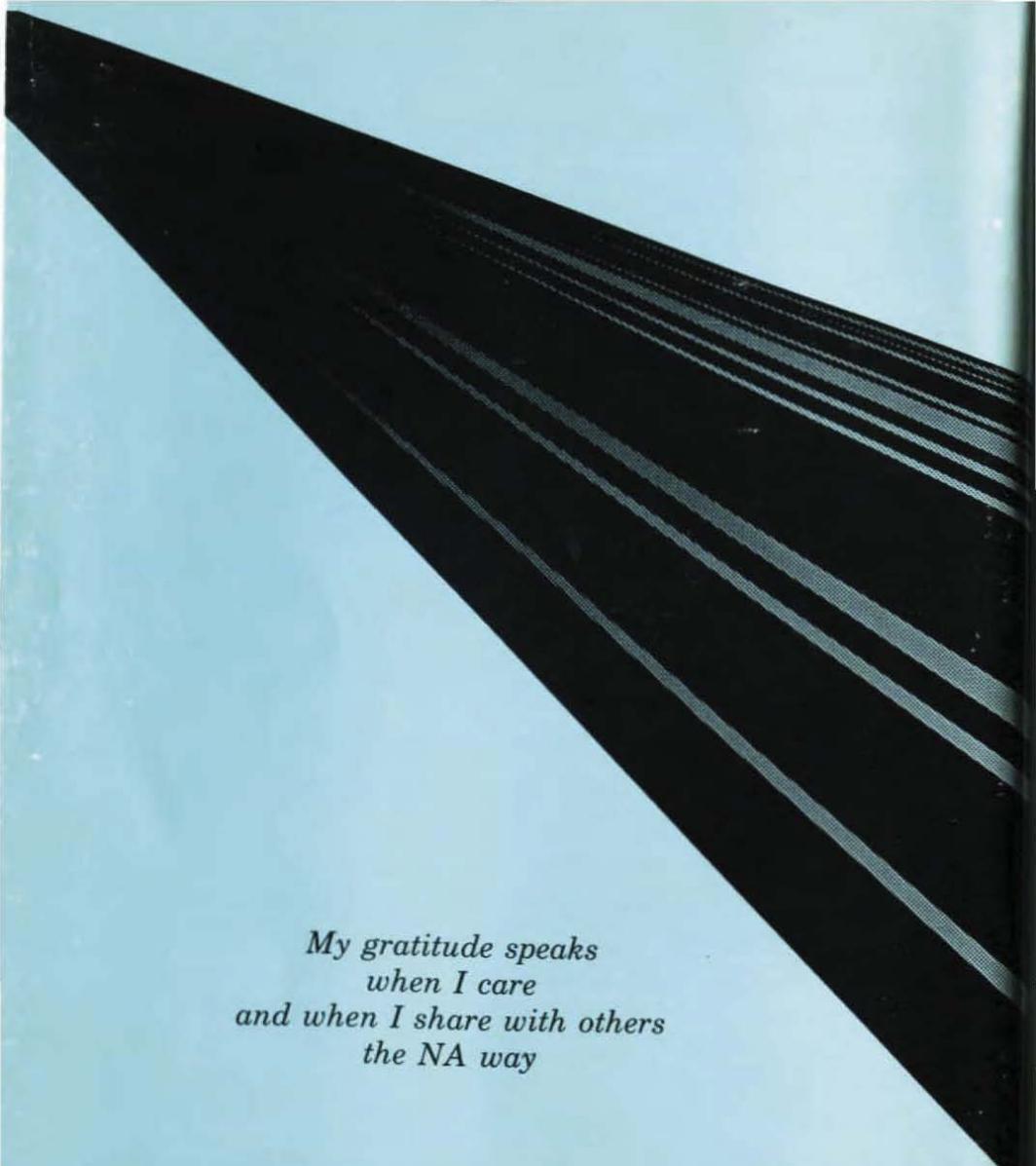
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3TEA

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.

Twelve Traditions reprinted for adaptation by permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.



*My gratitude speaks
when I care
and when I share with others
the NA way*

What is Narcotics Anonymous?

NA is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only one requirement for membership, the desire to stop using. We suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that they work.