

THE **N.A. Way**
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Facing those 'secrets'

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Feature: H&I work

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Special interests or
common needs?

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The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous

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

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Fireside meditation

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to participate in some survival training in the Texas foothills. Of course, as an addict I already knew a lot about surviving: that was my reality for many years. But I did learn a few new skills, one of which was learning how to start a fire.

I've always liked fires; they almost mesmerize me. The light, the warmth, the colors, the smell, the sound—it all attracts me. We learned in that course about the three types of material used to start and maintain a fire: tinder, kindling and fuel.

Tinder is the highly flammable, quick burning stuff like wood shavings, dry grass and small twigs. Kindling is material that also burns fairly easily, but lasts a little longer. Things like sticks and small branches make good kindling. Fuel, the third material, is the big stuff: slow-burning logs. These logs could burn for hours, maintaining that yellowish-orange glow.

A friend and I decided to be rugged and sleep out by the fire under the beautiful night sky, complete with a full moon. When we got ready to sleep, the fire was burning nicely, providing a lot of warmth in the De-



ember night.

A few hours later, we both woke up shivering. The fire was almost out. We had chosen to sleep outside the tent, and we would wake the others up if we went in there at that hour. As I looked at this situation, I realized I wanted and needed that fire, and I was responsible for helping to keep it going. This realization did not thrill me but I knew I had to do it.

So my friend and I got up in shifts and gathered material with which to stoke the fire. Even when the fire was almost out, we'd push the ashes around a little bit and find hot coals underneath that would light up again. It was a neat experience to see

the fire blaze up strongly with some of the pine branches. But the problem was, that type of material didn't last very long. Constant effort was necessary to keep that beautiful flame alive.

I couldn't help but think of how this fire concept could apply to our program. The warmth and light of this program almost instantly caught my attention, and still has it. When I first came into N.A. I kept coming back to the warmth of the fellowship. I saw the fire of the Higher Power in the lives of the addicts I met. For awhile, all I could do was gather around the fire. I was comforted to feel welcome,

and to know that there was a place for me there.

As time went on, I began to realize that I had responsibilities as a part of this fellowship. I have a responsibility for my own recovery; I also have a responsibility to carry the message to addicts who still suffer. These responsibilities require action and continuous effort. Just as I experienced at the fire, it was neat to see that when I did my part, not only did I help myself, but I helped others as well.

Sometimes, I reach lows in my program. It seems as if the fire is almost out and I feel cold. In those times, my Higher Power touches my life in various ways to stir up those ashes and re-ignite the fire that still burns

The light, the warmth, the smell, the sound: fires almost mesmerize me.

beneath them in the coals.

What are the three ingredients for your fire? For me, tinder might be phone calls or letters to other addicts, going out for coffee, or my daily meditations. Kindling would probably be meetings. They produce a lot of positive energy and light but they don't last very long. Fuel for my fire is our Basic Text, talking to my sponsor, and living the steps. Those are things that, with my Higher Power's strength and my effort, produce long-lasting, steady results.

S.L., Japan

The powerlessness of being powerless

What is the powerlessness of being powerless? Let's see if I can answer my own question. It's the feeling of not being able to do anything about the things you *want* to do something about. It's having to accept that inability, regardless of whether you want to accept it or not.

I bet you're wondering what this addict is talking about. I will try to explain. I met someone at the last world convention. We had our first date at the convention, and we hit it off great—the chemistry was there, the relating was there, and, of course, I thought the recovery was there.

Well, we started dating—at least *we* called it dating. What we *really* did was attach to each other. We had the intensity, the passion, and the mutual obsession. I'll be real honest: I liked it. I liked it a lot.

Let me qualify myself for a moment. You see, I'm almost forty. I haven't been in a relationship since I left my wife some nine years ago. I've had

some casual affairs, but nothing of real substance. So when this lovely lady came into my life, I grabbed at her. She soon became the most important thing in my life, taking the place of my higher power, my sponsor and my friends.

The funny part of this whole thing is that I thought I was doing fine. I thought I had this relationship business *down!* I read all the right books, listened to all the right people, thought all the right thoughts.

Most of what I knew about relationships I had learned at home when I was growing up: If you love someone, you take care of them and try to make everything good for them. In other words, give them so much that they won't want to leave. And that's what I did.

I don't think that we were together more than a few days when I knew I did not want to lose this woman. I subtly and manipulatively tried to get her as hooked into me as I was hooked into her. My need to be loved—and to give love—was selfish, self-obsessed, but real. All I wanted was to feel as good as she made me feel, and I would have done anything to get what I wanted.

Once I replaced my higher power with this woman, my disease started to get real active. It had a lot to feed on, since I hadn't worked with my sponsor in several months and had only been half-heartedly working the steps. Funny thing: I thought I had some awesome recovery. The fact is, I didn't. I guess the point of this whole thing is that when I am diseaseridden, the only energy I have to give is also diseased.

Unless I work the steps and keep my priorities in order, my whole life becomes unmanageable and everything around me falls apart. No matter how good I *think* my intentions are under those circumstances, my behavior is motivated from self-obsession and self-centeredness. And that kind of behavior only results in pain—great pain. Only slowly, and

I replaced my higher power with this woman; my disease started up.

only if I'm willing to change, does growth relieve the pain.

The problem is that it takes the pain to motivate me. And even then, I still think that if I do the right things I will get the results I want. I even go as far as praying for my higher power's will to make it happen the way I want. Bottom line is, I don't give up and therefore I suffer.

Isn't this a sad, sad story! (I'm sure that no one can relate.) Thank God, I've received gifts from this adventure into the disease. I once again get to recommit myself to the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I get to make a gratitude list, which helps put life in perspective. I get to reorder my priorities. And, most blissfully, I get to redevelop my relationship with God, as I understand him.

I have been fortunate to have seen my disease in full bloom, and not have used. I have been fortunate to find

that I have a need to be intimate—and that I can do that with friends and not just a "girlfriend." I have learned that I can deal with emotional pain and walk through it, thereby growing spiritually.

Most importantly, I have learned that I have friends, and that I'm cared about and loved for me, just for me. I never had that before I came to N.A. I hate to think of where I would be without you, the friends, the fellowship.

So the powerlessness of being powerless is in the disease—the disease that tells us we're doing good when we're not; that we're spiritual when we're not; that we're working a program when we're not. It's the lie that kept us out there, even when using no longer worked. It's the disease that wants us to self-destruct as slowly and as painfully as possible.

The treatment for that disease is Narcotics Anonymous—thank God.

Anonymous



My struggles with spirituality

I have found the Eleventh Step to be nearly impossible to practice at times, even though I had received religious training in my home and in the private school I attended. I learned the words to many prayers, and I learned various methods of worship, but I still experienced a great deal of difficulty with prayer, with meditation and with trying to do God's will.

At first, I rationalized that I did not really have to worry about any step which mentioned God, because through my religious training I had mastered all the parts about God. However, these other people in the program had better work *all* the steps. I put myself above the unbelievers. After all, I had been an active participant in my church—wasn't I different?

You can guess the rest. It was many years before I could find peace and serenity in the program. Some people say, "Do the steps or die." Since only a few steps did not relate to an H.P., I wasn't working many of the steps. However, I did do something right, for I stayed clean, though I wasn't exact-

ly filled with serenity.

After several years in the program, I suffered a major depression which lasted for many months. I lost all desire to live. Nevertheless, I kept going to meetings, and one day at a time I kept putting off checking into a mental hospital.

During those years, my life was filled with healthy activities, or so I thought. Much of my time was devoted to my job. Many of these enterprises worked like the drugs: they allowed me to avoid real relationships with others. All of those endeavors may have been healthy, but there is something about me which compels me to do everything to excess and to always compete against others.

As the years have gone on in the program, I have come a long way with the Eleventh Step. At first, I saw any type of meditation as a waste of time. I wanted to do things, I didn't want to just sit and think. I wanted action.

My earliest effective meditation

Running along empty country roads, I found my Higher Power.

happened during long distance running. Running for five to ten miles along empty country roads, I found my Higher Power. After I got past the first mile or so, my brain slowed down. I was able to see my life and the world more clearly. I was able to intuitively solve many problems, big and little.

Running gave me the opportunity

to think of one thing at a time. Most of my life has been a frenzied rush from one endeavor to another with no time for thinking.

Later—years later—I suffered an injury which caused me to eliminate all running. Now I had to move on to other ways of seeking conscious contact with my H.P. One method developed out of the way I communicated with my sponsor, who lives a good distance away. We made audio tapes with a tape recorder—usually while driving—then mailed the tapes to each other. I found that just talking to my sponsor in that way helped, and I decided to try it with my H.P. I discovered that it worked. I felt better. And I received answers from that "inner voice."

The best advice I have received about Step Eleven was that there is no wrong way to meditate. Each person will discover what is most effective for them. For me, I need to be alone, not pressured for time. Walking in the woods quiets my mind. I try to listen to my thoughts, taking a kind of unwritten inventory. My thoughts during these times are between me and my H.P.

I have a little spiritual discipline in my life today. Each day, I read from spiritually oriented books and say a few words of prayer. Every day, several times, I pray for acceptance. Nearly all of my pain is due to lack of acceptance of things which I can not change. I pray for acceptance of what I have to do this next ten minutes or this next hour.

Throughout my life, I have felt times when I could easily talk to my H.P. and other times when it was

almost impossible. And sometimes praying for and accepting my H.P.'s will is difficult. I don't worry about those times. I go through some motions in an attempt at prayer, or at acceptance, and soon I feel H.P.'s hand on me again.

My life is good today. By working the steps, every part of me is different. Until my H.P. proved to me that his will was safe and productive, I had difficulty trusting him. By the time I got to Step Eleven my life had been transformed, so I was able to trust my H.P.

There are many ways to pray and meditate. I have shared some of what I do. I hope that other members write to the *N.A. Way* describing their means of praying and meditating.

Anonymous



Some thoughts on conscious contact

When I came into recovery I was filled with the denial of my addiction. In the midst of my feelings of guilt, embarrassment and despair, I had built a world that I could at least try to feel comfortable in. I filled this world with visions of what I would like to be and how I would like to have people see me.

At that point in my life, I had little or no conscious contact with the God of my understanding. The only contact I had was possibly the sense that my life was unmanageable sometimes, and that maybe I needed some help. When I was introduced to the program of Narcotics Anonymous, and I began to hear other addicts sharing freely, all the inner feelings and insecurities inside me began to be set free. That inner voice was saying, "God, that guy's telling my story," and, "Yeah, that's the truth, man, I am screwing up big time."

What was happening, I now believe, was that the "we" of the program was beginning to break through the denial of addiction.

Through listening to others share, I began to realize that it was okay to admit to my powerlessness over addiction and to the total unmanageability of my life. I achieved a glimpse of humility, a true picture of what my life is all about. I began to surrender control.

As I surrendered control of my thoughts, I opened the door for new ideas to come in. I started to cultivate a new voice in my head: It was like a re-awakening of the conscience I once had. I think of this new voice as the voice of my recovery.

As I worked the steps and cleared away the wreckage of the past, I began to let go of more and more of the useless self-deceptions that ran my life. This was done through inventory, sharing and a lot of surrender. Each step led me closer to the truth about myself and the world around me.

This is what I believe humility is all about, and each step leads me closer and closer to true humility. My insides more and more match my out-

sides, and I become open to the voice of recovery in my head.

I realized more and more that if I could stay in tune with that little quiet voice, my life would run much more smoothly. I was beginning to realize that this voice was actually the voice of my Higher Power.

This is how I now understand the conscious contact that the Eleventh Step speaks of. It was through working the preceding steps that I cleared away enough of the garbage of the past to be able to truly hear the voice of my Higher Power.

As I continued to recover, I began to have second thoughts about actions I wanted to take. As I matured in the program, I began to listen to these second thoughts, and came to know that they are the stirrings of a re-awakening conscience. And that, in fact, is the voice of my Higher Power.

"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." As I approached the Eleventh Step, I had been building up contact with my Higher Power by increasing my awareness of that small

There was a new voice in my head: a re-awakening of my conscience.

recovery voice within, and I had begun to rely on it in all my affairs. My Higher Power speaks to me when I slow down long enough to be able to listen.

It is through practicing forms of prayer and meditation that I developed the tools to slow down throughout my day so that I could hear my conscience—or my Higher Power, as I now call it.

Listen for the still, quiet voices.

Anonymous



Weathering the storms of life

Today is a cold, rainy December day, but for me it's beautiful. I have just started my third year of recovery in N.A. and I feel happy. I'm grateful to my Higher Power and hopeful for what the future might hold for me.

A little over two years ago, however, things were not quite so rosy. It was quite apparent to everyone else that my marriage was on the rocks, though I did not see things that way. Verbal (and sometimes physical) battles raged between my wife and me. I still insisted, though, on using drugs, which I stole from the pharmacy I worked for, to ease the pain and to try to keep things together.

Our two children, aged seven and five, were still in foster care. They had been there for over a year already, after my wife and I both landed in a psychiatric hospital. I had been committed there after attempting suicide.

Through that hospital, I was introduced to N.A. I loved what I was



experiencing in meetings, but I approached things so seriously at first that I ended up back in the psychiatric ward within a few months.

When I was released from the hospital a month and a half later, I felt a lot better, but I was advised to stay off of work for a while. I started going to meetings again, but I approached the program in a much more easy-going manner.

Even though I had again become involved in N.A., my marriage was not improving. When I took my six-month chip, I finally came to grips with the fact that my marriage was not helping my recovery. I got up the courage to inform my wife of my intentions to file for divorce.

That was a difficult decision, but I made it through. I weathered the storm of divorce, continued to deal effectively with the prolonged legal situation involving my children, and decided to change careers. And I just recently celebrated two years of recovery.

I have recently experienced a

spiritual awakening through working the steps of N.A. with my sponsor, through continuing to attend and share at meetings, and through living with five other recovering addicts.

Right now, I feel the best I have ever felt in my entire life. I feel well, deep down inside. My conscious contact with my loving Higher Power, as expressed through the program of N.A.

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I weathered the
storm.*

and the people in it, is as strong as ever.

I now relate to my ex-wife in a way I never did during my entire eleven-year marriage. Right now we are good friends, and I am quite grateful.

I feel myself beginning to relate a lot better to my children, too. I have

noted with joy the marked improvement as well in the way they are responding to me. I do not know what my Higher Power has in store concerning them, but I am quite willing to leave matters in his hands.

My Higher Power has granted me much spiritual growth, and I am continuing to recover one day at a time. Things have never been better in my life. I realize, though, that if I am to continue to grow, I cannot afford to become self-satisfied. I must continue to come to N.A. meetings, share with my fellow recovering addicts, work the steps with my sponsor and apply spiritual principles in my life to the best of my ability. Most important of all, it is necessary to maintain my close conscious contact with my Higher Power, through prayer and meditation.

I am feeling safe today in the protective, loving arms of my Higher Power. I am home here, along with my fellow recovering addict friends, in N.A.

S.F., California

I thought I was being honest

When I first came to Narcotics Anonymous I thought this “recovery thing” was going to be a snap. I didn’t understand what anyone was talking about when they referred to the Twelve Steps, changing, sponsorship, risks, getting active, or a “we” program. I didn’t even know there was a difference between recovery and staying off drugs. I didn’t know *anything*, but I thought it was going to be a snap.

I continued to use, despite my faithful one meeting a week (I figured for sure that should have been enough to keep me straight).

I could identify with the other addicts in the halls of N.A. Whether they talked about drugs, their feelings, or their experiences, I had experienced the same. I kept coming to meetings; it’s what the fellowship suggested I do, and eventually, I stopped using.

As time went by I became more willing (through pain, I might add) and took suggestions that continued to help me stay clean. The steps, sponsorship, service work, and meetings

all come to mind.

Honesty? Well, for some reason I thought I had that one in the bag already. I always thought of myself as an honest addict, even when I was using; so how could I not be when I was straight? I found out I wasn’t, and that I didn’t really know what honesty was.

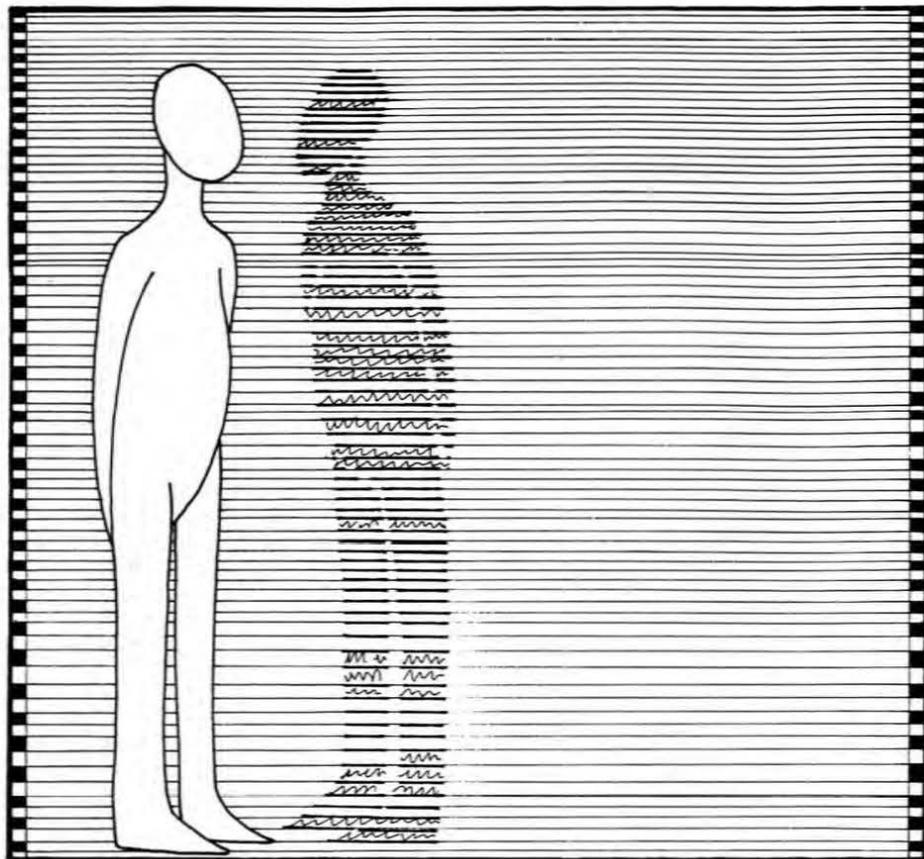
Today I believe I’m more aware of what honesty is. Honesty means many things to me. It means making myself vulnerable, letting people know me from the inside. It means expressing my opinions, good or bad. It also means I have to be aware of myself and make the necessary changes in recovery to continue to grow.

There was one particular lesson that helped me learn about honesty. Secrets. I can’t hold on to them. I didn’t know that if I kept secrets about myself it could be just as dishonest as lying.

Honesty means making myself vulnerable, letting people know me from the inside.

I remember this one time telling my sponsor something weeks later about a situation and she responded with, “Why didn’t you tell me sooner?”

I had gone for a drive with an old friend from treatment, knowing he still used. I assumed he wouldn’t do anything in front of me since he knew I was in the program. I was wrong. I



found myself parked in a lot with this guy listening to him talk about wanting to get straight while he pulled out a bottle of booze and asked me if I wanted any. By the grace of my Higher Power I didn’t pick up that evening. But for the next two weeks or so I was obsessed with wanting to use, and excuses seemed in abundance.

I didn’t tell anyone about this. I knew I had set myself up, so I assumed that was enough honesty. When the pain got great enough and I believed I was going to pick up, I broke down. I told my sponsor what had happened with me. When I shared this with her I

realized the obsession was gone and faith was again a part of my life.

Through many more such instances I have learned (and am still learning) about honesty, and about myself. I need to continue practicing honesty by letting people know how I think, how I feel, how I’ve changed or need to change, what causes me pain, and what I can do to stop it.

I need to carry the message of recovery, to give away what has been freely given to me—just for today.

This situation may have seemed like a small one, but it’s the small ones that usually lead to picking up. Be aware!

K.T., Massachusetts

Facing those “secrets”

When I first got clean I had convinced myself that all I would have to do to recover from this disease was not use drugs. Boy, was I wrong. As you probably know, and as I learned somewhere near a year clean, my using was only a symptom of a much deeper problem. For the first while, the struggle to just not use was all I could handle, but I had a firm conviction within me that no matter what happened to me I would not use.

I didn't come into this program brimming with honesty, love, or forgiveness either. I was filled with resentment and hate, and all the while pretending I wasn't. Then shortly before my first year birthday, all that hate in me started to erupt. I ended up getting into fights again and as a result I lost my job and was charged with three counts of assault. But it woke me up because it all took place in less than one month. I quickly realized that I needed help. I booked myself into a treatment center to deal with my anger problem.

A second miracle took place when I went to court. Because of my own ef-

forts to change, I was sentenced to eighteen months probation instead of the five years that my past record would have called for. I learned a lot through that period, especially that I was not only going to have to just go to my meetings, but also that I was going to have to work the Twelve Steps of this program to the best of my ability.

This new knowledge and the effort it calls for haven't been all that easy for me. When it came time to deal with my resentment, I couldn't see how I could be expected to forgive the people who had harmed me in my past; and when it came to listing the exact nature of my wrongs—good Lord, I needed strength! I had to forgive my father for sexually abusing me. But even harder, I had to admit

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to and forgive myself for sexually abusing my own children on top of that; I had to make direct amends for this.

I was amazed during my Fifth Step, when for the first time I shared these secrets that had haunted me, that my sponsor's reaction was not disgust and rejection as I had feared it would be.

No, instead my honesty was met with understanding. He understood the pain I had attempted to live with, and helped me to face the pain that would be in store if I truly wanted to recover. When I had decided that I would be willing to go to any length to recover, I had no idea exactly how far it meant I'd have to go.

My children were on my Step Eight list, no matter how I tried to rationalize taking them off it. I believed that if I didn't work Step Nine and make amends to them, they would grow up emotionally and spiritually crippled, as I had. I knew that the best way to make my amend to my kids was to see to it that they had the opportunity for professional help.

Where I live, that meant that I would have to report the abuse to the authorities and that charges would come as a result. Still, by now, I knew that for me these program principles were not just suggestions—they were musts. So on September 1, 1988, I turned myself in, and in the months to follow I was shocked and surprised at those beautiful addicts who came and offered their support to me as I approached sentencing yet again.

On December 21, 1988, I was sentenced to two and a half years in federal prison, but I feel relieved and revived. The burden I had carried all those long years is gone. Even as I sit here in my cell today, I am a free man for one of the first times in my life. Thank you, Creator, for N.A. And thank you, N.A., for giving me the tools to save myself and my children, who are now receiving treatment.

K.W., Saskatchewan



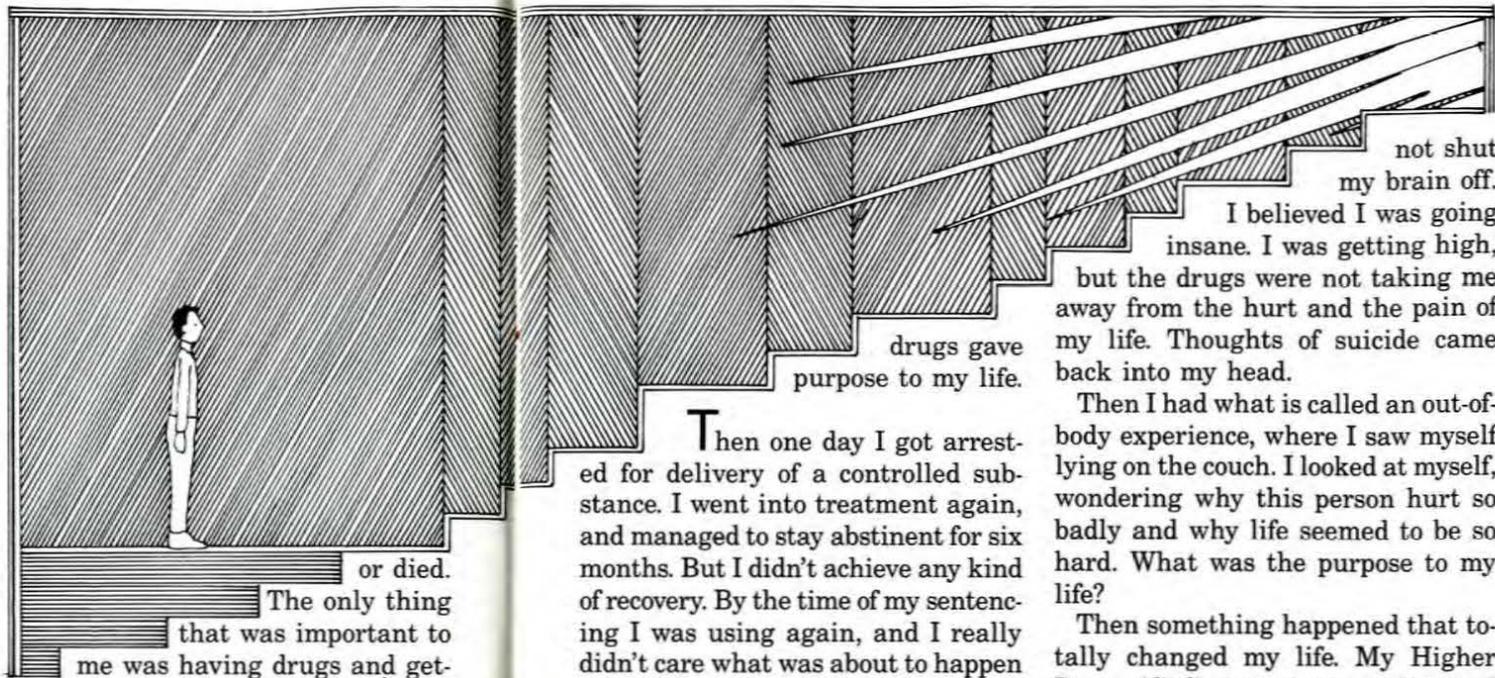
Journey to my higher power

I believe I was an addict before I ever used. I can remember walking down an alley by my house when I was eight years old. I was feeling very lonely and unacceptable, and trying to figure out why my life was so full of hurt and confusion.

I grew up in a family full of the disease of addiction. My dad, an alcoholic, was never there for the family. My mother used my sister and me as scapegoats for her anger about my dad's disease. It was not uncommon for her to whip, kick and slap us. There was also sexual abuse going on in our family. I learned real early in life that love was a hurting feeling.

At the age of twelve, I was full of hurt, anger and loneliness. All these feelings were building up inside of me. I found my release when I smoked my first joint. I learned that when I was high, I did not have to hurt or feel anything.

By the time I was sixteen, the disease of addiction had totally filled my soul: I was using anything I could afford. I started selling drugs to protect my supply. Without drugs, I did not know how to live. I can remember having feelings of not caring if I lived



or died. The only thing that was important to me was having drugs and getting more.

When I was seventeen, I did my first burglary. I got arrested and sent to treatment for the first time. I went there to stay out of jail. I used again the first day out. I was still lonely and felt unacceptable as a person. The only time I felt acceptable and needed was when I had drugs, because then people wanted to be with me.

At nineteen years old I got married, hoping this would fix me. It didn't. I used my wife like a possession, and I controlled her life. I would not allow my wife's love in, and I would not allow myself to love her. We were divorced after three years. Before the divorce I was having an affair. I used this affair like a drug to cover up all my hurt.

After my divorce I was really hurting, and I began using even more. The only way I could keep up with my habit was to sell more drugs. Dealing

drugs gave purpose to my life. Then one day I got arrested for delivery of a controlled substance. I went into treatment again, and managed to stay abstinent for six months. But I didn't achieve any kind of recovery. By the time of my sentencing I was using again, and I really didn't care what was about to happen to me. I ended up spending nine and a half months in prison: just another episode in the nightmare of my life.

While in prison I went through addiction treatment for the third time. After being released from prison I felt pretty good about myself, but there was something still missing.

After about three months I started using and dealing again. With dealing came the feelings of being needed again. As time went on, my will to live faded, and I really did not care. I wanted and needed to change my life, but the disease would not allow it. I was beginning to believe I would be better off dead than going through all that insanity.

On April 3, 1987, death was finally knocking at my door. The disease was not satisfied with just killing my self-esteem and self-confidence. I was sitting at home that night, and I could

not shut my brain off. I believed I was going insane. I was getting high, but the drugs were not taking me away from the hurt and the pain of my life. Thoughts of suicide came back into my head.

Then I had what is called an out-of-body experience, where I saw myself lying on the couch. I looked at myself, wondering why this person hurt so badly and why life seemed to be so hard. What was the purpose to my life?

Then something happened that totally changed my life. My Higher Power (God) came into my life and

***I began to see
God in a new
light as we read
the steps.***

kept me from killing myself. Four days later I was in treatment for the fourth time.

Two very important things happened to me in treatment. First I started to deal with the hurt and pain of my childhood and my whole life. And second, I was sent to an N.A. meeting held in the center. I just happened to know one of the addicts who showed up to share at the meeting. From her I received names and numbers of contacts in N.A. back home. I believe God set this up for me.

Then my counselor sent me out to my first regular N.A. meeting. The

topic that night was Step Three. I began to see God in a different light as we read through the steps. I had always thought that I had to go to church and be religious to have God in my life. I found out that it did not have to be that way. That night I started to open myself up to let a Higher Power of my understanding in. Since then I have been able to turn my life over to God and follow the path he wants me to follow.

I knew I had found something I had never felt before. I had a feeling of belonging and being accepted for the first time in my life. Since that meeting, my life has changed completely.

With only about four days left in treatment, I found out that I was going to be arrested again for delivery of a controlled substance. I believe my Higher Power gave me four days to digest what I was heading for, four days to find the strength to face the consequences of my own behavior. Had I been on the streets, it would have been tough to stay clean.

When I got out of treatment I spent two days in jail, doing a lot of thinking about my past and my future. I was scared. I asked God to help me find the strength to face this and let me have one year clean before my sentencing. Both of these came true. It took fourteen months for sentencing; I am now entering my twentieth month of recovery.

Now this is the *recovery* part of my story. It is based on Narcotics Anonymous and my Higher Power, and how they have affected the change in my life.

When I left treatment and went home, I found out there were no N.A.

meetings. The one that had been there had folded, so I re-opened it. At first I found myself sitting alone in the meeting and reading the Basic Text. I did not give up. Today we have two meetings a week. One is at the church and the other one is at the law enforcement center. We are now working on a third meeting at a treatment center.

When I am in service to N.A., I have a purpose and a reason to be here. I need to keep giving away what I have been given in order to keep it. I have found that when I stop doing service work, a lot of old negative feelings start coming back. I start feeling alone and start crawling back into my shell and closing everybody out of my life. I need to share.

I was sentenced on June 14, 1988, and am writing this from jail. God was definitely on my side in court that day. I received a five year prison sentence, with four and a half years suspended. I am serving six months in the county correctional center. I get released for work, and for N.A. meetings. They even let me out for ASC meetings. I am very grateful to my Higher Power for my sentencing.

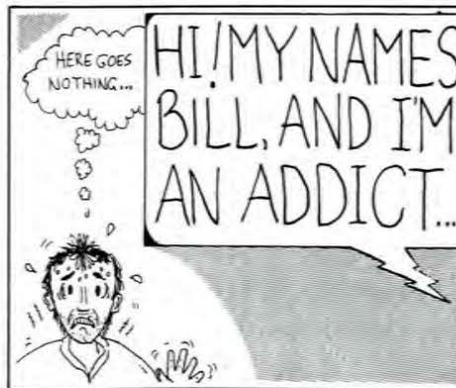
I am using this time in jail to learn about myself. In jail I am finding a peace within myself. They call it serenity.

Without N.A. and my Higher Power, I could not continue to recover. It scares me to think of where my life might have gone without N.A. The program of Narcotics Anonymous gives me strength and hope. This program has helped me deal with my past, my present and my future.

C.B., North Dakota

Home Group

Eddie Needs to Share



H&I work carries our message directly to suffering addicts, and it gives N.A. members an opportunity like no other to practice the Twelfth Step.

Hospitals and institutions

A tradition of service

In the early Sixties, N.A. was a tiny, struggling fellowship, composed of no more than four or five groups, all in the Los Angeles area. They were a tightly knit bunch, and when one of their members was sent back to prison shortly after getting clean, recovering addicts started going to visit him. "Everybody remained in contact and came to see me," Bob B. recalls. "I think all that contact while I was inside was what gave us the idea to start a meeting there. Maybe that was part of what I went to jail for, you know?"

And once they'd gotten a taste of H&I service, they just kept on going. "N.A. had a nucleus of people, and all the members of the fellowship at that time were actively involved in some kind of H&I work. I can recall some of the early members talking about how they used to pile into a few cars and spend the weekend doing H&I," Bob S. shared with us.

"On Saturday they would hit a couple of facilities on this side of the state. That night, they would drive over to another part of the state. And the next morning they'd visit two

or three more on their way home. That's how they carried the message—long before they had literature."

"If we can only do a little..."

Hospitals and institutions work was one of the first means by which members of Narcotics Anonymous tried to carry the recovery message to other addicts. "There were some cases," Bob S. told us, "where there were H&I committees before there was actually an area service committee."

But why H&I first? The young N.A. Fellowship had very limited resources—in many cases, no local service structure at all. They wanted to practice our Twelfth Step, and addicts were in need of what they had to offer. But in order to be effective, they had to be selective about the projects they chose for themselves. "And if we can only do a little bit to carry the message," Bob S. continued, "we can be sure that in jails and prisons and detoxes and treatments centers, we'll connect with people who need it."

Funding H&I

One of the means used early on to financially support H&I work, especially where N.A. general services had not yet been developed, was a special collection can placed at regular N.A. meetings. While the H&I can provided the funds necessary to purchase institutional literature, it also created some problems. There was often no way to account for the cash collected. And by giving H&I a source of operating funds separate from the mainstream of local services, it had the effect of setting H&I work apart from the normal patterns of accountability in N.A. service.

"There was an H&I person at the area level who collected the money," Vandy recalls about early H&I in her N.A. community. "But the can, as used in our area, was never accounted for. We just dumped the money from the can and handed it to XYZ, whoever

"They knew the war stories"

Ann: I had never done time. I'd gotten as far as the gates and then been sprung, but I'd never been inside. So this panel was one of the major all-time scary experiences of my life. I went in there with the idea that, somehow, I had to make them understand that I knew what it was like on the street. So I started telling them all my war stories.

Well, I look pretty good for a heroin addict who's been on the streets for a long time; I have all my teeth, I don't have any tattoos, and I learned real early about cleaning the needle, so my tracks aren't too bad. I was talking about how much dope I'd shot, and dealing, and burglary stories and all this nonsense.

There was this one tough looking woman, covered with tattoos, tracks everywhere, leaning up against the wall with her arms crossed, tapping her foot. Finally she just broke in and said, "If you were a junky for so long, where's your tracks?" And I was totally deflated.

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I stopped talking. My mouth fell open, and I felt like a little kid who'd been found out. I had no idea how I could convince her that I actually knew what I was talking about, so I just sort of picked up in a lame voice and changed the subject.

The next time I went into a prison, I was afraid to talk to them about what it was like. Instead, I talked about the denial and the progression of my disease, just enough for them to know I'd been out there a while. I talked about the feelings.

It was completely different. They responded; they acted like they knew what I was talking about. They were paying attention. When I'd been telling war stories, they'd been bored. They knew the war stories, it was no big deal.

But when I started talking about feelings, they either looked at me and nodded their heads, or else they got real uncomfortable, the ones who weren't ready to cop to being addicts yet. I only had to make that mistake once. And it got so that I wasn't so afraid to go in anymore.

was doing it. We didn't count it; it was H&I money. And XYZ was supposed to buy the literature and do whatever else it was that he did, although he wasn't accountable to anyone; it was H&I money."

Kicking the can

Eventually, the controversy surrounding the H&I can became so widespread that the World Service Conference H&I Committee took action. Their discussions ended in 1987 with a conference recommendation that local H&I subcommittees be funded in the same way as all other local subcommittees were funded: by the area service committee itself.

And with the change in H&I funding came other changes as well. "When H&I became financially responsible to the area service committee, the area started to have a way to control and monitor H&I activities," Vandy continued. "Where before we just had an H&I guy, now we have a real subcommittee. There are workshops to explain to people what H&I work is. The work is done in a more organized fashion, and it's done more responsibly."

Most of those with whom we spoke told us they felt the changes had helped make H&I more effective. The figures seem to bear that out. A 1985 report tallied 550 American correctional or treatment facilities with H&I panels; in 1989, that figure is closer to three thousand.

Getting involved

"I vaguely remember hearing about H&I when I was introduced to the program back in 1981," Freddie recalls, "but I had no concept of what it was all about. My sponsor, though, was involved in H&I. He thought it was kind of a neat way to be of service, so I started going into treatment facilities, too. When I went on my first panel into an institution... it's like I kind of fell in love, basically, 'cause I'd been in them places, and I'd gotten clean, and it was such a good way for

me to give it back."

So let's say you're interested by now—you want to "give it back," too. But you don't know anything much about H&I. Many local H&I subcommittees offer orientation programs of one sort or another for N.A. members new to this field of service.

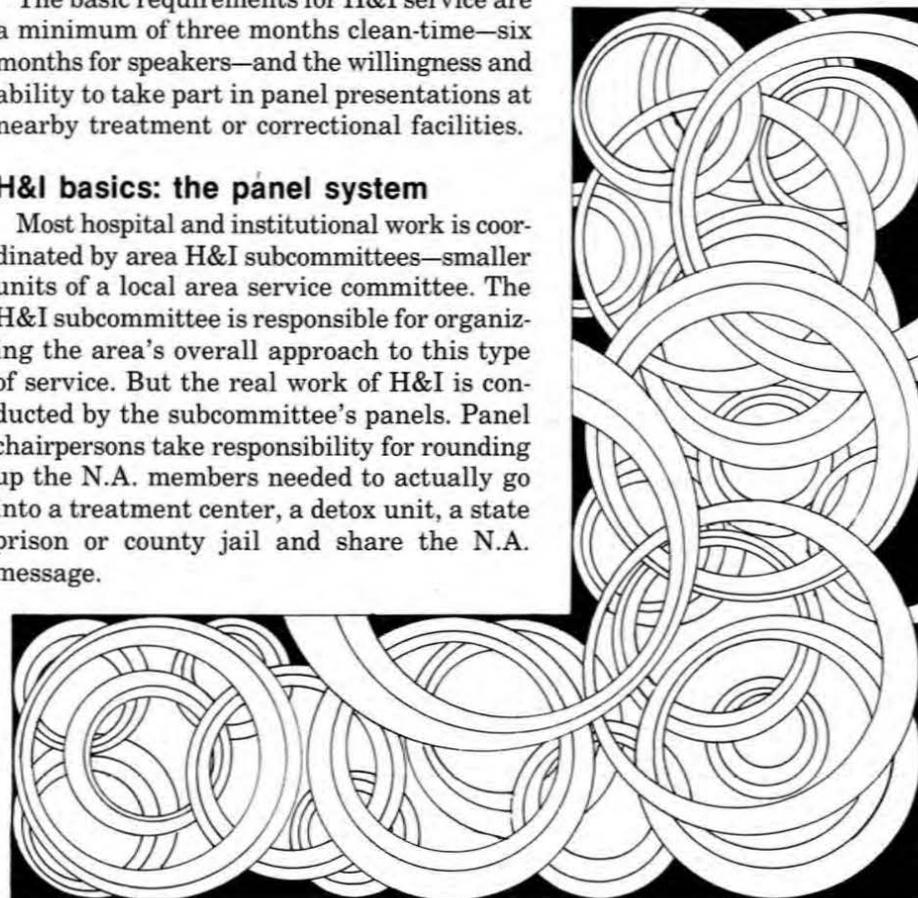
"H&I orientation is a period that allows N.A. members to become familiar with H&I work," a new H&I handbook up for approval at this year's World Service Conference explains, "so they aren't rushed into it without any preparation... Many people are quite apprehensive about getting into H&I for a variety of reasons. Don't be put off; everyone has something to offer."

The basic requirements for H&I service are a minimum of three months clean-time—six months for speakers—and the willingness and ability to take part in panel presentations at nearby treatment or correctional facilities.

H&I basics: the panel system

Most hospital and institutional work is coordinated by area H&I subcommittees—smaller units of a local area service committee. The H&I subcommittee is responsible for organizing the area's overall approach to this type of service. But the real work of H&I is conducted by the subcommittee's panels. Panel chairpersons take responsibility for rounding up the N.A. members needed to actually go into a treatment center, a detox unit, a state prison or county jail and share the N.A. message.

'Many people are apprehensive about H&I. Don't be put off; everyone has something to offer.'



Hopelessness— and hope

Vandy: I didn't like going to H&I meetings. I didn't like remembering. I didn't like the feelings those meetings brought up, and when I went to the treatment centers the feelings would be very strong—the feelings of hopelessness, the feelings of, "This is my eleventh treatment center." I heard and felt a lot of that, and I personally had a lot of trouble handling that because it was too close to me.

But I counteracted that with the message of hope: "When you get out, you can stay clean. We've got this Twelve Step program that I'm in, and life as I know it would not be possible today without it."

A variety of formats for the panel's presentation may be used—speaker, question-and-answer, discussion, literature studies, or step studies, to name the most common ones. Some formats are designed especially for panels held in short-term treatment centers and county jails, where N.A. is being presented to addicts who will shortly be able to attend regular meetings on their own. Other formats are more appropriate for panels held in prisons or long-term therapeutic communities, where those attending will have to develop their personal programs "behind the walls."

All panels, however, have one thing in common. Their purpose is "to carry the N.A. message of recovery to addicts who do not have full access to regular Narcotics Anonymous meetings," according to the proposed new H&I handbook. "H&I meetings or presentations, except for those in longer term facilities, are intended to simply introduce those attending to some of the basics of the N.A. program."

H&I volunteers: a changing image

We talked with a number of people involved in H&I work. One thing some of them spoke of was their irritation with the stereotype many N.A. members still have of the "H&I kind of guy": a tough male ex-con taking a panel into a prison.

While that stereotype may have been appropriate five years ago, they told us, things have changed in H&I. For one, more and more H&I work is focusing on carrying the N.A. message to treatment center clients. The increased attention H&I is giving this kind of service is accentuated in the proposed new H&I handbook, with an entire section given over to describing panels in treatment centers.

Another misconception many N.A. members seem to have about H&I work is that, if

they've not been in a treatment center or a jail, they don't have anything to share. "And that's just not true," Doris, active in a panel at an adolescent treatment unit, told us. "You share your recovery. You need to share honestly, at gut-level, not focusing on the insanity, but on the feelings. We all relate to that. You just need to be honest. That's what gets across."

A variety of backgrounds among those attending a panel actually seems to communicate our message better, another person told us. "At first I wanted to live up to some kind of image and bring the ex-cons in," Freddie told us, talking about a prison panel he chaired a while back. "That worked okay for a while. But the guys that came in for the panel from the institution, they kind of grew up with us; they wanted something more. So I started bringing other people. Those guys didn't care whether people who shared had never been in prison, as long as they were addicts—that's what was important."

Men with men, women with women

The N.A. pamphlet on sponsorship suggests that men sponsor men and women sponsor women. The H&I guidelines make the same suggestion—for the same reasons—regarding H&I panel participation. We've even been told that problems resulting from mixed panels held in some single-gender institutions have ended in H&I losing the opportunity to continue their work in those facilities.

So what does the chairperson of a panel held in a men's facility say to a woman who wants to take part in that panel? One suggestion might be that the woman take part in a panel at a women's facility, which in some areas are sorely in need of support. Other local H&I panels might make presentations in mixed facilities, and the woman could of course lend her aid to those.

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Seeing yourself in H&I

Freddie: When I go into an institution, it's great to be able to look out over an audience and know that I am just like them, and they are just like me. And knowing all those masks I wore and all the stuff that I put up when I was still using—when they hear me dropping all that stuff and talking about the way I feel, I can see it in their eyes: they feel that way too, but they're still in that place where they can't talk about it, where it's real touchy.

I've had other members tell me that since they've been in H&I work—whether they've been in prison or not—that just to be able to reach out to somebody living under those circumstances by carrying the message of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous through H&I work has been very rewarding to them. I know a lot of members who do H&I work in prisons, and the only time they've ever set foot inside a prison has been through doing H&I work.

Too much enthusiasm not usually the problem

"At one time there weren't four women in the whole city who were cleared to go into prisons, period," said Ann, an active participant in panels at women's correctional units in her area. "We had this real limited pool of women who could take part in these panels, and we were getting pretty worn out. We finally got a couple of more women cleared, but we've never had enough."

And the need is not only in women's jails. "When I first got involved in H&I work in our area," Freddie recalls, "it seems like there was a lot of support. It's not that way anymore, and it's not just with H&I. It seems to be that support for all the subcommittees is dropping off."

What does it take for a local H&I subcommittee to get N.A. members involved? Perhaps a better question is one we addressed earlier: Why H&I? Is the amount of time and energy and money that goes into organizing teams of people, dealing with institutional authorities, obtaining and distributing literature, all of the things involved in coordinating H&I work—is it worth it?

There are, of course, the kinds of results we can measure in numbers. "Our N.A. community gets most of its members through hospitals," Vandy told us. "Most of them were first exposed to us through a meeting held while they were in treatment." But there are other results of H&I work that can't be measured so easily.

"It puts me in touch"

"Various people get different things out of it," Bob S. explained, "but they all get something out of it. When I go into a detox unit, it puts me in touch with the reality that the disease is alive and well and killing people. And when I go to a prison, those bars are proof of where addiction takes people. That's part of the reason I do H&I work. But the biggest

reason I do it is to carry the message to those who need it, and who wouldn't get it unless we took it in to them. I do it because that's what was done for me. I do it to give it back."

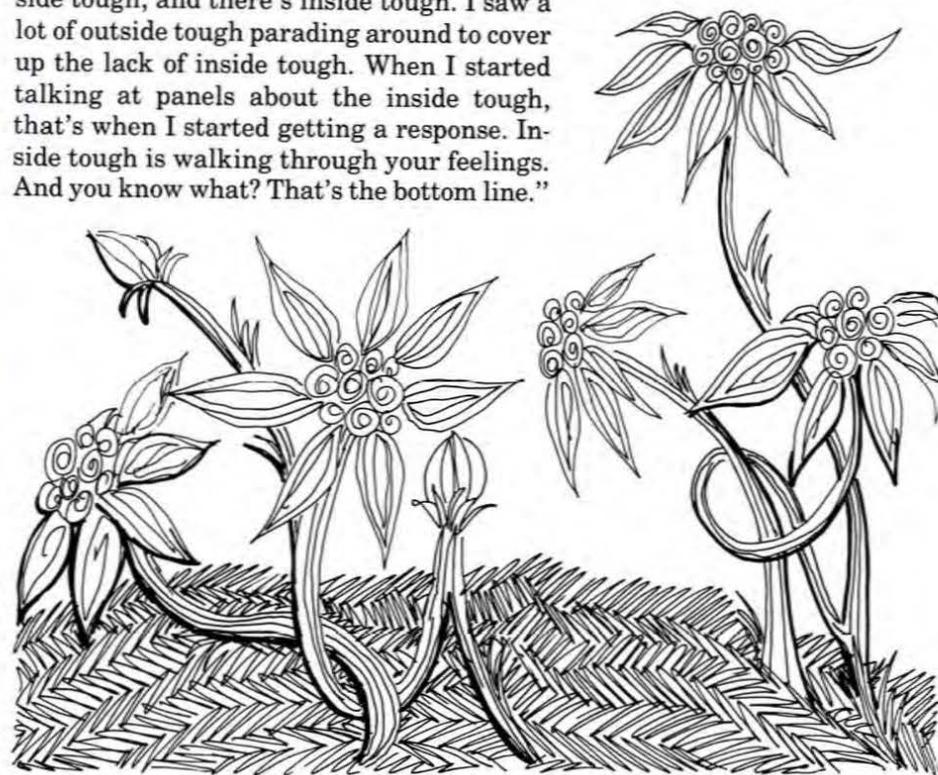
"Inside tough"

"H&I work has taught me a great deal about my character defects," Ann told us, "particularly those of intolerance and fear. Not just the simple fear of being locked in behind bars, but my fear of others."

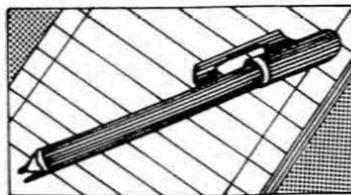
"When I first got clean, I thought I was an exceptionally tolerant and unbiased person," Ann continued, "and perhaps, in comparison to some other people, I am. But I learned a lot about my preconceptions of what people in the joint are like. It stripped away some of the glamor I'd attached to that, the idea that somehow those people are tougher."

"There are two kinds of tough: there's outside tough, and there's inside tough. I saw a lot of outside tough parading around to cover up the lack of inside tough. When I started talking at panels about the inside tough, that's when I started getting a response. Inside tough is walking through your feelings. And you know what? That's the bottom line."

'The reason I do H&I work is to carry the message to those who need it, and who wouldn't get it unless we took it in to them.'



Viewpoint



Special interests, Common needs

I feel our traditions are being compromised by special interest groups. I interpret the First Tradition to say that what is good for the common welfare of N.A. should be good enough for me. I must place my own personal preferences second to the principles of the N.A. program.

My bond with other addicts is the understanding that we all suffer from the disease of addiction, whether we be white, black, man, woman, gay, straight, old, or young. The disease doesn't discriminate. Addicts come from all walks of life. Our common welfare should never be threatened by those who wish to believe that they are *personally* affected differently by the same disease.

Any addict who says he or she is a member of this fellowship has the undeniable right to attend any meeting

of Narcotics Anonymous. That principle of membership cannot and should not be compromised by any group because of their own personal differences. We may disagree without being disagreeable. Principles do not discriminate, nor should any group.

I always hear addicts who attend special interest groups bring out a double-edged sword when a discussion begins. "The group is autonomous!" they exclaim, citing the Fourth Tradition. Yes, it is autonomous, but the tradition goes on to say that N.A. as a whole must not be affected. Our very First Tradition has been compromised already. Our Third Tradition is being negotiated when a member wants to go to a special interest group and is met at the door by someone telling them that they're not special. I find it hard to believe that these groups think that they aren't affecting this fellowship!

The Fifth Tradition is the simplest one for me to understand. Our groups carry the message to addicts—any addict seeking recovery. There are some people who believe that there is a secondary purpose, and a third purpose. Maybe, but that tradition comes after Traditions One through Four. The spirit of anonymity is broken when we carry the message only to those who are special.

How can N.A. say that we have no

opinion on outside issues when we have implied endorsements of special interest groups? We are in direct conflict with ourselves when we recognize any N.A. group other than *addicts* seeking recovery.

Anonymity is always in conflict when we place personalities in front of principles. Our foundation should never be negotiated or compromised. Let's just keep things simple and have just N.A. groups for addicts seeking recovery.

R.U., Pennsylvania

The traditions and special interest meetings

I would like to know if my fears, questions, and concerns are shared by other members of the fellowship concerning special interest groups. I have read letters about "N.A. purists," the use of "N.A. language," which prayers we should or should not use in our meetings, and how these all affect our unity. To me, the most ominous threats to our unity are interests outside of Narcotics Anonymous.

It's hard to believe these groups think they are not affecting N.A.!

It was reported at our last regional service conference that at the world service quarterly in Dallas, some thirty to forty different types of special interest meetings were discussed. Special interest meetings deal with the focus on the part of addicts who

believe the commonality of identity enhances their recovery.

My questions and concerns stem from what I feel are conflicts with many of our traditions, beginning with the very first one: "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity." Is this not going to separate some of our fellowship to attending only special interest meetings? Would I not be allowed to attend, share in, or be made to feel welcome in any and all N.A. meetings? Is our common welfare being jeopardized for special interests? And what of unity; are we dividing our fellowship into special little groups?

"In Narcotics Anonymous," the Basic Text says, "we find that what is best for the group is usually good for us. Our personal experiences while using differed from one another. As a group, however, we have found many common themes in our addiction."

Tradition Three: "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using." Not only would special interest groups add a requirement for membership, but non-addicts may come to share, associate, and relate to an interest other than freedom from addiction.

"Desire is our only requirement," says the Basic Text. "Addiction does not discriminate. This tradition is to ensure 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. With '... a desire to stop using' as the only requirement for membership, one addict is never superior to another."

Tradition Four: "Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or N.A. as a whole." Could addicts or non-addicts form an opinion of N.A. because of some group's interest other than recovery from addiction?

"Like group conscience," reads the Basic Text, "autonomy can be a two-edged sword. Group autonomy has

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women's table.***

been used to justify violation of the traditions. If a contradiction exists, we have slipped away from our principles."

Tradition Five: "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers."

"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 ensure 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."

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."

Could not mentioning a special interest along with a Narcotics Anonymous meeting be seen as an endorsement? The Basic Text says, "Endorsements can be either direct or implied... An implied endorsement is one that is not specifically stated."

Tradition Ten: "Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the N.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy." Again, are not some special interests controversial? Would we not be supporting an issue outside N.A. by including it in connection with a Narcotics Anonymous meeting? "For our own survival," says the Basic Text, "we have no opinion on outside issues."

Tradition Eleven: "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films."

Our Basic Text tells us to be "careful about advertisements, circulars and any literature that may reach the public's hands." Special interest meetings are listed in our meeting directories; could this be seen as promoting an outside interest?

"Our attraction is that we are successes in our own right. As groups, we offer recovery. We have found that the success of our program speaks for itself; this is our promotion."

Tradition Twelve: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." Are not special interests part of our per-

sonalities? "Throughout our traditions we speak in terms of *we* and *our* rather than *me* and *mine*. By working together for our common welfare, we achieve the true spirit of anonymity."

My main concern is for "our common welfare," because my "personal recovery depends on N.A. unity."

Anonymous

Women's tables

Two years ago, when our home group started, it did not have a women's table in the format. As the meeting grew, a women's table began to form. It was not planned; it grew out of a need. Most members of our group thought it was good and didn't give it any thought.

A few weeks back, some concerned N.A. members asked me (I'm the secretary and also a man) if I thought that the women's table had gotten out of hand. It had grown from two to three women to twenty, twenty-five women and two tables. I told them that I didn't think so, but if they felt that strongly to go sit with them. They did, which brought about some controversy.

The issues that were discussed between the two sides were segregation, tradition breaking, disunity, newcomers, etc. Emotions began to escalate. As trusted servants of our group we weren't sure what to do, but we knew it had to be dealt with. So we asked all interested members to attend our monthly business meeting.

At our business meeting, we invited the area chair to conduct the meeting. (We felt we were too one-sided to conduct it fairly.) We allowed everybody to speak about how they felt.

The meeting took an hour and a half, and about twenty-five people showed up. For me it was a very spiritual and rewarding experience. The meeting ran smoothly and was conducted in a fair but firm manner. The vote was to keep the women's table intact.

But the reason I am writing to the N.A. Way is that, although the issue is resolved at our particular meeting, I don't think it settles the issue in our area—maybe not even at our meeting. The members in opposition feel too strongly to let it lie.

I don't know what's right or not right about a women's table or what's best for N.A. as a whole. So I would like to hear from other members on this. Your thoughts, please, and feelings about it, pro or con, so we can all grow with it.

S.C., Michigan

Recovery or therapy?

In some meetings today, one can only sit and wonder, "Am I in group therapy? I thought I came for an N.A. meeting?"

When I first came to N.A. I was told that a meeting was a place for recovery, not a social gathering and

certainly not group therapy. Our Basic Text tells us that in order for a group to maintain an atmosphere of recovery, it must adhere to the Twelve Traditions. Lately I have noticed (specifically) two traditions that have been overlooked at certain meeting places: the first and the twelfth.

The First Tradition tells us, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity." When I share about personalities, certain drugs, certain instances or occurrences, then I am stressing the differences between us. Not everyone has gone through the

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same specific situations in life, but we all have felt certain emotions.

This program offers me many tools for recovery in addition to meetings. One is a sponsor, who I believe my Higher Power works through. I was taught that I could bring personal problems and personal joys individually to the people who are really working this program, and thus gain the knowledge of how to deal with my feelings.

N.A. has no professionals or opinions on outside issues; thus we are not counselors, sociologists, etc. We are addicts sharing experience, strength and hope.

The Twelfth Tradition says,

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." Through service and living the Twelve Steps, I can look beyond the personalities of the members who are sharing and find the principles in what is said.

But what about the newcomers? Remember them? When I first came to N.A., the more differences I could find in the meetings, the more I could rationalize about why I should not be there. Focusing on personalities can create differences; principles are universal.

I have tried to bring this to the attention of the fellowship for the sake of the newcomer and of my own personal recovery. As a member of N.A. it is my responsibility to insure that we maintain an atmosphere of recovery, so when that one addict is ready to begin the process of surrender, he has a place to recover.

Individually, I must make sure that I bring up recovery-related topics, and only share my experience, strength and hope. But primarily it is the group's responsibility to maintain an atmosphere of recovery.

It says in our literature that it is the GSR's who are supposed to make sure that the traditions are followed. The literature also says that it is the chairperson's responsibility to maintain an atmosphere of recovery within the actual meeting. To me, this means that if someone brings up a personal problem as a topic, then the chairperson should find a spiritual one for the group to share on.

As addicts we want things to come easy; but an atmosphere of recovery

does not always come easy. Do we have the willingness to protect our meetings from ourselves?

R.R., Ohio

Children at meetings

More and more I am attending or hearing about "closed" meetings that violate our Fifth Tradition by throwing out addicts who come to those meetings with children. I don't think that's ever justified. That tradition *doesn't* say, "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers (providing they have a baby-sitter or are presently childless)."

I spent the first six years of my recovery childless. Although there weren't as many children at meetings then, they were here; and, yes, some were disruptive. But never in that time did I consider it my right or any other member's right to decide which addict was to stay and which was to go. Nor did I ever hear of anyone being thrown out of any meeting.

Many of the people who come to meetings with their children are newcomers. Many haven't any trustworthy person to leave their children with. Is the newcomer the most important person at our meetings? Does

this exclude newcomers without baby-sitters?

Yes, there are some children who are disruptive in meetings. There are many addicts who are disruptive at meetings, too.

If a meeting feels that children would be disruptive or inappropriate at their meeting, adequate, responsible child care needs to be provided, not a policy of exclusion.

Until recently, my husband and I brought our three year old son to both closed and open meetings when necessary. At this point, however, we don't dare to, as neither he nor I would allow anyone to throw us out of any meeting. The scene that this resistance might cause is something we choose to spare our child.

***Many people
who came
to meetings
with their
children were
newcomers.***

When our son "plays meeting," he always remembers that we talk about God. It's nice to know someone gets the spiritual message of N.A.

M.L., California

It's the message that counts

Many articles and letters have appeared in the *N.A. Way* over the past few months on the topic of "N.A. language." I appreciate the *N.A. Way's* desire to be a forum for thoughtful discussions of concerns in the fellowship. However, I'm getting tired of this discussion.

The latest letter regarding N.A. language (Viewpoint, January 1989) claimed that the use of specific words is an important determinant of recovery. Without the words of the writer's preference, the letter implies, a message of recovery cannot be a strong one. This focus on form rather than substance strikes me as a strange twist on the concept of recovery.

I view recovery as living drug-free and practicing spiritual principles like honesty, open-mindedness and willingness. Is learning a mysterious new language called "N.A.-ese," recovery? I don't think so. I look at how people "walk the walk," not how they "talk the talk." To me, the obsession about using the "correct" words has

little to do with recovery and a lot to do with insecurity.

In N.A., the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. You are a member of N.A. when you say you are. No seal of approval, application procedure, or terminology exam is required. I am dismayed at the thought that any individual would be denied the opportunity to share at an N.A. meeting because of his or her choice of words.

Since the beginning of my recovery, I have been a consistent and dedicated member of N.A. I am just as much an integral part of our fellowship as anyone else, no matter what words I use. Our fellowship's diversity makes us richer with experience and wisdom. We've got better things to do than play word games.

It is not helpful to have to deal with an artificial "language barrier" in N.A. I want to share at meetings in an environment of freedom and love. That warmth doesn't come through as easily when someone is scrutinizing my vocabulary.

Our fellowship is international. Drug addicts all over the world are recovering in N.A. Bickering amongst the English-speaking members simply causes us embarrassment and slows our growth. We have enough work to do bridging *real* language barriers.

Recovery is a way of life, not a collection of words. Quality recovery comes through living, not through verbiage. Recovery is recovery, whether it's English, Japanese, French, clean, sober, or E-I-E-I-O.

J.R., *New Jersey*

From the editor



Is the N.A. Way conference-approved?

This question has been the one most often asked as we have moved ahead with any efforts to increase this magazine's circulation. Misunderstandings on this point have been our single greatest stumbling block.

The conference-approval process for N.A. literature currently takes a minimum of about three years from the writing of an original draft of a piece to the acceptance of a final draft by the World Service Conference. The final product is the accepted written word of N.A. on the subjects addressed.

It is obvious that such a process cannot be applied to a monthly magazine. The questions faced by the conference in light of that were, can we have a monthly magazine we can stand by? And if so, what will it mean to stand by it? Can it be read at meetings? Can it be sold or displayed at meetings?

In an effort to address those questions, the conference has approved an editorial process for the *N.A. Way*. In the nature of a monthly magazine, that doesn't mean everything printed is the approved word of N.A. on the subject, but editorial controls were put in place to insure that our fundamental principles are not compromised by anything published.

So the *N.A. Way* is a *conference-sanctioned publication*. While it is not appropriate to read aloud from the *N.A. Way* during meetings—that is

reserved for our conference-approved literature—it is perfectly appropriate to display it, make announcements about it, sell it, or generally talk about it at meetings.

This magazine is an important part of the overall written presentation of the N.A. message. Our fellowship goes to great lengths and expense every month to ensure that. There is direct involvement from the World Service Conference, World Service Office staff and the Board of Trustees in the editing of *every single* article and letter we print.

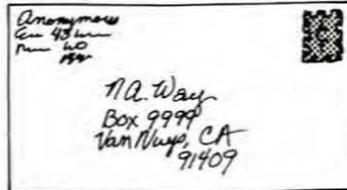
So please help us get past the confusion over the magazine's status. Join us in exploring ways to get this magazine into more hospitals, jails, detox and treatment centers—anywhere addicts may find it, and in finding it, find N.A.

In spite of the number of inquiries we've received regarding the magazine's status, we added more new paid subscribers during March than any other single month in our history. During this time of rapid growth, we're asking you to be part of the consciousness raising about this magazine. Share about what you've read here. Show your copy around. Suggest that your group subscribe. Let's continue to bring the *N.A. Way* out of the shadows and let it reflect the light of N.A. recovery to the greatest possible number of addicts in need.

R.H., *Editor*

N.A. Way • 35

From our readers



What a bargain!

I came to N.A. with almost a year of abstinence, not of recovery. I was coming out of prison, a mind full of disease and old ways. I was barely in the door, and my diseased thinking had me half way out again.

I had no Twelve Steps, no Twelve Traditions, no support group, no sponsor. Walking into my first N.A. meeting was uncomfortable. My head (which is not a safe place to be) would make bargains. It used to say, "If this program doesn't have the fast life I'm used to, I'm gone." In the meetings it continued to make bargains while I took everyone's inventory.

The attraction of the program was why I continued to come back. I wanted what these dope fiends had. I started going to the functions and having a good time, meeting people on the program who wanted to enjoy life without using. The hugs and love I received were just what I needed. I thought I knew what having fun was while I was using—but this N.A. was the place where I learned to live and enjoy life.

Today I have a sponsor who guides me in working the N.A. program on a daily basis. I am able to be a good mother and friend. But most of all I have a supportive group of friends who are there whenever and wherever I need them. I'm coming up on

another birthday. It's four this year. Thank you, N.A. The bargain I made was more than I ever dreamed it could be.

D.R., California

A non-addict's view

I would like to thank N.A. from a non-addict's point of view. My brother is an addict. During his active addiction, I had to let go of him. It hurt, because I felt helpless, useless, tied up. I wanted to help but didn't know how.

I had made up my mind that he was not one of our family, that something had gone wrong. To me, he was supposed to be smarter than that. He's always had the things that he wanted and needed in life, why him? I needed answers, but at the same time did not have anything to do with him while I was looking. I soon found out that he was the only one who could answer my questions. That meant I had to talk to him, which I didn't think I could do at the time.

Finally, he called our father. Dad knew he was on drugs, but waited until my brother was ready to acknowledge that he was an addict before he offered any type of help to him. They talked for hours, and he wanted to talk to me too, but I was "too busy." I wasn't ready to accept him yet.

Then one day I happened to learn about N.A. I listened to people tell their stories. I had heard stories about being an addict before, and I had known other addicts, but they weren't interested in helping themselves or stopping the problem. I began to read the literature of Narcotics Anonymous, to ask questions. I began to understand a lot of things more clearly. I began to see that my brother had been asking for help.

He joined the program some months ago, and is working the steps and becoming more involved with other members of the program. He is learning about himself through his Higher Power and the steps of Narcotics Anonymous. We are a family again.

C.M., California

Thanks from within

Listen here. I want to thank you people for sharing the article "Staying Clean on the Inside" which you printed in your December issue. I am currently incarcerated in a prison that does not have N.A. meetings, or any other such programs. The *N.A. Way* magazine, which I receive monthly through the mail, makes up for my lack of fellowship. I am able to pick up a lot of experience, strength and hope through its articles.

That article told my story. I really know how the author felt when he was sitting in that cell, feeling sick and tired of being sick and tired. Personally, I was lucky enough to have known of the N.A. program. When I hit my final bottom, I knew a member of it who had been clean for a number of years and was willing to help me.

I say my "final" bottom because I hit so many of them in my twenty year using history. For years I stubbornly fought acceptance of my disease (and everything else for that matter). I was simply unable to accept. But when your body, mind and spirit lay down on you all at the same time, death or total surrender are all that's left.

As with the guy in the article I have lived two of the other three alternatives our illness has to offer: jails and institutions. My God (unbeknownst to me at the time) saw fit not to let me experience the third.

My addiction has caused me much pain and misery. I always wanted something outside of myself to stop the pain. It wasn't until I became painfully willing to honestly work the steps, as they are suggested, and develop spiritual principles in my daily life, that I discovered any hope. It's true when they say this recovery stuff is an inside job.

For the last year I have been working the steps daily, to the best of my ability, and trying to live by some spiritual principles. I'm no saint, but for the first time I sense some change in my life. Now, through the grace of my God, the help of my sponsor and others, I have ten and a half months clean. I am going to be released soon. I have a lot to be grateful for. Most important is the light of hope this program has put into my life. When I hear stories like "Staying Clean in the Inside," I realize there truly is an alternative, and that I am capable of working it. Thank you for the experience, strength and hope.

M.T., California

Comin' up



LET US KNOW! We'll be happy to announce your upcoming events. Just let us know at least three months in advance. Include dates, event name and location, N.A. office or phonenumber, and a post office box. (Sorry, but we can't print personal phone numbers or addresses.)

The **N.A. Way**
MAGAZINE
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ALABAMA: May 25-28, 1989; 2nd Alabama/NW Florida Regional Convention; Wynfrey Hotel, Birmingham; rsvn.s (800) 522-5282; Convention Committee, P.O. Box 877, Millbrook, AL 36054

ALASKA: May 5-7, 1989; 5th Alaska Regional Convention; Hilton Hotel, Anchorage; phonenumber (907) 277-5483; ARC-5, P.O. Box 14-0733, Anchorage, AK 99514

ALBERTA: Nov. 3-5, 1989; 3rd Alsask Regional Convention; Polish Veterans Hall, 9203 144th Ave., Edmonton

ARIZONA: May 26-28, 1989; 3rd Arizona Regional Convention; Holiday Inn Broadway, Tucson, (602) 624-8711; Arizona RSC, P.O. Box 26404, Tempe, AZ 85222

AUSTRALIA: Sep. 29-Oct. 1, 1989; Sydney Combined Areas Convention; Hurstville Entertainment Centre, McMahon Street, Hurstville, Sydney; Fellowship Service Office (Surrey Hills, NSW) tel. 61-2-211-2445; CAC-89, P.O. Box 286, Double Bay 2028, NSW, Australia

BRITISH COLUMBIA: Jul. 14-16, 1989; Campout; Felker Lake Legion Campsite, Williams Lake; Williams Lake Group, Site 8, Comp 17, RR 4, Williams Lake, BC V2G 4M8

CALIFORNIA: Jun. 16-18, 1989; 5th San Diego-Imperial Regional Convention; Holiday Inn at the Embarcadero, (619) 232-3861; regional office (619) 584-1007; SDIRC-5, 2260 El Cajon Blvd., P.O. Box 184, San Diego, CA 92104

2) Jun. 17, 1989; 3rd San Francisco Area Unity Day; Mission High School, 17th and Dolores, SF; phonenumber (415) 621-8600; San Francisco ASC, P.O. Box 6150, San Francisco, CA 94101

COLORADO: Jul. 28-30, 1989; 2nd Annual "Standing on Higher Ground" Weekend; Telluride, central rsvn.s (800) 525-3455; regional office (303) 320-8323; Telluride Retreat, P.O. Box 2124, Telluride, CO 81435

CONNECTICUT: Jun. 2-4, 1989; 3rd Family Campout; Lone Oaks Campgrounds, E. Canaan; phonenumber (203) 266-0563; Greater Waterbury ASC, P.O. Box 1075, Woodbury, CT 06798

FLORIDA: Jun. 30-Jul. 3, 1989; 8th Florida Regional Convention; Omni Jacksonville Hotel, 245 Water Street, Jacksonville FL 32202; rsvn.s (904) 355-6664; RSO (305) 563-4262; phonenumber (904) 723-5683; Florida RSO, 1110 NE 34th Court, Oakland Park, FL 33334

2) Aug. 31-Sep. 3, 1989; 19th World Convention; Stouffer's Orlando Resort

GERMANY: May 12-14, 1989; 6th German Regional Convention; Emil von Behring Schule, Sybellstrasse 6, Marburg, Hessen, FDR; accommodations tel. Marburg 06421-41107, 06421-65644; N.A. Convention Committee, Postfach 1272, 6073 Egelsbach, Fed. Rep. of Germany

HAWAII: May 26-29, 1989; 3rd Big Island Gathering; Mauna Kea State Park, Hilo; phonenumber (808) 969-6644; Big Island Gathering, P.O. Box 10842, Hilo, HI 96721

IDAHO: Aug. 4-6, 1989; 4th Oregon / Southern Idaho Convention; Red Lion Riverside Motel, Boise; rsvn.s (208) 343-1871; phonenumber (208) 343-0188; OSIC-4, P.O. Box 1234, Boise, ID 83701

ILLINOIS: Jun. 23-25, 1989; 5th Little Egypt Area Campout; Carlyle Lake, Carlyle; phonenumber (618) 548-3547; Little Egypt ASC, P.O. Box 1062, Salem, IL 62881

2) Jul. 28-30, 1989; 5th Mid-Coast Convention; Hyatt Deerfield, 1750 Lake Cook Rd., Deerfield IL 60015; Chicago Service Office (312) 848-2211 or 848-4884; MCC-5, P.O. Box 633, Zion, IL 60099

IOWA: Jun. 30-Jul. 2, 1989; 6th Iowa Regional Convention; Stouffer Five Seasons Hotel, 350 1st Ave. NE, Cedar Rapids IA 52401, rsvn.s (800) HOTELS-1; phonenumber (319) 398-9100; IRC-6, P.O. Box 2062, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406

KANSAS: Aug. 11-13, 1989; N.A. Campout; Thunderbird Marina, Rolling Hills area, Milford Lake, Junction City

LOUISIANA: May 26-28, 1989; 7th Louisiana Purchase Regional Convention; Landmark Hotel, 2601 Severn Ave., Metairie LA 70002, (800) 535-8840; LPRCNA-7, P.O. Box 750237, New Orleans, LA 70175-0237

MAINE: Sep. 8-10, 1989; 6th Southern Maine Area Convention; Notre Dame Spiritual Center, Alfred; phonenumber (207) 761-6695; Southern Maine ASC, P.O. Box 5309, Portland, ME 04101

MICHIGAN: Jul. 1-4, 1989; 5th Michigan Regional Convention; Clarion Hotel, 6820 S. Cedar, Lansing MI 48911; rsvn.s (517) 694-8123; phonenumber (517) 483-9101; MRC-5, P.O. Box 4818, E. Lansing, MI 48826

MISSOURI: Jun. 9-11, 1989; 4th Show Me Regional Convention; Hilton Inn of the Ozarks, 3050 N. Kentwood Ave., Springfield; phonenumber (417) 866-7392; Springfield ASC, P.O. Box 3902-GSS, Springfield, MO 65808

NEBRASKA: May 26-29, 1989; 9th Run for Fun; Alexandria Lakes State Recreation Area, Alexandria

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

NEW JERSEY: May 19-21, 1989; 4th New Jersey Regional Convention; Vista Hotel, Newark International Airport; rsvn.s (201) 351-3900; phonenumber—out of state (201) 462-9199, in New Jersey ONLY (800) 992-0401; NJRC-4, P.O. Box 22091, Newark, NJ 07101

2) Jul. 21-23, 1989; 2nd Central Jersey Area Scavenger Hunt; home base at Bradley Beach Municipal Bldg., Main Street between McCabe and Lorraine Ave.s; phonenumber (201) 462-9199

3) Jul. 28-30, 1989; Quad State Unity Convention; Parsippany Hilton, 1 Hilton Court, Parsippany-Troy Hills NJ 07054, (800) HILTONS; Bergen County ASC, P.O. Box 104, Northvale, NJ 07647-0104

NEW YORK: Jun. 16-18, 1989; 3rd Annual Manhattan Area Convention; convention messages (212) 995-0763; Unity '89, c/o Community Center, 208 W. 13th St., New York, NY 10011

2) Jun. 23-25, 1989; 10th East Coast Convention; University of Buffalo, Amherst Campus; phonenumber (716) 878-2316; ECCNA-10, P.O. Box 141, Buffalo, NY 14216-0141

3) Jul. 28-30, 1989; Northern New York Regional Convention; Aurora, NY; phonenumber (716) 323-1530; NNYRCNA-89, 2605 Elmwood Ave., Ste. 135, Rochester, NY 14618

OHIO: May 26-28, 1989; 7th Ohio Convention; Bond Court Hotel, E. 6th at St. Clair, Cleveland; phonenumber (800) 451-3000; Ohio Convention, P.O. Box 10834, Cleveland, OH 44110

OREGON: Sep. 29-Oct. 1, 1989; 12th Pacific Northwest Convention; Airport Holiday Inn, Portland; Portland Central Office, 1730 SE 12th, Portland, OR 97214

SOUTH CAROLINA: Jun. 16-18, 1989; Carolina Regional Convention; Radisson Inn, Spartanburg; CRC '89, P.O. Box 5201, Spartanburg, SC 29304-5201

2) Nov. 9-12; Serenity Festival; Best Western Landmark, Ocean Blvd., Myrtle Beach; rsvn.s (800) 845-0658; phonenumber (803) 449-6262; Serenity Festival, P.O. Box 1198, Myrtle Beach, SC 29578

TEXAS: May 19-21, 1989; Texas Unity Convention; Whitney

UTAH: Aug. 4-6, 1989; 6th Utah Campout; Utah RSC, P.O. Box 6157, Salt Lake City, UT 84106-0157

WEST VIRGINIA: May 12-14 1989; 6th West Virginia Convention; Cedar Lakes Resort, Ripley, WV, (304) 372-7000; phonenumber (304) 344-4442; Convention, P.O. Box 2381, Westover, WV 26502

WYOMING: Jun. 30-Jul. 2, 1989; 6th Western States Unity Convention; Little America Hotel, Cheyenne; rsvn.s (307) 634-2771; phonenumber (307) 632-6433; WSUC-6, P.O. Box 184, Cheyenne, WY 82003

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9TEA

The Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous

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

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

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

What Is Narcotics Anonymous?

N.A. is a worldwide fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. It doesn't matter which drugs you used, or what you have done in the past. We are concerned only with how we can help addicts recover.

It costs nothing to belong to N.A.—there are no fees or dues. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using drugs. Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that they work.

For more information about N.A., see your local phone directory, or write us at the address inside.