



For the Newcomer

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NA is a nonprofit 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 to stay clean. There are no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using.

You don't have to be clean when you get here, but after your first meeting we suggest that you keep coming back and come clean. You don't have to wait for an overdose or jail sentence to get help from NA, nor is addiction a hopeless condition from which there is no recovery. It is possible to overcome the desire to use drugs with the help of the Twelve Step program of Narcotics Anonymous and the fellowship of recovering addicts.

Addiction is a disease that can happen to anyone. Some of us used drugs because we enjoyed them, while others used to suppress the feelings we already had. Still others suffered from physical or mental ailments and became addicted to the medication prescribed during our illnesses. Some of us joined the crowd using drugs a few times just to be cool and later found that we could not stop.

Many of us tried to overcome addiction, and sometimes temporary relief was possible, but it was usually followed by an even deeper involvement than before.

Whatever the circumstances, it really doesn't matter. Addiction is a progressive disease such as diabetes. We are allergic to drugs. Our ends are always the same: jails, institutions, or death. If life has become unmanageable and you want to live without it being necessary to use drugs, we have found a way. Here are the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous that we use on a daily basis to help us overcome our disease.

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.

Recovery doesn't stop with just being clean. As we abstain from all drugs (and, yes this means alcohol and marijuana, too) we come face-to-face with feelings that we have never coped with successfully. We even experience feelings we were not capable of having in the past. We must become willing to meet old and new feelings as they come.

We learn to experience feelings and realize they can do us no harm unless we act on them. Rather than acting on them, we call an NA member if we have feelings we cannot handle. By sharing, we learn to work through it. Chances are they've had a similar experience and can relate what worked for them. Remember, an addict alone is in bad company.

The Twelve Steps, new friends, and sponsors all help us deal with these feelings. In NA, our joys are multiplied by sharing good days; our sorrows are lessened by sharing the bad. For the first time in our lives, we don't have to experience anything alone. Now that we have a group, we are able to develop a relationship with a Higher Power that can always be with us.

We suggest that you look for a sponsor as soon as you become acquainted with the members in your area. Being asked to sponsor a new member is a privilege so don't hesitate to ask someone. Sponsorship is a rewarding experience for both; we are all here to help and be helped. We who are recovering must share with you what we have learned in order to maintain our growth in the NA program and our ability to function without drugs.

This program offers hope. All you have to bring with you is the desire to stop using and the willingness to try this new way of life.

Come to meetings, listen with an open mind, ask questions, get phone numbers and use them. Stay clean just for today.

May we also remind you that this is an *anonymous* program and your anonymity will be held in the strictest of confidence. "We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help."



Am I an Addict?

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Only you can answer this question.

This may not be an easy thing to do. All through our usage, we told ourselves, "I can handle it." Even if this was true in the beginning, it is not so now. The drugs handled us. We lived to use and used to live. Very simply, an addict is a person whose life is controlled by drugs.

Perhaps you admit you have a problem with drugs, but you don't consider yourself an addict. All of us have preconceived ideas about what an addict is. There is nothing shameful about being an addict once you begin to take positive action. If you can identify with our problems, you may be able to identify with our solution. The following questions were written by recovering addicts in Narcotics Anonymous. If you have doubts about whether or not you're an addict, take a few moments to read the questions below and answer them as honestly as you can.

1. Do you ever use alone? Yes No
2. Have you ever substituted one drug for another, thinking that one particular drug was the problem? Yes No
3. Have you ever manipulated or lied to a doctor to obtain prescription drugs? Yes No
4. Have you ever stolen drugs or stolen to obtain drugs? Yes No
5. Do you regularly use a drug when you wake up or when you go to bed? Yes No
6. Have you ever taken one drug to overcome the effects of another? Yes No
7. Do you avoid people or places that do not approve of you using drugs? Yes No
8. Have you ever used a drug without knowing what it was or what it would do to you? Yes No
9. Has your job or school performance ever suffered from the effects of your drug use? Yes No
10. Have you ever been arrested as a result of using drugs? Yes No
11. Have you ever lied about what or how much you use? Yes No
12. Do you put the purchase of drugs ahead of your financial responsibilities? Yes No
13. Have you ever tried to stop or control your using? Yes No
14. Have you ever been in a jail, hospital, or drug rehabilitation center because of your using? Yes No
15. Does using interfere with your sleeping or eating? Yes No

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 16. Does the thought of running out of drugs terrify you? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Do you feel it is impossible for you to live without drugs? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. Do you ever question your own sanity? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. Is your drug use making life at home unhappy? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. Have you ever thought you couldn't fit in or have a good time without drugs? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. Have you ever felt defensive, guilty, or ashamed about your using? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. Do you think a lot about drugs? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. Have you had irrational or indefinable fears? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24. Has using affected your sexual relationships? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25. Have you ever taken drugs you didn't prefer? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26. Have you ever used drugs because of emotional pain or stress? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 27. Have you ever overdosed on any drugs? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 28. Do you continue to use despite negative consequences? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29. Do you think you might have a drug problem? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

“Am I an addict?” This is a question only you can answer. We found that we all answered different numbers of these questions “Yes.” The actual number of “Yes” responses wasn’t as important as how we felt inside and how addiction had affected our lives.

Some of these questions don’t even mention drugs. This is because addiction is an insidious disease that affects all areas of our lives—even those areas which seem at first to have little to do with drugs. The different drugs we used were not as important as why we used them and what they did to us.

When we first read these questions, it was frightening for us to think we might be addicts. Some of us tried to dismiss these thoughts by saying:

“Oh, those questions don’t make sense;”

Or,

“I’m different. I know I take drugs, but I’m not an addict. I have real emotional/family/job problems;”

Or,

“I’m just having a tough time getting it together right now;”

Or,

“I’ll be able to stop when I find the right person/get the right job, etc.”

If you are an addict, you must first admit that you have a problem with drugs before any progress can be made toward recovery. These questions, when honestly approached, may help to show you how using drugs has made your life unmanageable. Addiction is a disease which, without recovery, ends in jails, institutions, and death. Many of us came to Narcotics Anonymous because drugs had stopped doing what we needed them to do. Addiction takes our pride, self-esteem, family, loved ones, and even our desire to live. If you have not reached this point in your addiction, you don’t have to. We have found that our own private hell was within us. If you want help, you can find it in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

“We were searching for an answer when we reached out and found Narcotics Anonymous. We came to our first NA meeting in defeat and didn’t know what to expect. After sitting in a meeting, or several meetings, we began to feel that people cared and were willing to help. Although our minds told us that we would never make it, the people in the fellowship gave us hope by insisting that we could recover. [...] Surrounded by fellow addicts, we realized that we were not alone anymore. Recovery is what happens in our meetings. Our lives are at stake. We found that by putting recovery first, the program works. We faced three disturbing realizations:

1. We are powerless over addiction and our lives are unmanageable;
2. Although we are not responsible for our disease, we are responsible for our recovery;
3. We can no longer blame people, places, and things for our addiction. We must face our problems and our feelings.

The ultimate weapon for recovery is the recovering addict.”¹

¹ Basic Text, *Narcotics Anonymous*



Sponsorship, Revised

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One of the first suggestions many of us hear when we begin attending NA meetings is to get a sponsor. As newcomers, we may not understand what this means. What is a sponsor? How do we get and use one? Where do we find one? This pamphlet is intended to serve as a brief introduction to sponsorship.

Our Basic Text tells us that “the heart of NA beats when two addicts share their recovery,” and sponsorship is simply one addict helping another. The two-way street of sponsorship is a loving, spiritual, and compassionate relationship that helps both the sponsor and sponsee.

WHO is a sponsor?

Sponsorship is a personal and private relationship that can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this pamphlet, an NA sponsor is a member of Narcotics Anonymous, living our program of recovery, who is willing to build a special, supportive, one-on-one relationship with us. Most members think of a sponsor, first and foremost, as someone who can help us work the Twelve Steps of NA, and sometimes the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts. A sponsor is not necessarily a friend, but may be someone in whom we confide. We can share things with our sponsor that we might not be comfortable sharing in a meeting.

“My relationship with my sponsor has been the key to gaining trust in other people and working the steps. I shared the total mess that was my life with my sponsor, and he shared that he had been in the same place. He began to teach me how to live without the use of drugs.”

WHAT does a sponsor do?

Sponsors share their experience, strength, and hope with their sponsees. Some describe their sponsor as loving and compassionate, someone they can count on to listen and support them no matter what. Others value the objectivity and detachment a sponsor can offer, relying on their direct and honest input even when it may be difficult to accept. Still others turn to a sponsor mainly for guidance through the Twelve Steps.

“Someone once asked, ‘Why do I need a sponsor?’ The sponsor replied, ‘Well it’s pretty hard to spot self deception...by yourself.’”

Sponsorship works for the same reason that NA works—because recovering members share common bonds of addiction and recovery and, in many cases, can empathize with each other. A sponsor’s role is not that of a legal advisor, a banker, a

parent, a marriage counselor, or a social worker. Nor is a sponsor a therapist offering some sort of professional advice. A sponsor is simply another addict in recovery who is willing to share his or her journey through the Twelve Steps.

As we share our concerns and questions with our sponsors, sometimes they will share their own experiences. At other times they may suggest reading or writing assignments, or try to answer our questions about the program. When we are new to NA, a sponsor can help us understand things that may confuse us about the program, from NA language, meeting formats, and the service structure, to the meaning of NA principles and the nature of spiritual awakening.

WHAT does a sponsee do?

One suggestion is to have regular contact with our sponsor. In addition to phoning our sponsor, we can arrange to meet up at meetings. Some sponsors will tell us how often they expect us to contact them, while others don't set those kinds of requirements. If we cannot find a sponsor who lives close to us, we can look to technology or mail to keep in touch. Regardless of how we communicate with our sponsor, it is important that we be honest and that we listen with an open mind.

"I rely on my sponsor to give me general direction and a new perspective. If no-thing else, she's an important sounding board. Sometimes all it takes is saying something out loud to someone else for me to see things differently."

We may worry that we are a burden to our sponsors and hesitate to contact them, or we may believe our sponsors will want something in return from us. But the truth is our sponsors benefit as much as we do from the relationship. In our program, we believe that we can only keep what we have by giving it away; by using our sponsors, we are actually helping them to stay clean and recover.

HOW do we get a sponsor?

To get a sponsor, all we need to do is ask. While this is simple, it may not be easy. Many of us are afraid to ask someone to be our sponsor. In active addiction, we may have learned not to trust anyone, and the idea of asking someone to listen to us and help us may feel alien and frightening. Nonetheless, most of our members describe sponsorship as a crucial part of their recovery. Sometimes we finally gather our courage, only to have someone say no. If that happens, we need to be persistent, have faith, and try not to take his or her decision personally. The reasons people may decline probably have nothing to do with us: they may have busy lives or many sponsees, or they may be going through difficult times. We need to reaffirm our faith and ask someone else.

"When I picked my sponsor, I looked at it like an interview. Are we a match? What are your expectations and what are mine? I looked for someone open-minded who I felt comfortable talking to."

The best place to look for a sponsor is at an NA meeting. Other places to seek a sponsor are NA events, such as service meetings and conventions. In seeking a sponsor, most members look for someone they feel they can learn to trust, someone

who seems compassionate and who is active in the program. Most members, particularly those who are new to NA, consider it important to find a sponsor with more clean time than they have.

A good rule of thumb is to look for someone with similar experiences who can relate to our struggles and accomplishments. For most, finding a sponsor of the same sex makes this empathy easier and helps us feel safe in the relationship. Some feel gender need not be a deciding factor. We are free to choose our own sponsor. It is, however, strongly suggested that we avoid getting into a sponsorship relationship that may lead to sexual attraction. Such attraction can distract us from the nature of sponsorship and interfere with our ability to share honestly with each other.

“When I got clean, I was insecure, lonely, and willing to do anything for some comfort and company. My natural tendency was to satisfy those desires and not have to focus on what was necessary to build a foundation for my recovery. Thank God for the integrity of those members who supported me and didn’t take advantage of me in the early days of my recovery.”

Sometimes members wonder whether it would be okay to have more than one sponsor. While some addicts do choose this route, most caution against it, explaining that having more than one sponsor might tempt them to be manipulative in order to get the answers or guidance they are looking for.

WHEN should we get a sponsor?

Most members consider it important to get a sponsor as soon as possible, while others explain that it is just as crucial to take a little time to look around and make an informed decision. Going to a lot of meetings helps us to determine who we are comfortable with and who we can learn to trust. While we are looking for a sponsor, if someone offers, we do not have to say yes. One thing to remember is that, if we get a sponsor to help us in our early recovery, we are free to change sponsors later if that person isn’t meeting our needs.

“I compared the timing of when to get a sponsor to drowning. I needed that life-saver/sponsor immediately!”

When we are new to the program, we need to reach out to other addicts for help and support. It is never too early to get and use phone numbers and begin sharing with other recovering addicts. Our program works because of the help we can offer each other. We no longer need to live in isolation, and we begin to feel part of something larger than ourselves. Sponsorship helps us to see that, in coming to NA, we have finally come home.

You may have questions about sponsorship that this IP did not answer for you. While there may not be “right” or “wrong” answers to your questions—the experience of our fellowship varies from community to community and member to member—we do have a book on sponsorship that addresses many issues related to sponsorship in greater depth.

An Introduction to NA Meetings

IP No. 29



If you're new to NA or planning to go to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting for the first time, it might be nice to know a little bit about what happens in our meetings. The information here is meant to give you an understanding of what we do when we come together to share recovery. The words we use and the way we act might be unfamiliar to you at first, but hopefully this information can help you get the most out of your first NA meeting or help you feel more comfortable as you keep coming back. Showing up early, staying late, and asking lots of questions before and after meetings will help you get the most out of every meeting you attend.

Effective meeting formats keep the primary purpose in focus and encourage members to participate in a way that expresses recovery.

Tradition Five, *It Works: How and Why*

Our Basic Text, *Narcotics Anonymous*, provides the best description of who we are and what we do: "NA is a nonprofit 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." The Twelve Steps of NA are the basis of our recovery program. Our meetings are where we share recovery with one another, but applying our program consists of much more than simply attending NA meetings. People have all sorts of reasons for attending NA meetings, but the purpose of each meeting is to give NA members a place to share recovery with other addicts. If you are not an addict, look for an open meeting, which welcomes non-addicts. If you're an addict or think you might have a drug problem, we suggest a meeting every day for at least 90 days to get to know NA members and our program.

NA literature is also a great source of information about our program. Our Basic Text (*Narcotics Anonymous*) or our informational pamphlets (IPs) are good places to start. Most meetings offer IPs for free, while NA books are generally sold at the group's cost. Much of our literature is also available to read or order online at www.na.org.

General information that applies to NA meetings

- ⊗ We are not concerned with types or amounts of drugs used; we focus on the ways addiction and recovery affect our lives.
- ⊗ NA meetings are not classes or group therapy sessions. We do not teach lessons or provide counseling. We simply share our personal experiences with addiction and recovery.
- ⊗ Meetings are often held in churches, treatment centers, or other facilities, because these places tend to be affordable, available, or convenient. NA is not a part of or connected to any other group, organization, or institution.
- ⊗ To respect the anonymity of all of our members, we ask that people who attend our meetings not talk about who our members are or what they share in meetings.
- ⊗ NA has no membership fees or dues, but it does cost money to hold meetings and provide other services to further our primary purpose. Our members make voluntary contributions at meetings to support the group and other efforts to carry our message. Nonmembers are asked not to contribute so NA can remain fully self-supporting.

Our program of recovery begins with abstinence from all drugs, including alcohol. Sometimes people come to NA meetings while still using drugs, detoxing from drugs, or on drug

replacement therapy. Regardless of what you may be taking when you first come to NA, you are welcome. Also, newer members often have questions about prescribed medications. We encourage you to read NA literature including the Basic Text and the booklet *In Times of Illness*, which will explain NA's approach to recovery. It also helps to talk to NA members who have faced similar situations about what worked for them. Sponsorship can be a vital tool for understanding this and other issues in our recovery (see IP #11 for more information on sponsorship). We are not professionals and NA has no opinions on medical matters; we can only share our personal experiences with one another.

A few things you might expect to see or experience in our meetings

NA meetings come in all shapes, sizes, and flavors, and so many things are done differently in meetings in different cities, different countries, or even just on a different night of the week in the place you live. Still, some things are common to most NA meetings around the world.

- ⊗ Meetings are usually either discussion or speaker meetings. Discussion meetings allow members to take turns sharing. Speaker meetings allow one or more members to share for an extended period of time.
- ⊗ Visitors and newcomers are usually asked to introduce themselves by their first name. Newcomers are usually welcomed with a hug or handshake and a welcome keytag.
- ⊗ In most places, it is customary for members to gather in a circle to end the meeting with a short prayer or NA reading. Though you may hear prayers in meetings, ours is a spiritual, not religious program.

- ⊗ Groups often mark or sign attendance sheets or court cards as a courtesy to people who request it, but some groups and members choose not to do so. If needed, it is best to ask how the group handles this before the meeting begins.
- ⊗ Most groups provide schedules or directories of other local NA meetings.

Many of us understand God to be simply whatever force keeps us clean. The right to a God of your understanding is total and without any catches.

Step Three, Basic Text

About sharing

- ⊗ NA relies on the “therapeutic value of one addict helping another.” Nonmembers are asked not to share in meetings, though some groups may allow brief participation during NA birthday or anniversary celebrations.
- ⊗ Members are usually asked to share only once per meeting, mindful of the meeting’s time limitations. Many meetings ask members to limit sharing to five minutes or less.
- ⊗ Members are also encouraged to avoid “crosstalk,” which means we share our own experiences instead of responding to other members. Individuals can have conversations before or after meetings.
- ⊗ Some groups ask members to refrain from sharing explicit details and descriptions of drugs and using in meetings, and to focus instead on how addiction and recovery have affected us.
- ⊗ Newcomers are generally encouraged to focus on listening, but they are welcome to share during the participation portion of the meeting.

- ⊗ Newcomers are encouraged to listen closely to identify experienced members they can relate to who might make good sponsors or friends, or offer other guidance and support.

Cultivating an atmosphere of recovery in our meetings

Groups may vary on how they choose to address some meeting-related matters. We encourage you to check each meeting out for yourself to get a better idea of what is expected at that meeting. The following basics are common in many meetings.

- ⊗ Some meetings have a short break for members to talk, get refreshments, use the restroom, or smoke. At meetings with no break, we usually wait until after the meeting.
- ⊗ We don't allow drugs or drug paraphernalia in any NA meetings.
- ⊗ We strongly discourage any harassment, threats, or disturbing behavior before, during, and after our meetings. This includes unwelcome sexual, romantic, financial, and religious solicitation. Our meetings are for sharing NA recovery. If you feel harassed or threatened, share your concerns with the meeting leader or a trusted servant.
- ⊗ We ask latecomers to find a seat quietly and avoid distracting people.
- ⊗ We discourage side conversations. Even at a very low whisper, they distract others.
- ⊗ Phone calls and text messages also distract others. We ask members to turn off or silence their cell phones and other electronic devices during meetings.
- ⊗ In many places, hugs are a common NA greeting. If you're not comfortable hugging, don't hesitate to say so. Most members will be understanding about this.

Our meetings vary widely in size and style. Some are small and intimate; others are large and loud. The practices and terms used in our meetings also vary widely from one place to another. Most importantly, our meetings are where we share our experience, strength, and hope. If you're an addict, keep coming back and share recovery with us!

Some helpful NA terms

ADDICT—the term we use to refer to ourselves because we see addiction itself as the problem, rather than the use of a specific drug

BASIC TEXT—the book that contains our core ideas, entitled *Narcotics Anonymous*

CLOSED MEETING—meeting only for addicts or those who think they might have a drug problem

GROUP—members who hold one or more regularly scheduled NA meetings (see IP #2, *The Group*)

HIGHER POWER—any loving force that helps a member stay clean and seek recovery

IPS—information pamphlets about NA

NEWCOMERS—new NA members

OPEN MEETING—meeting that welcomes anyone to attend, including interested non-addicts

RELAPSE—a brief or extended return to drug use

SHARING—offering personal experience with addiction and recovery

SPONSOR—experienced member who offers guidance and support through the Twelve Steps (see IP #11, *Sponsorship*)

TRUSTED SERVANTS—members who have service positions in NA

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Just for Today

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Tell yourself:

Just for today my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs.

Just for today I will have faith in someone in NA who believes in me and wants to help me in my recovery.

Just for today I will have a program. I will try to follow it to the best of my ability.

Just for today, through NA, I will try to get a better perspective on my life.

Just for today I will be unafraid, my thoughts will be on my new associations, people who are not using and who have found a new way of life.
So long as I follow that way, I have nothing to fear.

When we came into the program of Narcotics Anonymous, we made a decision to turn our lives over to the care of a Higher Power. This surrender relieves the burden of the past and fear of the future. The gift of today is now in proper perspective. We accept and enjoy life as it is right now. When we refuse to accept the reality of today, we are denying our faith in our Higher Power. This can only bring more suffering.

We learn that today is a gift with no guarantees. With this in mind, the insignificance of the past and future, and the importance of our actions today, become real for us. This simplifies our lives.

When we focus our thoughts on today the nightmare of drugs fades away, overshadowed by the dawn of a new reality. We find that, when we are troubled, we can trust our feelings to another recovering addict. In sharing our past with other addicts we discover we are not unique, that we share common bonds. Talking to other NA members, whether to share the trials and tribulations of our day with them or allowing them to share theirs with us, is a way our Higher Power works through us.

We have no need to fear if today we stay clean, close to our Higher Power and our NA friends. God has forgiven us for our past mistakes, and tomorrow is not yet here. Meditation and a personal inventory will help us to gain serenity and guidance throughout this day. We take a few moments out of our daily routine to thank God, as we understand God, for giving us the ability to cope with today.

“Just for today” applies to all areas of our lives, not just abstinence from drugs. Reality has to be dealt with on a daily basis. Many of us feel that God expects no more of us than to do the things that we are able to do today.

Working the program, the Twelve Steps of NA, has given us a new outlook on our lives. Today, we no longer need to make excuses for who we are. Our daily contact with a Higher Power fills the empty places inside that could never be filled before. We find fulfillment in

living today. With our Higher Power guiding us we lose the desire to use. Perfection is no longer a goal today; we can achieve adequacy.

It is important to remember that any addict who can stay clean for one day is a miracle. Going to meetings, working the steps, daily meditation, and talking with people in the program are things we do to stay spiritually healthy. Responsible living is possible.

We can replace loneliness and fear with the love of the fellowship and the security of a new way of life. We never have to be alone again. In the fellowship, we have made more true friends than we ever believed possible. Self-pity and resentments are replaced by tolerance and faith. We are given the freedom, serenity, and happiness we so desperately sought.

A lot happens in one day, both negative and positive. If we do not take time to appreciate both, perhaps we will miss something that will help us grow. Our principles for living will guide us in recovery when we use them. We find it necessary to continue to do so on a daily basis.



NA White Booklet, *Narcotics Anonymous*

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Foreword

This booklet is an introduction to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. It is written for those men and women who, like ourselves, suffer from a seemingly hopeless addiction to drugs. There is no cure for addiction, but recovery is possible by a program of simple spiritual principles. This booklet is not meant to be comprehensive, but it contains the essentials that in our personal and group experience we know to be necessary for recovery.

Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Who is an addict?

Most of us do not have to think twice about this question. *We know!* Our whole life and thinking was centered in drugs in one form or another—the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more. We lived to use and used to live. Very simply, an addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs. We are people in the grip of a continuing and progressive illness whose ends are always the same: jails, institutions, and death.

What is the Narcotics Anonymous program?

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

There are no strings attached to NA. We are not affiliated with any other organizations. We have no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign, no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious, or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion, or lack of religion.

We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

Why are we here?

Before coming to the Fellowship of NA, we could not manage our own lives. We could not live and enjoy life as other people do. We had to have something different and we thought we had found it in drugs. We placed their use ahead of the welfare of our families, our wives,

husbands, and our children. We had to have drugs at all costs. We did many people great harm, but most of all we harmed ourselves. Through our inability to accept personal responsibilities we were actually creating our own problems. We seemed to be incapable of facing life on its own terms.

Most of us realized that in our addiction we were slowly committing suicide, but addiction is such a cunning enemy of life that we had lost the power to do anything about it. Many of us ended up in jail, or sought help through medicine, religion, and psychiatry. None of these methods was sufficient for us. Our disease always resurfaced or continued to progress until, in desperation, we sought help from each other in Narcotics Anonymous.

After coming to NA we realized we were sick people. We suffered from a disease from which there is no known cure. It can, however, be arrested at some point, and recovery is then possible.

How it works

If you want what we have to offer, and are willing to make the effort to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps. These are the principles that made our recovery possible.

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.

This sounds like a big order, and we can't do it all at once. We didn't become addicted in one day, so remember—*easy does it*.

There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat us in our recovery; this is an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles. Three of these that are indispensable are honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness. With these we are well on our way.

We feel that our approach to the disease of addiction is completely realistic, for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel. We feel that our way is practical, for one addict can best understand and help another addict. We believe that the sooner we face our problems within our society, in everyday living, just that much faster do we become acceptable, responsible, and productive members of that society.

The only way to keep from returning to active addiction is not to take that first drug. If you are like us you know that one is too many and a thousand never enough. We put great emphasis on this, for we know that when we use drugs in any form, or substitute one for another, we release our addiction all over again.

Thinking of alcohol as different from other drugs has caused a great many addicts to relapse. Before we came to NA, many of us viewed alcohol separately, but we cannot afford to be confused about this. Alcohol is a drug. We are people with the disease of addiction who must abstain from all drugs in order to recover.

What can I do?

Begin your own program by taking Step One from the previous chapter, "How It Works." When we fully concede to our innermost selves that we are powerless over our addiction, we have taken a big step in our recovery. Many of us have had some reservations at this point, so give yourself a break and be as thorough as possible from the start. Go on to Step Two, and so forth, and as you go on you will come to an understanding of the program for yourself. If you are in an institution of any kind and have stopped using for the present, you can, with a clear mind, try this way of life.

Upon release, continue your daily program and contact a member of NA. Do this by mail, by phone, or in person. Better yet, come to our meetings. Here you will find answers to some of the things that may be disturbing you now.

If you are not in an institution, the same holds true. Stop using for today. Most of us can do for eight or twelve hours what seems impossible for a longer period of time. If the obsession or compulsion becomes too great, put yourself on a five-minute basis of not using. Minutes will grow to hours, and hours to days, so you will break the habit and gain some peace of mind. The real miracle happens when you realize that the need for drugs has in some way been lifted from you. You have stopped using and started to live.

The Twelve Traditions of NA

We keep what we have only with vigilance, and just as freedom for the individual comes from the Twelve Steps, so freedom for the group springs from our traditions.

As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on NA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
6. An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every NA 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. NA, 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 NA 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.

Recovery and relapse

Many people think that recovery is simply a matter of not using drugs. They consider a relapse a sign of complete failure, and long periods of abstinence a sign of complete success. We in the recovery program of Narcotics Anonymous have found that this perception is too simplistic. After a member has had some involvement in our fellowship, a relapse may be the jarring experience that brings about a more rigorous application of the program. By the same token we have observed some members who remain abstinent for long periods of time whose dishonesty and self-deceit still prevent them from enjoying complete recovery and acceptance within society. Complete and continuous abstinence, however, in close association and identification with others in NA groups, is still the best ground for growth.

Although all addicts are basically the same in kind, we do, as individuals, differ in degree of sickness and rate of recovery. There may be times when a relapse lays the groundwork for complete freedom. At other times that freedom can only be achieved by a grim and obstinate willfulness to hang on to abstinence, come hell or high water, until a crisis passes. An addict who by any means can lose, even for a time, the need or desire to use, and has free choice over impulsive thinking and compulsive action, has reached a turning point that may be the decisive factor in his recovery. The feeling of true independence and freedom hangs here at times in the balance. To step out alone and run our own lives again draws us, yet we seem to know that what we have has come from dependence on a Power greater than ourselves and from the giving and receiving of help from others in acts of empathy. Many times in our recovery the old bugaboos will haunt us. Life may again become meaningless, monotonous, and boring. We may tire mentally in repeating our new ideas and tire physically in our new activities, yet we know that if we fail to repeat them we will surely take up our old practices. We suspect that if we do not use what we have, we will lose what we have. These times are often the periods of our greatest growth. Our minds and bodies seem tired of it all, yet the dynamic forces of change or true conversion, deep within, may be working to give us the answers that alter our inner motivations and change our lives.

Recovery as experienced through our Twelve Steps is our goal, not mere physical abstinence. To improve ourselves takes effort, and since there is no way in the world to graft a new idea on a closed mind, an opening must be made somehow. Since we can do this only for ourselves, we need to recognize two of our seemingly inherent enemies, apathy and procrastination. Our resistance to change seems built in, and only a nuclear blast of some kind will bring about any alteration or initiate another course of action. A relapse, if we survive it, may provide the charge for the demolition process. A relapse and sometimes subsequent death of someone close to us can do the job of awakening us to the necessity for vigorous personal action.

Just for today

Tell yourself:

Just for today, my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs.

Just for today, I will have faith in someone in NA who believes in me and wants to help me in my recovery.

Just for today, I will have a program. I will try to follow it to the best of my ability.

Just for today, through NA, I will try to get a better perspective on my life.

Just for today, I will be unafraid. My thoughts will be on my new associations, people who are not using and who have found a new way of life. So long as I follow that way, I have nothing to fear.

Personal stories

Narcotics Anonymous has grown a great deal since 1953. The people who started this fellowship and for whom we have a deep and lasting affection have taught us much about addiction and recovery. In the following pages we offer you our beginnings. The first section was written in 1965 by one of our earliest members. More recent stories of NA members' recovery can be found in our Basic Text, Narcotics Anonymous.

We do recover

Although "Politics makes strange bedfellows," as the old saying goes, addiction makes us one of a kind. Our personal stories may vary in individual pattern but in the end we all have the same thing in common. This common illness or disorder is addiction. We know well the two things that make up true addiction: obsession and compulsion. Obsession—that fixed idea that takes us back time and time again to our particular drug, or some substitute, to recapture the ease and comfort we once knew.

Compulsion—once having started the process with one fix, one pill, or one drink we cannot stop through our own power of will. Because of our physical sensitivity to drugs, we are completely in the grip of a destructive power greater than ourselves.

When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as human beings, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, or death—or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man's entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual—not religious—program, known as Narcotics Anonymous.

When my addiction brought me to the point of complete powerlessness, uselessness, and surrender some fifteen years ago, there was no NA. I found AA, and in that fellowship met addicts who had also found that program to be the answer to their problem. However, we knew that many were still going down the road of disillusion, degradation, and death, because they were unable to identify with the alcoholic in AA. Their identification was at the level of apparent symptoms and not at the deeper level of emotions or feelings, where empathy becomes a healing therapy for all addicted people. With several other addicts and some members of AA who had great faith in us and the program, we formed, in July of 1953, what we now know as Narcotics Anonymous. We felt that now the addict would find from the start as much identification as each needed to convince himself that he could stay clean by the example of others who had recovered for many years.

That this was what was principally needed has proved itself in these passing years. That wordless language of recognition, belief, and faith, which we call empathy, created the atmosphere in which we could feel time, touch reality, and recognize spiritual values long lost to many of us. In our program of recovery we are growing in numbers and in strength. Never before have so many clean addicts, of their own choice and in free society, been able to meet where they please, to maintain their recovery in complete creative freedom.

Even addicts said it could not be done the way we had it planned. We believed in openly scheduled meetings—no more hiding as other groups had tried. We believed this differed from all other methods tried before by those who advocated long withdrawal from society. We felt that the sooner the addict could face his problem in everyday living, just that much faster

would he become a real, productive citizen. We eventually have to stand on our own feet and face life on its own terms, so why not from the start.

Because of this, of course, many relapsed and many were lost completely. However, many stayed and some came back after their setback. The brighter part is the fact that of those who are now our members, many have long terms of complete abstinence and are better able to help the newcomer. Their attitude, based on the spiritual values of our steps and traditions, is the dynamic force that is bringing increase and unity to our program. Now we know that the time has come when that tired old lie, "Once an addict, always an addict," will no longer be tolerated by either society or the addict himself. We do recover.

One third of my life

Today has been one of those days. It was Friday and Monday all together. Trying to get something done was like trying to make a connection when the heat was on. It was a panic all day, but when I got home and lay down for an hour, it felt good. I can go on a natural nod, because I have nothing up here now but a clear conscience. The old hassle is gone. I can lie down, take it easy, and be comfortable. The longer I stay clean, the better it gets for me. It's real groovy to get up in the morning and not care whether it's foggy or the sun's shining, just so long as I'm clean. No cramps and no sweats now. I remember the times when I'd be afraid to go to sleep, because I had a "git up" there on the dresser; but if I took my "git up" I'd have nothing when I got up and then I'd be sick again.

I never thought I'd feel good being out here with the squares, but now I think sometimes I feel the same things they do. I don't have all those petty little things going through my mind now, like I did when I thought I was hip—so slick. The only one I was being hip and slick with was me. Everybody else could see right through me. I don't have a running nose anymore and no itchiness unless it's an allergy or something. I can go home now at night to clean sheets and blankets, say my little prayers, and go to sleep. It's real good for me.

Yesterday was pay day. I went out and bought myself a few presents—not Christmas shoplifting you know. Now, I can go through these stores without even a temptation to steal. This is my third Christmas on the bricks and I can't think of anything I've stolen since I've been out of the joint. I feel that I was basically honest from childhood. I stole to keep up my habit, to get my stuff, to keep my head on my chest, to keep my stomach from grinding, and to keep my nose from running. That nose! It was always running whether I was sick or not.

My story is similar to many others. I hit one nuthouse when I was thirteen—I really don't remember much about it. That was on an OD of amphetamines, they thought I was a manic-depressive till I cleaned up off the pills, and then they figured I was just a neurotic.

It progressed though. I started to make the joints. I'm thirty now and there's twelve-and-a-half years gone out of my life like this. Man, I sure don't want anymore of it. Since I've been out of the joint about three years I can't say I haven't had the temptation; I can't say I haven't had some obsession; I can't say I haven't had the passing thought of wanting to use, because I have at times. Now, however, it's like the passing thought of "There is a real nice car there. I'd like one like that," and then it's gone, and so is the thought. I notice that the times and the periods are getting farther apart when they happen.

I haven't had a driving obsession to get my head on my chest for over two years now, and this is really something. I now try to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand Him. Sometimes I like to try to play God and run everything but it doesn't work that way. The longer I stay around and stay clean, the groovier it gets. The last time I came out, I was a scared, sniveling little snot, double hip, double slick, still walking that walk and talking that talk. Now, I go back to the institutions every week I can make it. I went back to my home group a while back and it was greater than my birthday. You know those guys accepted me back and were glad to see me.

I gave a lot of them a hard time with the attitudes I used to have. At that time nothing was any good; everything was rotten, except dope. Sure, I had a craving for drugs, but at that time I was ready for anything that would get my feet off the ground. Now, however, I know that anything that would get my feet off the ground (that isn't an airplane) will head me for real trouble. I sincerely believe this. I don't know if I work the Twelve Steps to the best of my ability or not, but I do know I've been clean about three years by practicing them the best I can.

When things start buggin' me now, I know where most of the trouble lies: me. Now I find I have a greater tolerance for people and a lot more patience all around; this is a big change for me. Practicing the principles of this program the way I understand them, staying clean a day at a time, sharing experiences with other addicts who are new to the program—these actions have changed my whole outlook on life. It's a good way to live.

I can't do any more time

I came to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous as an addict, out of an institution for women. I came the first night I got out and it's been here that I've learned how to live, so that it hasn't been necessary for me to use any kind of drugs in my daily life. It has been here that I've learned a lot about myself, because we addicts are so very much alike. I've always seen another side of myself whenever problems and suggested solutions have been discussed at our meetings. I have learned, from those who are following the program of recovery to the best of their ability, how I can do the same if I am willing to make the effort. I have also learned from those who have made mistakes. I feel bad when I see that some leave this fellowship to try the old way again, but I know that I don't have to do that if I don't want to. Also, it has not been necessary for me to steal or to write any bad checks.

My addiction goes way back. I was drinking abusively, when I first started at sixteen, and I realize today that the reason for that was I was sick to begin with. I had this emotional illness and it was very deep. I don't think that, if I hadn't been emotionally ill to begin with, I would have gotten carried away with using. When it became noticeable that I was using alcohol more and more, being in the nursing profession, I tried experimenting with other drugs. It grew and grew and became a horrible problem.

Although this is certainly a suicidal path in itself, when I was aware and in a lucid moment, I did realize I was hopelessly addicted. I did not know that there was any answer. There really wasn't at that time. I was in San Francisco, not knowing which way to turn, when I tried suicide and was unsuccessful. I was twenty-six years old at that time. I now think that if it had been possible for me, I would have come to this program at that same age as a lot who are here today.

My pattern, however, continued. I had lost not only my self-respect but the respect and love of my family, my children, and my husband. I had lost my home and my profession. Somehow or other, I hadn't reached the point where I wanted to try this way of life or to try it all the way. I just had to go on and try in my own way. I tried drugs again and was finally committed to another institution three times. The last time I went there I just felt that I couldn't do any more time. I didn't immediately connect it with my addiction. I just couldn't do any more time. It wasn't the thought, "I can't use drugs," just, "I can't do any more time." I just felt completely hopeless and helpless and I didn't have any answers. All of my emotional and spiritual pride had gone.

I'm sure that when I was in the institution they doubted my sincerity in ever wanting to do anything about my problem. However, I did want to do something about it, and I know that this program doesn't work until we really do want it for ourselves. It's not for people who need it but for people who want it. I finally wanted it so bad I knocked on doors of psychiatrists, psychologists, chaplains, and anywhere I could.

I think one of my counselors, who just naturally loves all people, gave me a lot of encouragement, for I thoroughly took my first three steps. I admitted I was powerless over my

addiction, that my life was unmanageable. I had tried so many other things, so I decided a Power greater than myself could restore my sanity. To the best of my ability I turned my life and my will over to the care of God as I understood Him, and I tried in my daily life to understand God.

I had read all kinds of metaphysical books. I agreed with them and thought they were great, but I never took any action on them. I never tried any faith in my daily living. It's amazing how after I had gotten just this far, I began to get a little honesty and could see myself as I was. I doubted that I could get honest, but I became aware of myself by looking outside myself at the addicts around me, by getting to know them and understand them, by being friendly with them.

I would like to give credit where credit is due, and I do believe that my daily attendance at psychotherapy groups with very understanding psychologists helped me become aware of myself so that I might do something about my problem; but when I came out, I thought, "Oh! Can I make it outside?" So many times institutions took so many years out of my life that I wondered if I could stay clean and do ordinary things. I doubted whether I could go ahead with just normal living, but God has seen fit to see that I have been provided for in this last year and a half. I've been able to work regularly; I didn't have steady jobs at first, but there was never any long period in between them.

Although for a time I threw out the idea of going back to my profession, which is nursing, I have since reconsidered this and am now in the process of perhaps returning to full-time nursing. With the help of some very understanding people I have met, the future here looks very bright. In the meantime, I give myself to my job every day, as best I can, and have been doing it successfully, despite the fact that when I left the institution for the last time everyone thought I was unemployable.

To me this is a spiritual program and the maintenance and growth of a spiritual experience. Without the kind of help and the therapy of one addict talking to and helping another, I know that it wouldn't have been possible for me. The obsession to use drugs has been completely removed from me during this period, and I know that it's only by the grace of God. I now give my attention to my daily problems. It's amazing, having had a pattern of fear, anxiety, resentment, and self-pity, how much of this, too, has been removed. No longer do these sway my life. I ask for help every morning, and I count my blessings every night. I'm real grateful that I don't have to go through the sickness that accompanies the taking of drugs of any kind.

I think one of the biggest things that helped me here was that this is a program of complete abstinence. I got over the idea that I had a "dual problem." I don't have a problem with this drug or that drug; I have a living problem, and this is all I need to think about today.

I got a lot of help from my sponsor when it seemed that everyone had let me down, both family and friends. I don't know what I would have done had it not been for the doors that she opened in her letters. She shared her experience, her strength, and her hope with me, and it was very beneficial. She continues to be my very good friend. Here in NA I have found a family, friends, and a way of life. My own family has also been restored to me through working these steps, and not through directly working on the problem. A lot of wonderful things have happened to me. I can't conceive of anything ever happening that would make me want to forget this way of life.

The vicious cycle

I am Gene and I am an addict. In writing this I hope that I can help other addicts like myself, who are trying to overcome their addiction by substituting one thing for another. That was my pattern. I started drinking, whenever possible, at the age of fourteen. With this I added weed so that I could feel at ease and be comfortable with my surroundings in the social activities in high school.

At seventeen, I started on heroin and quickly became addicted. After using heroin for one-and-a-half years, I decided to admit myself to an institution. When they accepted my application, I got scared and joined the Army after kicking at home. I thought that by being away from my environment I would be able to solve my problem.

Even here I found myself going AWOL to get more heroin. I was then shipped to Europe and thought that if I just drank, that would be the answer, but again I found nothing but trouble. Upon my release I came back home to the same environment. Again I was using heroin and various other drugs. This lasted about two years.

The rat race really began when I tried to clean up—cough syrup, bennies, fixes, etc. By now, I didn't know where one addiction left off and the other started. A year before I came to Narcotics Anonymous I found myself hopelessly addicted to cough syrup, drinking five or six four-ounce bottles a day. I needed help so I went to a doctor; he prescribed dexedrine and would give me a shot that made me feel good. I found myself going to him practically every day.

This continued for about eight months, and I was very happy with my new found legal addiction. I was also getting codeine from a different doctor. I now became insanely afraid and began drinking too. This went on around the clock for a month and I ended up in a mental institution. After being released from the hospital, I thought I was free from narcotics and now I could drink socially. I soon found out I could not. It was then that I sought help from NA.

Here I learned that my real problem did not lie in the drugs that I had been using, but in a distorted personality that had developed over the years of my using and even before that. In NA I was able to help myself with the help of others in the fellowship. I find I am making progress in facing reality and I'm growing a day at a time. I find new interests now that mean something, and realize that that was one of the things which I was looking for in drugs.

Sometimes I still find it difficult to face things, but I'm no longer alone and can always find someone to help me over the rough and confused spots. I have finally found people like myself who understand how I feel. I'm now able to help others to find what I have, if they really want it. I thank God, as I understand Him, for this way of life.

Something meaningful

I know now I am not the great leader or philosopher that I tried to make people believe I was. After fifteen years of trying to live this illusion, I now find that I am being accepted for just what I really am. All my life before this, I did things my way. If anyone else ever offered advice or suggestions, I rebuffed them with a closed mind without ever trying what they had to offer to see whether it would succeed or fail. It seems that though my way always failed, I had to use again, until repeated trips to jail began to convince me that something was wrong.

I reached the point of desperately wanting to do something with my life that would be meaningful. I had to try something else that would work. I had found NA several years previous to this decision, but then I was not ready to change. And although I closed the door on NA on many occasions, I have always been welcomed back.

Since I have become willing to do something about my life with the NA program, life has been fuller and more meaningful. I could not experience life before on a daily basis without drugs. I needed these just to face each day. I know I have to alter this pattern of thinking and living if I am to stay completely clean. This I am doing through the principles of our program.

Although I do not now desire or need drugs, I have to fill the void that's left with something worthwhile. I have found this in the Fellowship of NA. I have to stick with the winners and go in the same direction that they go. As long as I follow the steps of the program, I know I can make it, too. Although I don't find the program easy, it is simple enough for a complicated person like me to follow.

I was different

My story may differ from the others you have heard, in that I was never arrested or hospitalized. I did, however, reach the point of utter despair which so many of us have experienced. It is not my track record that shows my addiction but rather my feelings and my life. Addiction was my way of life—the only way of life I knew for many years.

Thinking back, I must have taken one look at life and decided I didn't want any part of it. I came from a "good old-fashioned," upper-middle-class broken home. I can't remember a time when I haven't been strung out. As a small child, I found out I could ease the pain with food, and here my drug addiction began.

I became part of the pill mania of the 1950's. Even at this time I found it hard to take medication as directed. I figured that two pills would do twice as much good as one. I remember hoarding pills, stealing from my mother's prescriptions, having a hard time making the pills last until the next refill.

I continued to use in this way throughout my early years. When I was in high school and the drug craze hit, the transition between drug store dope and street dope was a natural. I had already been using drugs on a daily basis for nearly ten years; these drugs had virtually stopped working. I was plagued with adolescent feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. The only answer I had was that, if I took something, I either was, felt, or acted better.

The story of my street using is pretty normal. I used anything and everything available every day. It didn't matter what I took so long as I got high. Drugs seemed good to me in those years. I was a crusader; I was an observer; I was afraid; and I was alone. Sometimes I felt all-powerful and sometimes I prayed for the comfort of idiocy—if only I didn't have to think. I remember feeling different—not quite human—and I couldn't stand it. I stayed in my natural state: loaded.

In 1966, I think, I got turned on to heroin. After that, like so many of us, nothing else would do the thing for me. At first I joy-popped occasionally, and then used only on weekends; but a year later I had a habit, and two years later I flunked out of college and started working where my connection worked. I used stuff and dealt, and ran for another year-and-a-half before I got sick and tired of being sick and tired.

I found myself strung out and no longer able to function as a human being. During this last year of my using, I started looking for help. Nothing worked! Nothing helped!

Somewhere along the line I had gotten the telephone number of a man in NA. Against my better judgment and without hope, I made what may well be the most important phone call of my life.

No one came to save me; I wasn't instantly cured. The man simply said that if I had a drug problem, I might benefit from the meetings. He gave me the address of a meeting for that night. It was too far to drive, and besides I was kicking. He also gave me the address of another meeting a couple of days later and closer to home. I promised him I'd go and have a look. When the night came, I was deathly afraid of getting busted, and afraid of the dope fiends I would find there. I knew I wasn't like the addict you read about in books or newspapers. Despite these fears I made my first meeting. I was dressed in a three piece black suit, black tie, and eighty-four hours off a two-and-a-half-year run. I didn't want you to know what and who I was. I don't think I fooled anybody. I was screaming for help, and everybody knew it. I really don't remember much of that first meeting, but I must have heard something that brought me back. The first feeling I do remember on this program was the gnawing fear that because I'd never been busted or hospitalized for drugs, I might not qualify and might not be accepted.

I used twice during my first two weeks around the program, and finally gave up. I no longer cared whether or not I qualified. I didn't care if I was accepted. I didn't even care what the people thought of me. I was too tired to care.

I don't remember exactly when, but shortly after I gave up, I began to get some hope that this program might work for me. I started to imitate some of the things the winners were doing. I got caught up in NA. I felt good, it was great to be clean for the first time in years.

After I'd been around for about six months, the novelty of being clean wore off, and I fell off that rosy cloud I'd been riding. It got hard. Somehow I survived that first dose of reality. I think the only things I had going for me then were the desire to stay clean, no matter what; faith that things would work out okay so long as I didn't use; and people who were willing to help when I asked for help. Since then, it's been an uphill fight; I've had to work to stay clean. I've found it necessary to go to many meetings, to work with newcomers, to participate in NA, to get involved. I've had to work the Twelve Steps the best I could, and I've had to learn to live.

Today my life is much simpler. I have a job I like, I'm comfortable in my marriage, I have real friends, and I'm active in NA. This type of life seems to suit me fine. I used to spend my time looking for the magic—those people, places, and things that would make my life ideal. I no longer have time for magic. I'm too busy learning how to live. It's a long, slow process. Sometimes I think I'm going crazy. Sometimes I think, "What's the use?" Sometimes I back myself into that corner of self-obsession and think there's no way out. Sometimes I think I can't stand life's problems anymore, but then this program provides an answer and the bad times pass.

Most of the time life's pretty good. And sometimes life is great, greater than I can ever remember. I learned to like myself and found friendship. I came to know myself a little bit and found understanding. I found a little faith, and from it, freedom. And I found service and learned that this provides the fulfillment I need for happiness.

Fearful mother

I thought an addict was a person who was using hard drugs, someone who was on the streets or in jail. My pattern was different—I got my drugs from a doctor or friends. I knew something was wrong yet I tried to do right—at work, in my marriage, and in raising my children. I really tried hard. I would be doing well and then I'd fail. It went on like this and each time it seemed like forever; it seemed like nothing would ever change. I wanted to be a good mother. I wanted to be a good wife. I wanted to be involved in society yet never felt a part of it.

I went through years of telling my children "I'm sorry but this time it will be different." I went from one doctor to another asking for help. I went for counseling feeling everything will be all right now, but the inside was still saying, "What is wrong?" I was changing jobs, changing doctors, changing drugs, trying different books, religions, and hair colors. I moved from one area to another, changed friends, and moved furniture. I went on vacations and also remained hidden in my home—so many things through the years—constantly feeling, I'm wrong, I'm different, I'm a failure.

When I had my first child I liked it when they knocked me out; I liked the feeling of the drugs they gave me. It was a feeling that whatever is going on around me, I don't know and I don't care, really. Through the years the tranquilizers gave me the feeling that nothing is really that important. Toward the end, things became so mixed up I was not sure what was and what was not important. I was shaking inside and out. Drugs would not help.

I was still trying, but very little. I had quit work and was trying to go back but I couldn't. I would be on the couch afraid of everything. I was 103 pounds and had sores on my lips and in my nose. I had diabetes and shook so that I had a hard time putting a spoon to my mouth. I felt I was out to kill myself and people around me were out to hurt me. Physically and mentally I had a breakdown. I had just become a grandmother and I could not even communicate with a small child. I was almost a vegetable. I wanted to be a part of living but did not know how. Part of me said I'd be better off dead and part of me said there has to be a better way of living.

When I started on the program of NA, there were a lot of people who suggested just everyday things for me to do, like eating, taking a bath, getting dressed, going for a walk, going to meetings. They told me, "Don't be afraid, we have all gone through this." I went to a lot of meetings through the years. One thing has stuck with me, one thing they said from the beginning, "Betty, you can stop running and you can be whatever you want to be and do whatever you want to do."

Since being on the program I have listened and watched many people and have seen them go through many ups and downs. I have used the teachings I felt were best for me. My work area has had to change and I have been going to school. I have had to relearn all the way back to the grammar school level. It has been slow for me but very rewarding.

I also decided that I need to know me better before I can have a meaningful relationship with a man. I am learning to communicate with my daughters. I am trying many things which I wanted to do for years. I am able to remember many things that I had pushed out of my mind. I have found that Betty is not that big pile of nothing but is someone and something that I never really stopped to look at or listen to. April 1 will be my fifth NA birthday. How's that for April Fool's Day!

Fat addict

I am an addict. I used at least fifty different types of drugs on an ongoing basis for a period of eighteen years. I didn't know it when I started using, but I used drugs for only one reason—because I didn't like the way I felt. I wanted to feel better. I spent eighteen years trying to feel different. I couldn't face the everyday realities of life. Being a fat kid, fat all my life, I felt rejected.

I was born in Arizona in 1935 and I moved to California in the early 1940's. My family moved around from state to state and my father was married several times. He was a binge drinker; either he was in a state of self-righteousness or a state of complete degradation. This is one of the many reasons we moved so often.

As I moved from school to school, I would relate various experiences that I had and I would talk about my various stepmothers. For some reason, I was thought to be a liar. It seemed the only company that accepted me, no matter where I went, was the so-called lower-level people, and I never felt I was a lower-level person. It made me feel like I had some self-worth by being able to look down on them.

My family life was confused and painful, but a lot of sound moral values were passed on to me in my upbringing. I always made the attempt to stay employed. As a matter of fact, on most occasions I managed to be self-employed in some type of business. I was even able to maintain some civic status by belonging to fraternal organizations.

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

Somebody told me about the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous when I was in the complete stage of degradation and desperation. Having no place to go, I walked into this fellowship feeling as low as a person can feel, like there was no way out. I was completely and totally morally bankrupt. I knew nothing about spiritual values. I knew nothing about living. Life ultimately was nothing but pain on a daily basis. All I knew was to put something in me—

food or drugs—or to abuse sex to feel good, which just didn't do it for me anymore. I just couldn't get enough of anything.

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

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

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

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
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