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Why you can't do what I
did.



Dear NA Members

I'm sorry you have been excluded from the kind of service I was able to participate in. I deeply regret that you can't experience the same benefits from participation in NA service as I have. I don't understand why it was deemed necessary to close the literature process so that any addict who wants to participate is denied the opportunity to do so.

The first miracle occurred prior to my arrival in NA, the Basic Text. That made my commitment possible. When I saw the book I had no need to alter one single word in order to identify with what was written. The approval form had my total approval; it fit me like a glove. When I heard members of the literature committee share about what it had been like to go through the process of writing the text, I wanted those feelings too. I wanted the special connection they shared. I wanted the spiritual awakening I heard expressed as they talked about the process. I wanted "more."

I made the commitment to recover exclusively in NA in February, 1982. I was just in time to be able to experience the camaraderie the fellowship had to offer in what I believe was its purest and most spiritual form. There were so many of us, so widely spread apart, and we set aside petty differences to accomplish common goals, especially the survival and growth of NA. The basic text being written in conference, by groups of addicts was an impossible phenomenon. Nevertheless, it happened and a miracle was accomplished; they produced a book on recovery from addiction with an agreed upon concise and clear message. Having achieved that, they were ready to go on and create more literature.

At the 1982 World Service Conference, I watched the vote take place to accept that text to be printed as our own book of recovery. How excited most of us in attendance were! That there was resistance to the text being approved was incomprehensible to me, but I saw the resistance and heard plenty of resentment expressed.

I also thought it was odd that one of the people who had introduced me to NA gave me, an RSR-Alt. from a different state, a motion to submit to the Conference, telling me that he didn't think it would pass if it came from him. Why would that make a difference? Weren't we supposed to be placing principles before personalities? Somewhat perplexed, I did submit the motion, and it passed. There would be an H&I Handbook for use by groups, down to the World Level of Service. A motion was also made to create a fellowship-wide magazine on recovery from addiction, the NA Way Magazine.

I showed up at the venue for the first H&I Handbook workshop, thinking I'd help by cleaning up or perhaps fixing sandwiches. I was sure there would be something I

could do. Quitting school in the 11th grade had robbed me of confidence and self-esteem. I had slid through the three years of school prior to that with minimal effort. It never occurred to me that I might be able to help write literature; when I was asked to participate in editing I actually laughed. The thought was ridiculous to me.

We gathered in an old farm house and split into small groups. I was put in a group with two men both of whom had previous experience working on literature. When they said the three of us would be working in a small bedroom upstairs, my comfort level dropped. There were no chairs in that room. But when we went up there, got up on the bed and lined up with our backs to the wall and started working. My discomfort quickly disappeared. Patiently, in the next few hours I was walked through the process and a wonderful thing happened. I developed two new friends, one of whom I still feel a strong emotional bond with, thirty years later.

The next day, I was put into another group with several women I didn't know. In the hours that passed, working together toward our common goal, more bonds of friendship were formed. We shared frustration, exhaustion, and lots of laughter and excitement. Later, one of those women would ask me to sponsor her and that relationship was a delightful gift.

It seemed strange to me that in just a few days, I had amassed a group of people with whom I had experienced what I can only explain as "magic." We accomplished the supposed impossible. We set aside our egos and began the process of creating literature that would help change the lives of thousands of addicts. I couldn't understand the strong bond I felt with these people, how was it possible that could happen in just a few days? Then someone pointed out that in the hours we worked together over that weekend, we had spent the same amount of time together as if we'd shared several months of home group meetings. It was beyond amazing to me.

After that, I showed up at several workshops for editing the NA Way Magazine. After a few mistakes, I developed the knack of editing input into a useable form to share in print a message that would exclude no one. In the process, I got more of the magic: the phenomenon of a seemingly instant bonding of kindred spirits working together for a spiritual common goal. A very special spiritual awakening; NA Magic! Back at home, we received a flyer for a gathering at Thanksgiving "Consciousness in Memphis", Tennessee, and immediately decided to participate. That weekend our mission was to edit our White Book and Informational Pamphlets. Our group split up and I joined a few addicts working on the White Book. As we read through the booklet, and paused to re-work that piece to better express the clarity of our message, I began to feel that unique bonding of spiritual purpose. Hours later, full blown NA Magic!

A few weeks ago, thirty years after that Thanksgiving weekend, I was preparing to attend an NA History Conference in Atlanta. A woman I've known and loved for years wrote on Facebook that she was attending and sharing at a workshop at the upcoming conference. She sent me a message asking for input and I suggested she contact another friend who could help her more than I. Afterwards, I picked up my phone and called her, and we were talking about our early days in service and trying to remember where it was that we met. It just seemed to both of us that we'd just always known each other. Each of us remembered working on that White Booklet. I shared what I remembered about that weekend, and she did the same. As she was talking about her input, it was as if I travelled through time to our shared weekend. I remembered thinking how brilliant and more socially sensitive she was as she gave her input. NA Magic, revisited.

A few years after my participation in the literature writing and editing, I began to take classes to get my GED. I became somewhat impatient in those classes, because I knew the material being covered. I decided to skip over all but the math preparation section of those classes. When the day came to take the test, I was frightened that I'd made a mistake. As I finished the test, and got up to leave I felt panic. I was done early; perhaps I should go back and review my work. Deciding not to second-guess myself I handed in my test and left. Some weeks later I received

to second guess myself, I handed in my test and left. Some weeks later, I received my results in the mail and nervously opened the envelope to read the dreaded insert. I read the congratulations; I'd passed and looked over the form, somewhat confused. It looked to me as I hadn't really done very well. Knowing I'd passed felt great though, and I set the results aside. A week later, I received a phone call and the caller identified himself as the head of the Adult Education Services in my locale. I felt a moment of panic. I thought he was going to tell me there had been a mistake and I hadn't passed after all, but as I listened I was amazed. He explained that I had passed in the 95th percentile, which meant I did better than 94% of the people who take that test. He wanted to meet with me so he could understand what I had done to study for the test. I gathered the end-results of many of those workshops, the H&I Handbook, a few copies of the NA Way Magazine, the White Book, and a PI Handbook, and went to that meeting where he asked me to share about my experience by speaking as Valedictorian of that GED Class. I turned down the honor of Valedictorian; I was speaking at a convention on that weekend, and I didn't earn my GED by preparing through their classes. I showed him the literature on which I'd worked and explained how it had been created, introducing him to the Miracle of NA.

When I later earned my Associates Degree in Legal Studies, I knew how I got it. Open participation service in Narcotics Anonymous.

The growth of the fellowship, its spread around the world is the culmination of our dreams. Yes, NA is different than it was in the 80's. I would never choose to go back to limited meetings and almost no literature. I neither want nor expect NA to stay the same. What I do want is for the spiritual benefit of open participation service to be reinstated so that the miracle can continue. Why should we spend thousands of dollars for professional writers when we have a fellowship full of talent?

After the World Service Conference this year, and my History Conference weekend, I've been having conflicting emotions. I feel so sad that our service structure has changed to restrict participation, seemingly a little more each year. Delegation instead of group conscience directed service is completely upside-down me. And then there are repeating flashes of renewed hope.

There are still enough of us "dinosaurs" or "predecessors," around who have stayed clean and remember the spirituality we developed during those marathon service meetings where our souls seemed to bond. Perhaps, if each of us who achieved the divine benefits of open participatory service shares openly and clearly the benefits we received through that process, the magic we experienced that was almost tangible, maybe these ongoing changes which have restricted participation and caused our literature to be written by professional writers can be reversed. Hopefully, it is not too late. Perhaps you who are newer in recovery will catch the excitement and want the magical spiritual awakenings we have been so blessed with. It is my ongoing prayer this change occurs; however, it can only happen if you are aware of what you are missing.

In Loving Service,
A Predecessor in NA

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