

BOB STONE'S FOURTH EDITION REPORT

WSC 1988

This is the transcription of a verbal report given by Bob Stone, manager of the World Service Office to the 1988 World Service Conference on the Fourth Edition of the Basic Text.

The reason Chuck, that I have asked for this opportunity to give my report to the Conference physically, although there is only one part of the report that I wish to address, is that it has a direct and a significant bearing on the issue of the fourth edition. There are two thoughts that I have to say concerning this matter. One relates specifically to the issue of the fourth edition itself and the other relates to something that I addressed in my oral presentation at last year's Conference. There is a relationship between the two and I wish to address the first one initially. Last year I conveyed to you, I hope, my fears and frustrations over the reality that exists of the two sides of N.A. The two sides being them and us, whoever that happens to be in any conversation or any meeting or any region or area with the world level. It's a tragic thing when it occurs and it has occurred with such frequency and severity that it has caused all of us some pain and some suffering and some problems in our areas and our regions and certainly at the World Service Conference. I am here to address that issue now from a perspective of having experienced the ultimate failure in our ability to get along and overcome this "we versus us" issue. What that issue does is blinds us, it makes us impervious to really listening to what somebody else is saying. And when we become impervious to what other people are saying we do a disservice to the Fellowship and we cause additional problems. And that is what has occurred during the last year. It has occurred over the fourth edition of the Basic Text. When the Basic Text was published as the fourth edition last year as would have been expected, a number of people decided that they should, on their own, go through it word for word and compare it with the Third Edition Revised to determine what they thought about this as a different publication. This is an issue completely aside from the issue whether or not a fourth edition should have been printed and published in the way that it was. That issue I don't care to get involved in at this time. I am concerned however, with the trail of

events that took place as a result of it's immediate publication. Some of those folks who did the word for word comparison were immediately disheartened, dismayed, angered, frustrated, hurt and a number of other adjectives that I could think of in time. It prompted an immediate action on their part to bring to the world's attention the problems they felt were centered in this because of it's differences. Unfortunately the we versus them syndrome entered into the discussion immediately. Because of how the alarm was raised and, to some degree, because of who raised the alarm, other people did not as seriously as now seems necessary and appropriate thoroughly study everything they were saying and determine it's validity. When the issue hit the streets it became immediately an issue of confrontation between those people who were saying something was wrong with it and disagreeing with it's content and those who might have had a different opinion. That blindness in my opinion now has been a contributing factor in an error that originated two years ago that I now have to address. That blindness prevented all the people who got that manuscript from the committee that sent the manuscript out. It blinded them from bringing to the attention of all the rest of us and certain key people in particular what was specifically contained in there that had more validity then they themselves knew or recognized. And here's how that works. What we have discovered is a result of Michael Lee's insistence that a word for word complete master list be prepared. Those discussions took place in January and February and our staff got assigned that task and began doing that. It was slow work and we did not assign sufficient resources to do that until recently.

So what I am going to tell you in terms of sequence only occurred recently. On Friday, not this last one but the Friday before, it was my tragic and unfortunate experience to learn--that our staff informed me that--there were places in the manuscript that was delivered to the editor for editing and the same manuscript that was used by the Literature Review Committee to review the work where lines of text had not appeared that were in the third edition revised. Those lines of text, in our review of the events that took place, are relatively easy to understand what took place. And we have included the twenty-five pages on which those lines appear in the back portion of this report. We have underlined the lines that were omitted from the third edition revised as the manuscript was prepared. I cannot tell you nor find words to express my anguish over this and my fear and just general displeasure. There is no excuse, whatsoever, for this to

have occurred. Unfortunately I would only tell you that, if we didn't make mistakes we probably wouldn't be human. On the other hand I can tell you that making mistakes of this type are simply not acceptable and had we become aware of them at an earlier date it might have been possible to do something else and perhaps other decisions may have occurred. Had the alarm that was raised last October and November been raised in a way that the rest of the Fellowship had not been blinded to its content, we might have been following a different course and have entirely different discussion today. So there are two issues here. One and I am taking this one very calmly because in the last 10 days since learning the completed extent of this problem I've had to go through a lot of personal growth and personal changes. Those are very hard for all of us to do and they are hard for me as well as for you. It is important I think for you to understand these changes, excuse my language I am getting nervous. I have attempted to explain on page 48 in a very short number of paragraphs the facts of the event and I've not attempted to induce any language to this discussion other than the facts. If I had been more diligent in supervising the proofreading it is possible that this error might not have occurred. I do not have any personal assurance that would have been a guarantee but it has renewed our understanding of the enormity and the preciseness of our responsibility of production. We have made the corrective actions that we believe are necessary or laid the foundation for those corrective actions so this will not occur again in the future. An example of the corrective action is to go back to how the Second Edition was produced in 1983. The book was re-typeset following the Conference in 1983 and published about four months later. When the book was typeset it was done by a company in Northern California. After the original typesetting was done a proofreading session was held at which members of the Board of Trustees, members of the Literature Committee and WSO Board of Directors participated in a word for word review of the manuscript. It was that manuscript where the majority of the errors were found although even after they finished there were still some that we corrected in the following year. But they found all the big problems, the big problems were corrected and the Second Edition was then printed. Since that time we have not felt it essential to have that kind of a proofreading session. The tragedy of this mistake clearly pinpoints again that we must return to that formal proofreading session to involve other service arms in such major publications as the Basic Text. And that correction system alone I believe will probably be expanded to include

sending copies of the draft prior to its publication to other committees or individuals on a fairly limited basis who may be interested in doing a simultaneous proofreading to assist in this process. We believe that by gaining the Fellowship's participation and assistance in this we can avoid the types of errors that this one highlights.

At the end of the report, as I indicated, there are the words that are missing, typical if you turn to, say page 252 or 238, it seems obvious that when the typist was working on page 238 their eye movement in some way was, as typists normally do, moved from one place to another and when their eye movement came back to type the sentence following the word "I cried" they missed the next part and went right on to "I got right back." It is easy to understand how that mistake occurs and the others generally are of that type. There are some that are a little different, like I said there's no justification for it and I am sincerely sorry and have an inability to express how remorseful I feel over this error. Thank you very much.

This concludes the verbal input given by Bob Stone, manager of the World Service Office to the 1988 World Service Conference during the general forum on the fourth edition.

because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who are learning to live without drugs. We are a non-profit society. and have no dues or fees of any kind. Each of us has paid the price of membership. We have paid dearly with our pain for the right to recover.

We are addicts, surviving against all odds, who meet regularly together. We respond to honest sharing and listen to the stories of our members for the message of recovery. We realize that, at last, there is hope for us.

We make use of the tools that have worked for other recovering addicts who have learned to live without drugs in Narcotics Anonymous. The Twelve Steps are positive tools that make recovery possible. Our primary purpose is to stay clean and to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. We are united by our common problem of addiction. By meeting, talking with, and helping other addicts, we are able to stay clean. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.

Narcotics Anonymous has had many years of experience with literally hundreds of thousands of addicts. This mass of intensive first-hand experience in all phases of illness and recovery is of unparalleled therapeutic value. We are here to share freely with any addicts who want it.

Our message of recovery is based on our own experience. Before coming to the fellowship, we exhausted ourselves trying to "use" successfully, or trying to find out what was wrong with us. After coming to N.A., we found ourselves among a very special group of people who have suffered like us and found recovery. In their experiences, freely shared, we found hope for ourselves. If the Program worked for them, it would work for us.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. We have seen the Program work for any addict who honestly and sincerely wants to stop. We don't have to be clean when we get here, but after the first meeting, we suggest that newcomers keep coming back and come

back clean. We don't have to wait for an overdose, or jail sentence, to get help from Narcotics Anonymous, nor is addiction a hopeless condition from which there is no recovery.

We meet addicts like ourselves who are clean. We watch and listen to them and realize that they have found a way to live and enjoy life without drugs. We don't have to settle for the limitations of the past. We can examine and re-examine all our old ideas and constantly improve on them or replace them with new ones. We are men and women who have discovered and admitted that we are powerless over our addiction. When we use, we lose.

When we discovered that we cannot live with or without drugs, we sought help through N.A. rather than prolong our suffering. The Program works a miracle in our lives. We become different people. The steps and abstinence give us a daily reprieve from our self-imposed life sentences. We become free to live.

We want the place where we recover to be a safe place, free from outside influences. For the protection of the fellowship, we insist that no drugs or paraphernalia be brought to any meeting.

We feel totally free to express ourselves within the fellowship, because no law enforcement agencies are involved. Our meetings have an atmosphere of empathy. In accordance with the principles of recovery, we try not to judge, stereotype or moralize with each other. We are not recruited and it doesn't cost anything. N.A. does not provide counseling or social services.

Our meetings are a process of identification, hope and sharing. The heart of N.A. beats when two addicts share their recovery. What we do becomes real for us when we share it. This happens on a larger scale in our regular meetings. A meeting is two or more addicts gathered together to help each other stay clean.

At the beginning of the meeting, we read N.A. literature which is available to anyone. Some meetings have speakers, topic discussions or both. Closed meetings are for addicts or those who think they might have a drug problem; open meetings welcome anyone wishing to experience our Fellowship. The atmosphere of recovery is protected by our Twelve Traditions. We are fully self-supporting through voluntary

to relieve us or that something will go wrong. We ask another member who says, "You're right where you're supposed to be." We renew our readiness to have our defects removed. We surrender to the simple suggestions that the Program offers us. Even though we are not entirely ready, we are headed in that direction.

Eventually faith, humility and acceptance replace pride and rebellion. We come to know ourselves. We find ourselves growing into a mature consciousness. We begin to feel better as willingness grows into hope for relief. Perhaps for the first time, we see a vision of our new life. With this in sight, we put our willingness into action by moving on to Step Seven.

STEP SEVEN

"We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."

Having decided we want God, as we understand Him, to relieve us of the useless or destructive aspects of our personalities, we have arrived at the Seventh Step. We couldn't handle the ordeal of life all by ourselves. It wasn't until we made a real mess of our lives that we realized we couldn't do it alone. By admitting this, we achieved a glimpse of humility. This is the main ingredient of Step Seven. Humility has a lot to do with getting honest with ourselves, which is something we have practiced from Step One. We accepted our addiction and powerlessness. We found a strength beyond ourselves and learned to rely on it. We examined our lives and discovered who we really are. To be truly humble is to accept and honestly try to be who we are. None of us are perfectly good or perfectly bad. We are people who have assets and liabilities and most important of all, we are human.

Humility is as much a part of staying clean as food and water are to staying alive. As our addiction progressed, we devoted our energy toward satisfying our material desires. All other needs were beyond our reach. We always wanted gratification of our basic desires.

Character defects are those things which cause pain and misery all of our lives. If they really contributed to our health and happiness, we

would not have come to such a state of desperation. We had to become ready to have God remove these defects.

The Seventh Step is an action step, and it is time to ask God for help and relief. We have to understand that our way of thinking is not the only way; other people can give us direction. When someone points out a shortcoming, our first reaction may be one of defensiveness. We must realize that we are not perfect. There will always be room for growth. If we truly want to be free, we will take a good look at what is pointed out to us. If the shortcomings we discover are real and we have a chance to be rid of them, we will surely experience a sense of well-being.

Some will want to get on their knees for this step. Some will be very quiet, and others will put forth a great emotional effort to show intense willingness. The word humble applies because we approach this Power greater than ourselves to ask for the freedom to live without the limitations of our past ways. Many of us are willing to do it without reservations, on pure blind faith, because we are sick of what we have been doing and how we are feeling. Whatever works, we go all the way.

This is our road to spiritual growth. We change every day to gradually, carefully and simply pull ourselves out of the isolation and loneliness of addiction into the mainstream of life. This comes not from wishing, but from action and prayer. The main objective of Step Seven is to get out of ourselves and strive for achieving the will of our Higher Power.

If we are careless and fail to grasp the spiritual meaning of this step, we may have difficulties and stir up old troubles. One danger is in being too hard on ourselves.

Sharing with other addicts in recovery helps us to not become morbidly serious about ourselves. Accepting the defects of others can help us become humble enough to be relieved of our own defects. God often works through those who care enough about our recovery to help make us aware of our shortcomings.

We have noticed that humility plays a big part in this Program and our new way of life. We take our inventory; we become ready to let God remove our defects of character; we humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings. This is our road to spiritual growth and we will want to continue. We are ready for Step Eight.

STEP TEN

"We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it."

The Tenth Step frees us from the wreckage of our present. If we do not stay aware of our defects, they can drive us into a corner that we can't get out of clean.

One of the first things we learn in Narcotics Anonymous is that if we use, we lose. By the same token, we won't experience as much pain if we can avoid the things that cause us pain. Continuing to take a personal inventory means that we form a habit of looking at ourselves, our actions, our attitudes and our relationships on a regular basis.

We are creatures of habit and are vulnerable to our old ways of thinking and reacting. At times it seems easier to continue in the old rut of self-destruction rather than to attempt a new and seemingly dangerous route. We don't have to be trapped by our old patterns. Today we have a choice.

The Tenth Step can do this for us; it can help us correct our living problems and prevent their recurrence. We examine our actions during the day. Some of us write about our feelings, explaining how we felt and what part we might have played in any problems which occurred. Did we cause someone harm? Do we need to admit that we were wrong? If we find difficulties, we make an effort to take care of them. When these things are left undone, they have a way of festering.

This step can be a defense against the old insanity. We can ask ourselves if we are being drawn into old patterns of anger, resentment or fear. Do we feel trapped? Are we "setting ourselves up" for trouble? Are we too hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Are we taking ourselves too seriously? Are we judging our insides by the outside appearances of others? Do we suffer from some physical problem? The answers to questions like these can help us to deal with the difficulties of the moment. We no longer have to live with the feeling of a "hole in the gut." A lot of our chief concerns and major difficulties come from our inexperience with living without drugs. Often when we ask an "oldtimer" what to do, we are amazed at the simplicity of the answer.

The Tenth Step can be a pressure relief valve. We work this step while the day's ups and downs are still fresh in our minds. We list what we have done and try not to rationalize our actions. This may be done in writing at the end of the day. The first thing we do is stop! Then we take the time to allow ourselves the privilege of thinking. We examine our actions, our reactions, and our motives. We often find that we've been "doing" better than we've been "feeling." This allows us to find out where we have gone wrong and admit fault before things get any worse. We need to avoid rationalizing. We promptly admit our faults, not explain them.

We work this step continuously. This is a prevention, and the more we do it, the less we will need the corrective part of this step. This is really a great tool. It gives us a way of avoiding grief before we bring it on ourselves. We monitor our feelings, our emotions, our fantasies, and our actions. By constantly looking at these things we may be able to avoid repeating the actions that make us feel bad.

We need this step even when we're feeling good and things are going well. Good feelings are new to us and we need to nurture them. In times of trouble we can try the things that worked before. We have the right not to feel miserable. We have a choice. The good times can also be a trap; the danger is that we may forget that our first priority is staying clean. For us, recovery is more than just pleasure.

We need to keep in mind that everyone makes mistakes. We will never be perfect. However, we can accept this fact by using Step Ten. By continuing a personal inventory we are set free, in the here and now, from ourselves and the past. We no longer are forced to justify our existence. This step allows us to be ourselves.

STEP ELEVEN

"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."

The first ten steps have set the stage for us to improve our conscious

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truly the ties that bind us together. It is only through understanding and application that they work.

TRADITION ONE

"Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity."

Our First Tradition concerns unity and our common welfare. One of the most important things about our new way of life is being a part of a group of addicts seeking recovery. Our survival is directly related to the survival of the group and of the fellowship. To maintain unity within Narcotics Anonymous it is imperative that the group remain stable, or else the entire fellowship perishes and the individual dies.

It wasn't until we came to Narcotics Anonymous that recovery became possible. This program can do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We became part of a group and found that we could recover. We learned that those who did not continue to be an active part of the fellowship faced a rough road. The individual is precious to the group, and the group is precious to the individual. We never experienced the kind of attention and personal care that we found in the Program. We are accepted and loved for what we are, instead of "in spite" of what we are. No one can revoke our membership or make us do anything we do not choose to do. We follow this way of life by example rather than direction. We share our experience and learn from each other. In our addiction, we consistently placed our personal desires before anything else. In Narcotics Anonymous we found that what is best for the group is usually good for us.

Our personal experiences while using differed from one another. However, as a group we have found many common themes in our addiction. One of these was the need to prove self-sufficiency. We had convinced ourselves that we could make it alone and proceeded to live life on that basis. The results were disastrous, and in the end, each of us had to admit that self-sufficiency was a lie. This admission was the starting point of our recovery and is a primary point of unity for the fellowship.

Understanding these Traditions comes slowly over a period of time. We pick up information as we talk to members and visit various groups. It usually isn't until we get involved with service that someone points out that "personal recovery depends on N.A. unity," and that unity depends on how well we follow our Traditions. Because we hear about "suggested steps" and "no musts" so often, some of us make a mistake and assume that this applies to groups the way it applies to the individual. The Twelve Traditions of N.A. are not negotiable. They are the guidelines that keep our fellowship alive and free.

By following these guidelines in our dealings with others and society at large, we avoid many problems. That is not to say our Traditions eliminate them all. We still have to face difficulties as they arise: communication problems, differences of opinion, internal controversies, and troubles with individuals and groups outside the fellowship. However, when we apply these principles, we avoid some of the pitfalls.

Many of our problems are like those our predecessors had to face. Their hard-won experience gave birth to the Traditions, and our own experience has shown that these principles are just as valid today as they were when these Traditions were formulated. Our Traditions protect us from the internal and external forces which could destroy us. They are

TRADITION THREE

"The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using."

This Tradition is important for both the individual and the group. Desire is the key word; desire is the basis of our recovery. In our stories and in our experience of trying to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers, one painful fact of life has emerged again and again. An addict who does not want to stop using will not stop using. They can be analyzed, counseled, reasoned with, prayed over, threatened, beaten, locked up, or whatever, but they will not stop until they want to stop. The only thing we ask of our members is that they have this desire. Without it they are doomed, but with it miracles will happen.

Desire is our only requirement, and rightly so. Addiction does not discriminate. This Tradition is to insure that any addict regardless of drugs used, race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual preference or financial condition is free to practice the N.A. way of life. That only the desire to stop using is needed insures that no caste system will develop making one addict superior to another. All addicted persons are welcome and equal in obtaining the relief they are seeking from their addiction; every addict can recover in this program on an equal basis. This Tradition guarantees our freedom to recover.

Membership in Narcotics Anonymous is not automatic when someone walks in the door or when the newcomer decides to stop using. The decision to become a part of our fellowship rests with the individual. Any addict who has a desire to stop using can become a member of N.A. We are addicts and our problem is addiction.

The choice of membership rests with the individual. We feel the ideal state for our fellowship exists when addicts can come freely and openly to an N.A. meeting, whenever and wherever they choose, and leave just as freely if they want. We realize that recovery is a reality and that life without drugs is better than we ever imagined. We open our doors to addicts hoping that they can find what we have found, knowing only those who have a desire to stop using and want what we have to offer will join us in our way of life.

TRADITION FOUR

"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole."

The autonomy of our groups is necessary for our survival. A dictionary defines autonomous as "having the right or power of self-government . . . undertaken or carried on without outside control." This means our groups are self-governing and are not subject to outside control. Every group has had to stand and grow on its own.

One might ask, "Are we truly autonomous? What about our service committees, our offices, activities, hot lines, and all the other things that go on in N.A.?" They are services we utilize to help us in our recovery and to further the primary purpose of our groups. Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women, addicts meeting in groups and using a given set of spiritual principles to find freedom from addiction and a new way to live. Those things we mentioned are the result of members caring enough to reach out and offer their help and experience so that our road might be easier.

A Narcotics Anonymous group is any meeting which meets regularly at a specified place and time for the purpose of recovery provided that it follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. There are two basic types of meetings: those which are opened to the general public and those closed to the public (for addicts only). Meetings vary widely in format from group to group. Some are participation meetings, some speakers, some question and answer, some special problems discussion.

Despite the type or format a group uses for its meetings, the function of a group is always the same: to provide a suitable and reliable environment for personal recovery and to promote such recovery. These Traditions are part of a set of spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous, and without them, N.A. does not exist.

We say that for N.A., autonomy is more than this. It gives our groups the freedom to act on their own to establish their atmosphere of recovery, serve their members, and fulfill their primary purpose. It is for these reasons that we guard our autonomy so carefully.

It would seem that we, in our groups, can do whatever we decide regardless of what anyone says. This is partly true. Each group does have complete freedom, except when their actions affect other groups or N.A. as a whole. Like group conscience, autonomy can be a two-edged sword. Group autonomy has been used to justify the violation of the Traditions. If a contradiction exists, we have slipped away from our principles. If we check to make sure that our actions are clearly within the bounds of our Traditions; if we do not dictate to other groups, or force anything upon them; and if we consider the consequences of our action ahead of time, then all will be well.

TRADITION FIVE

“Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.”

“You mean to say that our primary purpose is to carry the message? I thought we were here to get clean. I thought that our primary purpose was to recover from drug addiction.” For the individual, this is certainly true; our members are here to find freedom from addiction and a new way of life. However, groups aren’t addicted and don’t recover. All our groups can do is plant the seed for recovery and bring addicts together so that the magic of empathy, honesty, caring, sharing, and service can do their work. The purpose of this Tradition is to insure that this atmosphere of recovery is maintained. This can only be achieved by keeping our groups recovery-oriented. The fact that we, each and every group, focus on carrying the message provides consistency; addicts can count on us. Unity of action and purpose makes possible what seemed impossible for us—recovery.

The Twelfth Step of our personal Program also says that we carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Working with others is a powerful tool. “The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without

parallel.” For the newcomers, this is how they found Narcotics Anonymous and learned to stay clean. For the members this reaffirms their commitment to recovery. The group is the most powerful vehicle we have for carrying the message. When a member carries the message, he is somewhat bound by interpretation and personality. The problem with literature is language. The feelings, the intensity, and the strengths are sometimes lost. In our group, with many different personalities, the message of recovery is a recurring theme.

“What would happen if our groups had another primary purpose?” We feel our message would be diluted and then lost. If we concentrated on making money, many might get rich. If we were a social club, we could find many friends and lovers. If we specialized in education, we’d end up with many smart addicts. If our speciality was medical help, many would get healthy. If our group purpose were anything other than to carry the message, many would die and few would find recovery.

What is our message? That an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. Our message is hope and the promise of freedom. When it is said and done, our primary purpose can only be to carry the message to the addict who still suffers because that is all we have to give.

TRADITION SIX

“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.”

Our Sixth Tradition tells us some of the things we must do to preserve and protect our primary purpose. This Tradition is the basis for our policy of non-affiliation and is extremely important to the continuation and growth of Narcotics Anonymous.

Let’s take a look at what this Tradition says. The first thing a group ought never do is endorse. To endorse is to sanction, approve or recommend. Endorsements can be either direct or implied. We see direct

practice the steps can result in a relapse.

Obsessive behavior is a common denominator for addictive people.

We have times when we try to fill ourselves up until we are satisfied, only to discover that there is no way to satisfy us. Part of our addictive pattern is that we can never get enough of whatever we think we want. Sometimes we forget and we think that if we can just get enough food or enough sex, or enough money we'll be satisfied and everything will be all right. Self-will still leads us to make decisions based on manipulation, ego, lust or false pride. We don't like to be wrong. Our egos tell us that we can do it on our own, but loneliness and paranoia quickly return. We find that we cannot really do it alone; when we try things get worse. We need to be reminded of where we came from and that it will get progressively worse if we use. This is when we need the fellowship the most.

We don't recover overnight. When we realize that we have made a bad decision or bad judgment, our inclination is to make an attempt to rationalize it. We often become extreme in our self-obsessive attempt to cover our tracks. We forget we have a choice today. We get sicker.

There is something in our self-destructive personalities that cries for failure. Most of us feel that we do not deserve to succeed. This is a common theme with addicts. Self-pity is one of the most destructive of defects. It will drain us of all positive energy. We focus on anything that isn't going our way and ignore all the beauty in our lives. With no real desire to improve our lives, or even to live, we just keep going further and further down. Some of us never make it back.

We must relearn many things that we have forgotten and develop a new approach to life if we are to survive. This is what Narcotics Anonymous is all about. It is about people who care about desperate, dying addicts and who can, in time, teach them how to live without drugs. Many of us had difficulty coming into the fellowship because we did not understand that we have the disease of addiction. We sometimes see our past behavior as part of ourselves and not part of our disease.

We take the First Step. We admit we are powerless over our addiction, that our lives have become unmanageable. Slowly things get better and we start getting our confidence back. Our ego tells us we can do it on our own. Things are getting better and we think we really don't need this

program. Cockiness is a red light indicator. The loneliness and paranoia will come back. We find out we can't do it on our own and things get worse. We really take the First Step, this time internally. There will be times, however, when we really feel like using. We want to run, and we feel lousy; we need to be reminded of where we came from and that it will be worse this time. This is when we need the program the most. We realize we must do something.

When we forget the effort and work it took us to get a period of freedom in our lives, lack of gratitude sinks in and self-destruction begins again. Unless action is taken immediately we run the risk of a relapse, which threatens our very existence. Keeping our illusion of reality, rather than using the tools of the program, will return us to isolation. Loneliness will kill us inside and the drugs, which almost always come next, may do the job completely. The symptoms and the feelings we experienced at the end of our using will come back even stronger than before. This impact is sure to destroy us if we don't surrender ourselves to the N.A. program.

Relapse can be the destructive force that kills us or leads us to the realization of who and what we really are. The eventual misery of using is not worth the temporary escape it might give us. For us, to use is to die, often in more ways than one.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks seems to be in placing unrealistic expectations on ourselves or others. Relationships can be a terribly painful area. We tend to fantasize and project what will happen. We get angry and resentful if our fantasies are not fulfilled. We forget that we are powerless over other people. The old thinking and feelings of loneliness, despair, helplessness and self-pity creep in. Thoughts of sponsors, meetings, literature and all other positive input leave our consciousness. We have to keep our recovery first and our priorities in order.

Writing about what we want, what we are asking for, and what we get and sharing this with our sponsor or another trusted person helps us to work through negative feelings. Letting others share with us about their experience gives us hope that it does get better. It seems that being powerless is a huge stumbling block. When a need arises for us to admit our powerlessness, we may first look for ways to exert power against it.

We admit our lives have been unmanageable, but sometimes we have a problem admitting our need for help. Our own self-will leads to many problems in our recovery; we want and demand that things go our way. We should know from our past experience that our way of doing things did not work. The principle of surrender guides us into a way of life in which we draw our strength from a Power greater than ourselves. Our daily surrender to our Higher Power provides the help we need. As addicts we have trouble with acceptance which is critical to our recovery. When we refuse to practice acceptance, we are, in effect, still denying our faith in a Higher Power. Worrying is the practice of lack of faith.

Surrendering our will puts us in contact with a Higher Power which fills the empty place inside that nothing could ever fill before. We learned to trust God for help daily. Living just for today relieves the burden of the past and the fear of the future. We learned to take whatever actions are necessary and leave the results in the hands of our Higher Power.

The Narcotics Anonymous program is spiritual. We strongly suggest that each person make an attempt to find a Higher Power of their understanding. Some of us have profound spiritual experiences, dramatic and inspirational in nature. For others, the awakening is more subtle. We recover in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for one another's beliefs. We try to avoid the self-deception of arrogance and self-righteousness. As we develop faith in our daily lives, we find that our Higher Power supplies us with the strength and guidance we need.

Each of us is free to work out our own concept of a Higher Power. Many of us were suspicious and skeptical because of disappointments we have had with religion. As new members, the talk of God we heard in meetings repelled us. Until we sought our own answers in this area, we were trapped in the ideas gathered from our past. Agnostics and atheists sometimes start out by just talking to "whatever's there." There is a spirit or an energy that can be felt in the meetings. This is sometimes the newcomer's first concept of a Higher Power. Ideas from the past are often incomplete and unsatisfactory. Everything we know is subject to revision, especially what we know about the truth. We reevaluate our old ideas, so we can become acquainted with the new ideas that lead to a new way of life. We recognize we are human with a physical, mental and

spiritual sickness. When we accept that our addiction caused our own hell and that there is a power available to help us, we begin to make progress in solving our problems.

Lack of daily maintenance can show up in many ways. Through open-minded effort we come to rely on a daily relationship with God as we understand Him. Each day most of us ask our Higher Power to help us stay clean, and each night we give thanks for the gift of recovery. As our lives become more comfortable, many of us lapse into spiritual complacency, and risking relapse, we find ourselves in the same horror and loss of purpose from which we have been given only a daily reprieve. This is hopefully when our pain motivates us to renew our daily spiritual maintenance. One way we can continue a conscious contact, especially in hard times, is to list the things for which we are grateful.

Many of us have found that setting aside quiet time for ourselves is helpful in making conscious contact with our Higher Power. By quieting of the mind, meditation can lead us to calmness and serenity. This quieting of the mind can be done in any place, time, or manner according to the individual.

Our Higher Power is accessible to us at all times. We receive guidance when we ask for knowledge of God's will for us. Gradually as we become more God-centered than self-centered, our despair turns to hope. Change also involves the great source of fear—the unknown. Our Higher Power is our source of the courage we need to face this fear.

Some things we must accept, and others we can change. The wisdom to know the difference comes with growth in our spiritual program. If we maintain our spiritual condition daily, we find the pain and confusion easier to deal with. This is the emotional stability that we so badly need. With the help of our Higher Power, we never have to use again.

Any addict clean is a miracle. We keep this miracle alive in ongoing recovery with positive attitudes. If, after a period of time, we find ourselves in trouble with our recovery, we have probably stopped doing one or more of the things which helped us in the earlier stages of our recovery.

Three basic spiritual principles are Honesty, Open-mindedness, and Willingness to try. We say these are the HOW of our program. The initial

amount of morphine was injected into their veins. That was for me! Over the next few months several personal tragedies led to my world crumbling about me, and experimentation quickly led to abuse and then addiction with all the bewildering helplessness and self-condemnation that only the drug addict knows.

Shortly after having started my residency training in neurosurgery, I sought help from a psychiatrist, as the delusion that I could control my narcotic use finally evaporated. I was hospitalized in a mental institution for a few days until I felt better, and then convinced my psychiatrist that I was well enough to return to my training program. He was either naive, gullible, or ignorant (of drug addiction) enough to let me go merrily on my way. I lasted a few months before relapsing. With no changes made in my thinking or behavior, relapse followed relapse, and I established a pattern which I would maintain for almost ten years. I continued to try psychiatrists and mental institutions (five hospitalizations), but after each I would relapse again.

After having performed over one hundred surgical procedures while loaded, I was asked to leave my residency. Another hospitalization followed and I returned to my pattern of relapse. Besides institutionalization, over the years I have tried job changes, geographical relocation, self-help books, methadone programs, only using on weekends, switching to pills, marriage, health spas, diets, exercise, and religion. None of it worked other than temporarily. I was told I was incorrigible and there was no hope for me based upon my track record.

After about five years of heavy using, I started to develop a physical allergy to my drug of choice; insidiously at first, but progressively, each time I used, a small amount of tissue would die around the injection site. This soon led to open sores and draining wounds. I found I could prevent the process by using cortisone initially, but after several more years it returned in spite of the cortisone. In the meantime, I developed all the attendant side effects of the cortisone, e.g., obesity, acne, ulcers and propensity toward infection (as my immune mechanism was knocked out). By the time I reached my last hospitalization, I had a large open wound in the left forearm with exposed infected bone. I had destroyed several tendons so that I could not raise my wrist and the scar tissue pre-

vented me from extending my forearm. On admission, I was very heavy and my hands and feet were swollen and full of fluid. I must have been a sight to behold as I was a physical wreck. Worse yet, I was totally demoralized and suffering from a spiritual bankruptcy of which I was unaware. The denial and self-deception were so great that I hated to see what a pitiful creature I had become.

I entered a chemical abuse treatment facility in San Diego and there, for the first time, was confronted by physicians who were addicts themselves. They asked me first if I wanted help, and then if I was willing to go to any lengths to recover. They explained I might have to lose all my worldly possessions, my practice, my profession, my wife and family, even my arm. At first I balked. I figured there was nothing wrong with me that a little rest and relaxation could not set right. But instead, I made a pact with them: that I would listen and take orders without questioning. I had always been independent and this was certainly a change for me. This was my first introduction to the "tough love" which has helped me so much in N.A.

During that month in the hospital, a great change came over me. I was forced to go to outside N.A. meetings. At first I was rebellious. These people were not like me; they were common street people, junkies, dope fiends, pill heads, and coke freaks. How could I relate to them? They had not come from where I had. They had not experienced what I had experienced. They had not achieved what I had achieved. Yet when I listened, I heard my story, again and again. These people had experienced the same feelings, the sense of loss, doom and degradation which I knew. They too had been helpless, hopeless, and beaten down by the same hideous monster as I had. Yet they could laugh about their past and speak about the future in positive terms. There seemed such a balance of seriousness and levity with an overpowering sense of serenity, that I ached for what they had.

I heard about honesty, tolerance, acceptance, joy, freedom, courage, willingness, love and humility. But the greatest thing I heard about was God. I had had no problem with the concept of God as I had called myself a believer. I just could not understand why He had let me down. I had been praying to God as a child asks Santa Claus for gifts,

given to me by my environment, whom I did not understand. I knew his God did not want anything to do with something like me.

There were times when I tried to relate, but there seemed to be something missing. I sincerely think that even though the feelings seemed the same there seemed a lack of deeper understanding that I needed. God bless them, they tried. There were no recovered addicts in the area and no N.A. I looked for people with other drug dependencies and finally found one lady in the group. She had spent ten years in and out without any success.

Things did get a little better. There were no arrests and no stays in the hospitals for a period of two years. Then in the fall of 1975 everything went to pieces. Back to the hospital I went. Exchanging the alcohol for pills, I was back in the old paradox again. Then a series of events began that changed my life. There was talk of committing me to the state institution. My family no longer wanted me like I was. Two Program members came one afternoon to see me and they both told me the same thing; that I wasn't crazy, to come back, don't use, and ask for help.

My sponsor, who had fired herself several times from my case, picked me up and took me to a meeting. The girl who rode with us spoke that night; she talked about God of her understanding. Sitting next to my wife that night I began to see where I had missed the boat. I went back to that dark room and thanked God for those people, because somehow I knew they cared. Even though they did not understand many things about me, they gave me time out of their lives and asked for nothing back. I remember the Eleventh Step in the Program and I thought maybe, just maybe if I asked for knowledge of His will for me and the power to carry it out, He might help. I got a little brave, knowing I wasn't honest, I added "P.S., Please help me get honest." It would have been great to say that I left that hospital and never have used again, but it didn't happen that way. It was almost like all the other confinements I had experienced. I came out of that hospital with exactly what I went in with: me!

Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years passed just like a wink, blink and a nod, and I was still praying. Everything got worse. My family kicked me out the day after New Years and I knew it was hopeless,

but I was still asking for honesty and on or around the fifth of January, I began to ease off the pills I was using. It wasn't any fun, but I know today that all the suffering was necessary. Praying and tapering off had become my obsessions. I felt that this was my last chance.

I took my last pill, shot, etc., in March. By God's grace I was clean! People began to tell me, look what you have done, and I began to believe them. I got to looking so good to me I just invited me out for a drink. What a rude awakening. I came off that drunk cold turkey, no pills, nothing, for the first time in over 21 years. For five days I shook and I mean shook, and on the fifth day I wanted no more. I sat down in my little V.W., bowed my head and told God, "if this was all in life for me, I wanted life no longer. Death would be far more merciful. It doesn't make any difference any longer." I felt a peace come into me that I had never felt before. I don't know how long this lasted and it doesn't matter. It happened and that is the important part. Since then, I have experienced the same feeling from time to time. It was like being brought forward from darkness to light. God doesn't let me stay in the sunlight too long, but he will help me if I choose to stay in the twilight. I walked away from that car a free man. I did not realize this for a long time. Since that day I have not had a desire to use.

A God of my understanding had sent me enough honesty to get started down the right path. I went back to the Program and again I made another mistake. I kept my mouth shut with the intention of letting the winners teach me how to become clean. Today I know for me I walked a different path through addictions and I had to walk a different path through this Program. I had to learn about me. For almost two years in the program I saw people come and go with addictions other than alcohol. One night in Birmingham, I was sharing with a group and also talking about drugs when a man approached me with tears in his eyes. He told me of his son and daughter somewhere hooked on drugs. He said, surely God must have some program for people like them. All the way back home that night I talked to a girl using drugs; a schoolmate of my wife's. The telephone gave us the answer through some new friends from Georgia and Tennessee in Narcotics Anonymous. A visit to share in Chattanooga proved to be a blessing. Several people came up from

ning — just come. So I came. And I strutted, and I smiled, and I did what I could for a cookie, a compliment, a look, or a stroke. My ego needed anything it could get. At that time — I still didn't really know what being clean was all about — but I kept coming back. Eventually, I started coming for me. I realized I'm a drug addict in many ways. I may not have taken a great variety of drugs. I may not have done the things other "drug fiends" have done, I may not have gone as far down the road — but only because I didn't have the opportunity. I am a drug addict, not only because of the drugs, but because of the defects as well. Because of the lying, manipulating, conniving, self-will, thieving, and escaping — I qualify.

I also found out that drugs were only a symptom of a disease. With meetings and the help of the people in those meetings and my Higher Power — I started to grow. I got rid of the fear and the guilt. My confidence was built up. I learned how to handle pressure and responsibility. I learned to reach out one hand "for" help and the other hand "to" help. I learned how to make friends and I learned respect for myself. I could go on and on. The main thing is, I'm growing by using the tools of the Program. Thank God for the N.A. Program. I'm alive. I'm free, and I have a lot to offer — today.

Chapter Nineteen

WHY ME? WHY NOT ME?

My God what am I doing here! Why am I in so much trouble? What am I going to do? Nothing had gone right for me in such a long time. Was I going crazy? Was there hope for me in this horrible existence I called life? The only words I could describe my life with at this time are fearful, desperate, aimless, and hopeless.

As I thought of my past with remorse and disgust, I tried to think of anything I had done or accomplished which was positive in any way. I had three beautiful children, a wife, two cars, a new house, and a good job. However, I could not think of a single thing in my life to be grateful for. I felt as though I was a complete failure, with nothing left to live for.

For the past fourteen years, I had been drinking heavily, and had experienced numerous consequences due to drinking, but I thought that was part of the game of being a responsible adult. I never liked responsibility, and made a point to avoid it whenever possible.

I was introduced to narcotics completely by accident. The accident was due to my drinking at 7:00 a.m. while driving. I suffered a broken neck in a head-on collision, and was taken to the hospital. I learned to enjoy the life of being waited on and having no responsibility. This was exactly what I thought I had been looking for; soap operas and

walk in reality. With the world in such a turmoil I feel I have been blessed to be where I am at. I look at how N.A. has grown. We are in Germany, Australia, England, Scotland, Italy, Brazil, etc., etc. Maybe some day we will reach the countries that are so hard to reach.

I have been told there are not many women with a lot of time on the program. I am surprised when I hear this. I just assume there are and maybe they have moved to other cities and states. Maybe even to some of these countries that are so damn hard to reach. When a woman wants something bad enough, look out — she can move heaven and hell. One of the first things told to me was, “No one else in this world knows what you want, but you. If you want to survive in this world you had better do what is right for you because no one else is going to do it.” I sure get bumps and bruises and I suck my thumb once in awhile, but I sure get stronger each time. I have a dog named Baba Wawa and she was very tiny when my daughter gave her to me. My daughter said, “Mom, here is a little dog and she will never grow very large.” Well, she has grown very big and she surprises me every once in awhile. Last night she tried to fight a big dog right through a chain link fence. Now I thought she was still a puppy but she can stand her own and I guess it’s like me. I have grown more than I realized and unlike Bawa Wawa, I have been known to climb the fence and go after whatever I have to. I have also been known to knock those fences down. I feel like there is more to say but who can put all of ten years down on paper. I would rather spend my time living it than writing it.

I have been active in N.A. answering phones, typing, working in different areas of N.A. I go to meetings and talk and still feel funny and awkward. Sometimes I am a kid, all hyper; and other times it goes so smoothly, I can’t remember what happened or what I have said but I feel good. What I am trying to say is, thank Heaven nothing is as bad as it used to be and there is so much more of what there should be in my life.

Chapter Twenty-Two

I FOUND THE ONLY N.A. MEETING IN THE WORLD

My name is Bob B. from Los Angeles. Getting to the subject of people, places and things, my story is not much different from the executive — just the opposite end of the stick.

I grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, poor, deprived, during the depression, in a broken home. The words of love were never spoken in my household. There were a lot of kids in my house.

Most of the things I remember about my life are in retrospect. While they were happening, I didn’t know anything about it. I just remember going through life feeling different, feeling deprived. I never felt quite comfortable wherever I was, with whatever I had at any given time. I grew up in a fantasy world. Things on the other side of the fence always looked better. My grass was never green enough. My head was always out to lunch. I learned all the short cuts in order to make it through school.

I always had a dream of leaving home. It was not the place to be. My great fantasy was that there was going to be something good out there somewhere.

I started using drugs fairly late in life. Eighteen years old, I say “late”

During the process of finding mothers, one mother found me. I thought I should hem this one up and get papers on her, then she couldn't run away.

I chose correctly by choosing someone who wasn't using. I knew about the ones that were using. They were never there when I got locked up. They never had bail money. They could never visit because they were too busy taking care of their own habits.

So I found one of those unsuspecting ones. She was in school, working, had a place to stay. She had one shortcoming: she didn't know she needed someone to take care of. I was a prime candidate. I wanted to be taken care of. She was going to help me get my act together. She proposed to me in jail, and I said, "Yes, I do. Just go down and pay the bail."

For the next three years I ran her crazy trying to keep up with me. Then she went out and found the *Only Narcotics Anonymous Meeting in the World*. How she did that, I don't know. At that time, there was only one meeting in the whole world, and she went out and found it, and I sent her off to the meeting. I had her go check it out.

You have to realize that in those days, drug addicts were very unpopular. To just intimate that two drug addicts were going to congregate anywhere would constitute a police stakeout. That's the way they treated drug addicts/at the time. There was very little understanding about addiction. I was very leery about anything to do about helping drug addicts. I knew what they did with drug addicts; they locked them up. Period! There was no Program to go to, except Ft. Worth and Lexington.

I always had a sad story to justify my using. One day after one of those six month trips to go get a loaf of bread at the corner grocery, I came home and my bags were sitting by the door. She had told me fifty times or a thousand times, "You got to go." This time was different. There was something in her voice this time. So I took my bags and went to the only place there was to go; the streets.

I had become accustomed to living in the streets. I knew how to live in the back of old cars, old laundry rooms, any old empty building, your house or my house. Of course, I never had "my house." I couldn't pay the rent. I never knew how to pay rent. If I had \$3.00 in my pocket that

\$3.00 was going for drugs before a place to stay. It was that simple. I think I paid rent one time while I was using drugs and living on the streets, that was just to move in. It was called "catch me if you can" from then on. It usually didn't make any difference, because I was a ward of the state much of the time anyway. I just ran in the streets until they locked me up. Then I had a place to stay. I could rest up and get my health back in order to go back out and do it again.

I came to Narcotics Anonymous nearly 21 years ago.* But I didn't come for me. I came just to keep her mouth shut. I went to meetings loaded.

I didn't have a driver's license. I was unemployable. I had no place to stay. I was the wrong color. I had no money. I didn't have a car. I didn't have no old lady, or I needed a new one. I took them all these problems and they would tell me, "Keep coming back." And they said, "Work the Steps." I used to read the steps and thought that was working them. I found out years later that even though I read the steps, I didn't know what I had read. I did not understand what I read.

They told me in many places that I was an addict. I had been labeled, "addict." From the Military to the jails right on down the line, I had been labeled. I accepted that, but I didn't understand it. I had to go out and do some more experimenting, before I got back to the Program.

One of the things I had to learn to do was to understand what the Program was all about. I had to become willing to find out what the Program was about. Only after standing at the "Gates of Death" did I want to understand. I think "Death" is the "Counsel Permanent." I had O.D.'d a number of times, but that was kind of like the place where I always wanted to be. It was just before going over the brink and everything seemed okay. Coming out of it, I could say, "Wow, give me some more." That's insanity!

The final case for me was that I was about to be shot off a fence, and not by my own doing. That, I didn't like. Playing cops and robbers is dangerous, "out there." They have guns, and I don't like being used for target practice. There were more and more cases of policemen sticking guns in my mouth and upside my head, and telling me to lay upside a wall.

*Written in 1981.

by this time I was out completely. There were no veins left, so I had to go in about an inch and a half to find one and I nearly lost my veins for good. All this time I was trying to be a mother, wife, and girlfriend. I'd dress myself up for a day, put on my mask and perform my duties, but it never did work. I had no motivation to help myself.

During the worst time of my addiction my thoughts were never suicidal. I just wanted to sleep till it all went away. My old ideas told me it was a "sin" to take my own life. I couldn't really see that I was slowly doing just that. As deep as I now was into my habit, it wasn't long before I was selling everything. I had run out of lies to tell my money man, so, next went my house, cars and jewelry, but I didn't care, I had to have my dope.

There were people reaching out to me with all they had, but all I could do was shoot more dope. When someone tried to get close to this scared little girl, I didn't have any idea how. I didn't have the strength to get out of it at all. It wasn't long till I got busted again. This time it was different. It was the end for me. I had never been one to assist cops in anything but now the running was over; I knew it. I told them exactly what I had done and I didn't really care what the consequences were, I just wanted out. I was picked up at a drugstore and taken to jail. I was so messed up that nothing mattered — nothing.

I was unable to walk, both my legs were bent from infection so that I couldn't straighten them out. I was carried by the nurses before the judge to have my bond set. As foggy headed as I was I'll never forget the voices of disgust and pity as I was carried into the courtroom. Something inside my sick mind and heart told me it was all over finally! I suddenly realized how close I was to death or even prison.

Without my knowledge, my father had found a lawyer to get me out. The nurses informed me that I was on my way to a hospital, police escort and all. Before I left the jail my lawyer arrived. He came in, introduced himself, and then proceeded to tell me the most frightening words I'd ever heard, "It's time for you to grow up!" He told me the only reason he was taking my case was because he hated to see a grown man cry and my father had sat in his office and cried like a baby, pleading with him to please help his little girl this last time. He informed me there would be no

more calling my parents, brothers, sisters or sugar daddy for help. I was to stand on my own two feet for once and take the responsibility for my actions. I had never been so scared in my life. The things he told me scared me more than anything; even my arrest and losing my daughter weren't as scary as having to grow up. I didn't know where to begin. I had no idea of how to grow up and no idea of what he really meant, except that it had to be done somehow.

When I arrived at the hospital, I was informed that there would be no phone calls in and no phone calls out. I couldn't even talk to my parents. I didn't like it too much but I knew I had better listen for the first time in my life. My lawyer was the only visitor I had for the first few days and he really helped me laugh at myself. I was laying in the bed one day feeling sorry for myself and counting my scars. I had 22. He looked at me real serious and said, "I know what we'll do, we'll paint you green and play dot to dot!" I had never in my serious, condemning mind found that I could ever laugh at myself in such a forgiving way. Before, if I laughed at me, I was judging me for being such a failure at life. Now there seemed to be some relief and hope; nothing was THAT BAD anymore.

My next trip was to a treatment center. I was determined to make it work this time. I spent a lot of that time preparing myself to go to prison because there just didn't seem to be a way out of it. My lawyer told me there would have to be a miracle somewhere, because I had really gone my limit. I knew this, people just didn't get out of three narcotic arrests (including fraud), without ratting and without going to jail. The song "Why Me Lord" came into my head while I was there and stayed. Every time I laid down to go to sleep it was there. I had begun to know what gratitude was. My prayers were limited to just, "help me." I didn't know what I was really praying to, but I had to pray anyway. I couldn't carry the burden alone anymore. The people around me were telling me I had to believe in something bigger and greater than me or I would die. I could look in their eyes and see that they must be telling the truth, because something was there and I wanted it.

For the first time I was told I could have my own God, who would love and understand me. I could have a God that no one else had if I chose. Wow, what a relief this was to me. I no longer had certain rules and

hold my head high and tell anyone “Hi, my name is—; I’m an addict.” Before I came to the program and was asked, “Who are you?” I wouldn’t answer because I had no idea what it really meant. I love the newly found me. I love getting to know me and getting to know other people who are like me. I now can feel emotions that were buried deep within me for many years.

The Program has given me everything non-material. To me, “happiness” (I used to think) was what and how much I could buy. How little I knew of true “happiness”. I’m beginning to accept pain as growth. I know pain is essential. Through pain God can break down many false personalities little by little, in His own time.

There is so much hope for me today. The program was a challenge I needed desperately and was given to me as a gift. Each day I want more of what it has to offer. I want so much to learn, and have a long way to go to reach the understanding I’m searching for. That’s okay; I’m at least searching.

To put into words what God and the program of Narcotics Anonymous have done for me has been difficult, there aren’t words to express God’s love. I hope that my story can reach someone, somewhere; but if it doesn’t that’s okay because it has reached me.

Thank you God. Thank you Narcotics Anonymous for giving me, me.

Chapter Twenty-Five

IT’S OKAY TO BE CLEAN

On one of my first drunks, at 13, I made a fool of myself, got very sick, had trouble with my parents, and was kicked off the basketball team. In one night, I made plenty of reasons not to drink again, a preview of coming attractions. Two important reasons outweigh all the pain and trouble and kept me using for years. First, was the attention I got at school. I was a celebrity for a short time. The other guys who drank welcomed me into their group and I felt the acceptance I craved. Second, and just as important, I liked the way the alcohol made me feel. I first smoked pot at 14, and by the time I finished high school I was smoking several times a week and getting drunk most every weekend.

I had experimented with drinking hard liquor, eating acid, mescaline, speed, mushrooms, and smoking different kinds of hash and pot. Being from a small town in Washington State, most drugs were hard to get, but there was always pot. The pot was easier for me to get than beer. I could buy the pot right at school, but I had to find someone of legal age to buy alcohol. I always partied with the same group of friends throughout my using. We shared our common interests in drinking and drugging and I was afraid of meeting new people. I was always looking for happiness,

Chapter Thirty-Two

RESENTMENT AT THE WORLD

I had living problems before I ever started using drugs. At an early age, I developed a strong resentment against alcohol. I was hit by a car and the driver was drunk. Later I had resentments towards gays, after I was raped. I had resentments towards my parents after I found out that I was born illegitimate. By the age of 13, I hated almost everyone.

I also started using at that age. My first experience with drugs was smoking pot and drinking alcohol; it relieved me of all my pain. Although I did get sick, that didn't matter. I loved it anyway and I set out to find ways not to get sick. I didn't drink very much after that. I started getting in trouble at home and at school, I was blaming my troubles on authority. I started rebelling at school and I refused to communicate in any way with my father. Things just kept getting worse. If I didn't have pot, I felt very lonely and left out.

At about this time, I lost my ability to think clearly and as a result I got thrown off the football team. I became very resentful over this. I blamed it on one of my teammates because he told the coach I was smoking pot. At about this time my parents decided to move because of my reputation. They thought if I moved away, I would get better. This, of course, didn't work. Wherever I went, my disease went with me.

In the new town, I was introduced to harder drugs and I got into them because they got me further away from reality. I started using acid and

my thirteenth birthday and it was all gone before the big day even arrived. My friends told me that was not normal. I tried to quit that summer and I did for three months.

When I started getting high again it was worse. I was smoking more pot and I started taking a few chemicals. I started school again and it was obvious I had a problem. I would go to school high and then skip school to get high again. My grades dropped from A's to C's and D's. Luckily we moved and my parents never saw my grades.

I met a girl who was also in junior high and who liked to party, so we started using together. I managed to maintain through junior high. In high school my addiction started progressing more rapidly. I drank occasionally. I didn't like to drink because I always got sick. I took acid and speed occasionally, but I was dropped out of high school my first year. I went back the second year and I dropped out again.

I got a G.E.D. the spring of my junior year and was sent to the State Hospital that summer. I was suicidal. I thought I should kill myself because of all the things I had done and since I didn't, the world was going to end. I lost it and I didn't think that would ever happen to me—I was too smart. My friends, parents, and doctors told me it was the drugs. I could still handle it and started smoking pot again. In eight months I was worse. I was smoking pot every day and selling it to support my habit. I had tripped a few more times and was taking speed to lose weight. I ended up in the hospital again except this time it was a treatment center.

The first few weeks were a struggle. I still wasn't sure what was real and wasn't. I was afraid. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I was too scared to go to meetings. I thought everybody belonged to some weird cult. The people gave me phone numbers and told me to call. I didn't go to meetings and I relapsed. I remember feeling like I didn't belong in N.A. because pot was really my problem although I had used other drugs. I read the little white pamphlet "Narcotics Anonymous." It said an addict was someone who "lived to use and used to live" and that "our lives and thinking were centered on getting and using of drugs." That sounded like me. Then it said they didn't care what drug I used and the only requirement for membership was the honest desire to stop

using. I thought, well, maybe, just maybe they would let me stay. I started going to a meeting every day or I talked with another addict. The members told me they needed me and I began to feel a "part of!" I attended regularly and tried to support new meetings. I learned about the steps and I tried to work them. I didn't use, I took inventories, I made amends, and I prayed. That's one of the things I'm grateful for is having the freedom to have a God as I understood Him. One day I realized I was being freed from my addiction. The obsession and the compulsion were no longer the dominating force in my life; growing spiritually was.

I got a sponsor and I talked to her. I listened to others who had clean time. I watched others hoping I could learn from their mistakes, like what happens to people who don't go to meetings. I learned about spiritual principles: honesty, openmindedness, willingness, humility, gratitude, forgiveness, and love. I slowly grew to accept myself, to love myself, and to love others. I'm still growing in these areas. I've heard it shared, I am able to love others for I know I am loved. N.A. has given me the love I needed to grow. I worked on being willing and on helping others. I learned about service work. It started with picking up ash trays, giving members rides to meetings, cleaning up after meetings, to being secretary of a group and taking meetings to institutions. I've learned that being of service is a way to show my gratitude to N.A. for saving my life.

I feel real privileged to be clean today. I'm twenty years old now and I've been around the Program for over two and a half years.* Some days are better than others and other days, all I can do is hang on with both hands. I've learned that it's on my bad days that I can grow the most. I just keep on believing that it'll all be right as long as I don't use. I still do the same things I did in the first year of my recovery. I say "please" in the morning, "thank you" at night, go to meetings, read the literature, live the steps, and talk to other addicts.

Thanks to N.A. one of my greatest joys was the day I realized "Just for Today, I never have to use again!"

*Written in 1980.

I was 5'5" tall, and weighed 282 pounds. I ate compulsively to try and handle my feelings and emotions and to make me feel better. As a matter of fact, this was how I originally got into using heavy drugs. I wanted to lose weight so desperately that I became willing to use heroin. I thought I would be smart enough not to get hooked and that I could use and lose my appetite, feel good and outsmart the game. I ended up in penitentiaries and jails and bounced around the country. This was the beginning of the end; not only was I a compulsive overeater and remained fat, but I was also addicted to the drugs I was using.

Somebody told me about the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous when I was in a complete stage of degradation and desperation. Seemingly having no place to go, I walked into this fellowship feeling as low as a person can feel; like there was no way out. I was completely and totally morally bankrupt. I knew nothing about spiritual values. I knew nothing about living. Life ultimately was nothing but pain on a daily living basis. All I knew was to put something in me—food, drugs, alcohol—or to abuse sex to feel good, which just didn't do it for me anymore. I just couldn't get enough of anything.

When I came to this program, I found something that I had never experienced before—total acceptance for who and what I was. I was invited to keep coming back to a fellowship that told me there were no fees or dues. They said that I had already paid my dues, via my past life, and that if I kept coming back, I would find total freedom and a new way of life.

Today, many years later, I find that I am free from drug addiction, compulsive overeating, and I have status in the community. I have a nice home, family, executive position and most of all I have a personal relationship with my God, which has made all these things possible. I am able to feel good, to feel joyful, blissful and to feel serenity, even when things are not as good as they might be.

There is no question about it. I owe my life to the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship and God. I can only extend my hope that if you, too, are suffering, as I once was, that you will practice the principles of Narcotics Anonymous and find freedom from pain and a meaningful, prosperous life.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

EARLY SERVICES

I started using and drinking when I was about ten years old. My stepfather and I would go down to his boat and drink beer and smoke pot. Then, he would force me to engage in homosexual acts with him. I was always very scared that he would beat me up. By age eleven, my drinking had gotten worse and he did start beating me. I finally went to my mother. She told me that we needed him to support us, for me to just do whatever he said, and don't make waves.

By age twelve, I couldn't take it at home any more. I stole \$100.00 from my mom and left home. After being gone for three nights, a man came up to me and asked if I wanted to earn some money. I agreed because I was almost broke by this time. I went to his house to take a shower. After I got dressed and came out, he asked if I took drugs. I said, "I like everything." We snorted some cocaine and he started taking off my pants. The next day, he took me to his friend's house. On the way there he said, "you are going to get good money and all the drugs you want."

When we arrived, movie cameras were set up and I began my career in "porno" films. There were also two men in the bathroom fixing heroin,

and this was my first experience with heroin. By this time, I had no feelings of self-worth and I did not care whom I hurt or what I did to hurt anyone else.

By the time I was 14½, I had my first overdose of heroin. When I got out of intensive care, it was hard for my “sugar daddy” to find me a recovery house. He finally got me into an adult program because he knew some people. At this program, I went to my first N.A. meeting. I was scared, lonely and didn’t want anything to do with anyone. At my second meeting, I threw a chair at the leader. I kept coming back for 90 days, and I had to celebrate. I went out and got a fix. I thought it would be easy to get 90 days again. But after I went back out, I couldn’t even get one day.

I decided that I couldn’t clean up where I was, so I relocated 3,000 miles away. Things got worse. I had to turn tricks to support my habit. One night, I blacked out in a club, got violent and was taken to a mental hospital. The doctors kept me so severely sedated that I wandered around in a shuffle. Because I was only 15, the doctors called my father whom I hadn’t seen for two years. He came and got me. When we got into town, he dropped me off and said, “Call me sometime.” At that point, I thought I might want to stop using. For the first time I can remember, I cried. I just sat at the airport and cried. I got right back into tricking and using, but I was so tired of lying, hustling, stealing and using that I went to a meeting.

I had just fixed before the meeting, but because I wanted to be accepted, I got up and said that I had six months clean. Then I went outside because I knew I was dying and I didn’t know how to scream for help. My stepfather was at the meeting and I didn’t even remember what he looked like. He followed me outside and said, “We have to get you in a recovery house.” Then he looked me straight in the eye and said, “I love you.” For the first time in my life I knew he cared. He then found a recovery house that would accept me.

Before I got to the recovery house, however, I overdosed on barbiturates in a telephone booth while telling someone how to get where I was so they could take me to the house. I stayed in the recovery house for 30 days.

I go to a meeting every day now, and usually make eight or ten a week. Every morning when I get up, I look at myself in the mirror and say, “I’m okay for today. God, just for today, keep me clean.”

I’m almost four months clean, and I hurt most of the time. But today, I know that without this program, I will die. At this point in my recovery, I am actively involved in N.A. service. It keeps me busy and shows me a spiritual part of the program I never knew was there. I am slowly learning to trust my fellow members and know that I never have to be alone again. Today, I know there is hope.

my father and drank the whole thing. I got really sick and did a lot of weird things in my neighborhood, and everyone knew that I was drunk. I couldn't wait until I got to school the next day to see what all the kids would say. I didn't care that they thought I was a fool. It just felt really good to know that they were all talking about me. It enabled me to say things that I was afraid to, do whatever I wanted to, and I could say, "Well, I couldn't help it, I was drunk." Soon after, I started smoking dope and I loved it. I also remember the paranoia, thinking that God was going to strike me dead. I started smoking compulsively soon after I tried it. Dope made me feel really hip and like I had a lot of friends. I remember feeling that God was bull and that I didn't need him. All I needed was to get high, do nothing. I was just going into ninth grade and my grades were going downhill. I was fighting with my parents all the time, and I was unhappy at home. All I wanted was for people to leave me alone and just let me get high. I started burglarizing houses to get booze and money to get high on. Although I made eighty dollars a week and had seven hundred in the bank, I was draining that quickly. I got caught ripping off houses and my parents couldn't believe it. I got put on probation and I felt like it was a big joke. While I was on probation, dope was dry, so I bought three pints a day. I needed to get high and tried THC. I was told it was from pot. I remember hating it. As soon as I came down, and was able to stand up, I wanted more. This became my drug of choice. I soon found it was PCP, but it was too late and I didn't care. I was soon doing acid and everything else I could get and I remember stealing medicine from my mother and doing it in school and being sent to the hospital because I could not wake up. They were downs and I took too much. I thought I'd just have to take less the next time. I started seeing a psychologist because my parents didn't know what to do. I told this shrink that I just used socially. I had it together in my head. He stuck up for me and told my parents not to put it down until they had tried it. He gave me a new license to use. He helped me to get my parents off my back. My father knew I was dealing dope and was going to put me away, so I partied it up and overdosed. I told my parents that I wouldn't use like that if they wouldn't threaten me like that. My shrink still stuck up for me. I coned that guy into thinking I was his friend and I really cared

for him. It was me and him against my parents. We convinced them that I was responsible because I paid all of my drinking fines and disorderly conducts. I usually owed money on three of them, and I was just one step ahead of the constables. I was always ripping houses off and people (other addicts). I stole money from my mother twice a week, usually twenty dollars at a shot.

Things kept getting worse for me. I had a girlfriend who did not show up for a party with me, so I did her share of drugs as well as mine that night and I overdosed five minutes after taking it. My brother found me chasing cars and barking at them and he dragged me home and my parents took me to the hospital. I woke up in a strait jacket that was tied to a bed that was soaked in piss and sweat. I was fifteen years old then. I remember a psychiatrist asking me why I wanted to kill myself and I couldn't understand what he was saying. I just wanted to get high. After this, I saw this shrink for a week and he convinced me that if I took acid (or PCP) again I would lose my mind. When I was in the hospital part of me died. I was pale, and slow talking and thinking. I was physically, mentally, and emotionally beat. I tried at this point to just drink three beers a day and just smoke one joint. I really tried but it only lasted three days, and I dropped and smoked as much as I wanted. I didn't use chemicals for awhile. The progression was tamed for the time being. When I graduated from this shrink, he told me I could function in society if I stayed off of hard drugs. After a couple of weeks, I was with a girl who had some pot sprinkled with PCP. After I smoked it, I wanted to do more. Two days later I was out to do anything I could get my hands on. My master plan was being formed. I had just turned 17 and I was planning to set up this big dealing operation. I started getting paranoid, afraid of being busted or killed. I was afraid to go out in the daytime or to talk to anyone on the phone. I had quit school and I wasn't working. I knew it was the drugs and I figured I would just stop using and clean up my act so I could use again. When I stopped using, the walls started breathing, flashes of lights, sirens, friends plotting to kill me, shakes, sweating, crying, and I felt like I was losing my mind. God, how I hurt! I paid friends not to kill me. They told me I was crazy and I offered them more dope. I didn't know what was real and what wasn't. In a last

desperate effort to find the answer in drugs. I bought five dollars worth of pot and smoked it to get to sleep for a day or two. I was halfway done smoking when I realized that I wasn't getting tired. I was getting more spaced out. It made all of those things I was feeling worse and I took the pot and pipe and threw it as far as I could. I ran home and begged for help from my father. I had never heard of a rehab before. I had only heard of the methadone program and I wasn't a junkie. They wanted me to join an inpatient and I wouldn't buy it. They asked if I wanted to go into an outpatient rehab, and I was willing to try it. I just wanted to stop hurting, and an addict told me that I might not get any better—meaning that walls breathing, flashes of light, shakes and sweating might never stop. If I did not use today, they wouldn't get any worse. I went for forty days and one morning I got up and it was all gone: the pain, the hallucinations, the paranoia. I had prayed so hard for God to remove these and He did. That was all I really needed God for—when I felt better I stopped praying. I attended a few meetings and really felt I didn't need them. The steps mentioned God and I had nothing to do with that. I got better and I tried to be a very honest person. I had a hard time staying clean. It was a constant battle. My old friends hung in front of my neighbor's house all the time. I turned down drugs a lot. My brother and I shared a room together, and he was still using. He stashed dope in the room and I knew where it was. I used a lot of people for support and I started recovering. I was always being told by my brother that my friends said "Hi," and the fact that I couldn't really be rid of them made it really hard.

I stayed in touch with people constantly and things at home got some better; trust gradually developed. After going through the rehab, I had a lot of clean friends. I had a girlfriend who I moved in with. So much had been going really good. I had a diploma, a brand new car, a driver's license and a good relationship with my parents. My girlfriend was seeing a therapist who told her we should get involved in something together like starting an N.A. meeting in our area. The closest N.A. meeting was over an hour away, and there were only two a month at that. After we started the meeting, she got high and moved out. My best friend had been getting high for awhile and they started going out together, and that really ripped me up inside. I had a dog who I cried to every night, and he

couldn't even stand it and ran away. My girlfriend moved out of the apartment and I felt like nothing. The two friends I had left were still friends of hers and spent a lot of time with her. I was lonely, isolated, depressed, and I needed help.

Since I had started this N.A. meeting, I continued to go and the meeting grew. Here I was with two years, crying in the meeting, feeling sorry for myself and depressed and having newcomers with 30 days clean telling me it would be better; be grateful for what you have, and keep coming back. People who were new in the fellowship would come over to my house and 12-Step me. They kept me coming back. They told me that they loved me. I was depressed for two months like that and during that time, two more meetings started. I was making three meetings a week and I started working the steps. I was getting involved in our area service and I started being grateful for everything I had. I was so grateful to be alive and I believed that that was the cause of the N.A. fellowship. It was time for me to get up off my butt and start doing something for others. I started doing public information work in my area and started accepting God's will for me. I attended a lot of meetings, and spoke very often, trying to carry the message of recovery through N.A. I tried "giving away" what I had to other persons, especially the newcomers. I prayed very often and that hollow feeling of being different didn't apply any more. I attended conventions and conferences. At one of these, I had a spiritual awakening! I saw a tiny glimpse of God's will for me, and I prayed for the courage to carry that out. Through service, I can make it possible for many addicts who seek recovery to find it in N.A. Today in meetings, I try to carry a message of hope, and I let everyone know that if they want to recover from addiction, they can through Narcotics Anonymous.

At one point, I realized I needed a little more than meetings. I heard people being told to get a sponsor and work the steps, but this was to new people. I tried to work the steps, but I really didn't know how. I didn't have a sponsor and wasn't sure if I needed one. Finally, I came to a point where I was ready for total surrender; that meant that the things that were good for newcomers—sponsor, meetings, steps—would be good for me. I finally asked someone and he said he would sponsor me and I

and I resented that. I became jealous when she told me she had been advised to get rid of her problem and that I was it. The feelings of rejection were a deep kind of pain and I was resentful over not having been given my second chance to put my family back together. The pain was unbearable and the only way I remembered to relieve it was to return to my immediate reliever—drugs.

In much less time than I thought possible, the reality of progression of the disease, as I had been taught in treatment, came true. In a period of five months I lost my family, all my material possessions except the clothes on my back, my job and all of my friends, and most certainly any control over my drug usage. I had married again, was heavily in debt and resorted to something I had never done before—stealing. The bottom I had hit before treatment was really nothing compared to this. I felt alone and desperate. I realized that I was no longer comfortable with the drug life.

I isolated myself in my apartment and withdrew myself to be rid of the drugs in the physical self. The mental craving was still there after withdrawal. I finally decided I couldn't make it by myself. I began to pray again and make conscious contact with the Higher Power. For the first time, I got honest about my powerlessness and reached out for help. I called old acquaintances in the Fellowship and asked for help in getting transportation to meetings.

In the beginning of my return to the Fellowship, only the body was present, but at least I had the willingness to get the body there. I felt so hopeless and helpless that I considered going into treatment again. After a lengthy conversation with a member of the Fellowship, (who told me I knew what to do), my mind finally caught up with my body and I began to work the steps.

I went to every meeting available, each week, and soon I began to feel differently. I was aware of a sense of peace. Some of the fear left and for the most part I had been relieved of the craving. Although my material world was still nonexistent, I began to distinguish my needs from my wants and got comfortable with what I didn't have. The Higher Power seemed to be taking care of business for me, and many of my problems disappeared or resolved themselves.

I became involved in the Fellowship, spending all my time with recovering addicts. I knew I was getting clean and that I wanted to be clean. I became aware of how people cared about me and that if I listened to them, God would speak to me through them. Without any effort on my part, my world began to fall into place. I was soon employed again, reconciled with my parents and sister and was able to cope with the outside world just as it was.

My feelings of gratitude spilled over. I finally felt I had something to share with other recovering addicts and I couldn't wait to "give it away." I became heavily involved in Twelve Step work and returned to the treatment center, where it all began, to offer myself as a volunteer for anything they needed me for. I drove van loads of patients to meetings, shared with the patients about my experience, strength and hope and became willing to be God's instrument to speak to others in any way He chose.

My life has taken on new meaning and I am able today, with the help of the Higher Power, to feel feelings I never allowed myself to feel before. I am more confident, but I know it is God-confidence. I am more reliant, but I know it is God-reliance. I am more independent, but I know it is God-dependency. Today I am free to be exactly who I am because I know "whose" I am.

Recognizing my dependency on God as I understand Him, continuing to work the steps of the program and my sincere desire to "give away" what I have, I can truthfully say I am a Happy Drug Addict!