

NA TODAY

FEBRUARY 2006

LUST FOR LIFE



FREEDOM FROM ACTIVE ADDICTION

From the Editor's Desk

This issue we have embraced two main topics. One of which is the many stories supplied by people who wrote for entry into the basic text update project, who also sent their stories in to us. The second is the World Service Conference 2006 issue discussion topic of how we as a Fellowship can create a safe atmosphere of Recovery.

It certainly is a subject that we all need to keep alive in our minds and group consciences for the mental, psychological and physical health of our members and Fellowship. But how do we achieve this? How do we rise to each new occasion that confronts us with this issue? How do we flow with the times and keep our Traditions constant?

We need to look after each other and care for each other and as a general rule I think we do. I believe that NA is pretty successful in extending the hand of friendship and support to all those in need whenever that becomes apparent. I have always been most impressed by the willingness of members to exercise real nurture and genuine concern for those of us in need of empathy and protection.

Heck! We're known for the NA Hug! I can still remember my fright when I witnessed what seemed like 13000 NA

members walk towards me to embrace and welcome me to the World Convention held in Paris in 1995! Wow! I wanted to turn and run! But these people were genuinely enthusiastic to see me and knew of no better way to demonstrate their welcome.

I guess when you have survived being on the brink of despair, ravaged by the horrors of addiction, and lived to feel at ease with oneself and the world (mostly!) being clean and seeing someone else embarking or journeying on that path, can cause overwhelming enthusiasm to bubble up.

Furthermore, what I have witnessed at Area, Region, Asia Pacific and World levels of service confirms my belief in the NA spirit. At all levels of service in which I have participated I have seen our representatives worry about issues even before they might happen. The concern is raised and the issue discussed with always the members' needs paramount.

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I have seen service representatives passionate about ensuring the care and protection of our membership, our steps and traditions. The main reason for passion is the care : and the passion seems to be proportional to the care felt and expressed.

Similarly, sponsors show the same care with sponsees, spending hours with each other giving guidance and support. Groups ensure the protection of the Fellowship and its members. We have regular group consciences, not just to report back from the ASC or RSC, but to be open to new ideas, new membership, new challenges and to give open and free discussion.

We hold Unity Days, Spiritual Growth Retreats, Men's weekends, Women's Weekends, Service Learning Days. All of these events are ways in which we express our need and willingness to help and be of service to each other. We cannot help it. It is intrinsic in our nature to be of assistance when the call is made. Indeed it is intrinsic in our nature to be aware with a heightened empathy antenna when there is an unspoken cry for help. We have all witnessed the member at a meeting who looks sad, distressed and we have all at some stage in our Recovery sought out that person to give support and show we care, unsolicited, simply because we empathise and know that a little TLC is needed.

We send each other NA birthday wishes, we send text messages of support in times of trouble, we go to court with

each other. We make an effort for each other. We will go that extra mile. We try not to take sides, we face life's challenges with the emphasis on looking on the spiritual side of life! We try, we give it our best shot.

We have so much to be proud of. Who would have thought this little addict could survive the rigours that life throws at her and stay clean, not go insane, and continue to emphasize a spiritual path and work a spiritual programme and be happy in the midst of it all.

I have learnt so much by observing others, and participating in the Fellowship, stuffing up but staying in tune with the force of our programme, make amends, keep coming, open the mind and heart, and say thank you. Once again thank you for this opportunity to be service. Thank you to my team of committee members.

ROSIE R
Editor and Chair NA Today Committee



Byron Bay Convention Great Success

The front cover of this issue of NA Today was selected for use because it was the recent logo from the Byron Bay Convention. The convention was a great success, with lots of positive feedback and many interstate visitors. 400 people registered though attendance was put at more like 450-500 over the course of the weekend. The convention was a financial success, though this was not necessarily the objective. The Far North Coast Area wishes to thank all those who attended for making the effort and making it a special occasion. They hope to see you all there again next year.

One of the highlights of the convention was a short film memorial at the Friday night meeting to two long standing members of the Byron Fellowship and indeed the Australian Fellowship.

John L and Melissa A, you will be sorely missed.

Controversy Corner

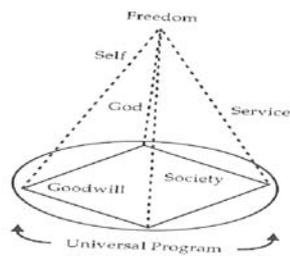
Response to

The NA Today Committee would like to thank all those who sent responses regarding last issue's Controversy Corner. It obviously struck a chord with many people and the author has been inundated with letters, emails, phone calls, visits etc.

Having stirred up that much debate, probably means a few things. Firstly, that NA Today is an excellent forum for disseminating information and that distribution is working well. We will endeavour to ensure that this continues. If people have any other topics of ideas, beefs or dramas that they want to put on the cutting edge on NA, send their articles or ideas to

rsc_natodayworks_chair@yahoo.com.au OR
office@fso.com.au





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A Basic Story

(This story was submitted from a member in Australia for entry into the basic text)

My name is ???? and I am an addict. I am 39 years old and have been clean for 16 and a half years. I live in Australia and got clean when I was 22, so I have lived most of my adult life as an NA member. I have a diverse, full, rich life now, thanks to the program of Narcotics Anonymous.

As an adolescent, my behavior was governed by my compulsion to take drugs and my life was characterized by trouble, violence, prison and poor health. My using was punctuated by counselors, probation officers, psychologists etc, all of which I was forced to see by the law. Rarely could I hear what these people were saying or awaken my soul long enough to hear anything above the rumbling din of self and the desire for drugs. I was so focused on getting what I wanted, what I thought I needed, I ignored most of the moral boundaries that most people take for granted. I stole, lied, cheated, scammed, robbed and in the end was exactly what the basic text says "reduced to the animal level". I hunted around the streets like a hungry wolf, looking for money and drugs. Underneath that cold exterior however,

inside me, I had a conscience somewhere buried under a pile of life's emotional rubble, but I couldn't access it, I couldn't afford to. The responsibility of living a normal life, cleaning up all that rubbish was too great. There were too many things to deal with and my life became a misery of unresolved responsibilities.

I believe every human's real job is looking after themselves and I couldn't seem to do that. Eating, sleeping, drinking water, exercising, staying warm or clean, seemed irrelevant and virtually impossible. The end result was a vicious cycle of hunger, poor hygiene and bad health. Deep underneath, between the layers of self, these inabilities hid a particular emotional pain that I carried. I couldn't feel it or articulate it properly until I got clean. I don't know whether I brought this pain from childhood or whether it came into the world with me, but I still carry it. This pain is not always present, but arises from time to time, as I move through these layers, when things seriously don't go my way, or if relationships end. If I get rejected, left out, treated as second best or am not wanted in some way, the pain can become acute. I think perhaps I used to medicate this pain with drugs. They made me feel better - for a long time they worked well, but in the end the drugs became their own particular pain. They drove me to the edge of

sanity and life and now I no longer see myself as having that option. Using drugs for me is suicide.

When I was 20 years old, I spent two years in Maximum security prison for burglary. In there I saw some of the most brutal human behaviors that I have ever witnessed. After two excruciating years, I was released, with an absolute commitment to stop using. I lasted for 1 hour, before I was stoned an about four different drugs. I awoke from a blackout the following day and my life spiraled out of control for the next few 6 months. The powerlessness of step one was evident, unmanageability undeniable. One night I woke up from a blackout, with blood on me, it wasn't mine; I had a pocket full of money and no recollection. I was frightened about what I was becoming.

One night I was trying to sleep through withdrawals. I had taken some heavy tranquilizers but they hadn't worked properly. I was in a stupor of frustration and futility. The pain of my whole wretched life was caving in on me. I worked myself into a weeping, cursing, violent rage, smashing the room, scratching and punching at my own face. My housemate was terrified and called my parole officer.

The following day, an intervention was done by my parole, counselor and my Mother. They told me they were going to send me back to prison unless I went to NA and did 90 meeting in 90 days. I said I would do whatever they

wanted. They told me that wasn't good enough, that I had to make choices for myself, that recovery couldn't occur until I really wanted to change. I was caught in a limbo of conflicting desires. Of course I wanted to change, but I couldn't, I wanted to use but I couldn't. I felt there was nothing left to do and decided that I would kill myself. I left the intervention that day filled with a sense of absolute doom and desolation. I did a robbery, bought as many drugs as I could afford and overdosed in the Woden Bus Interchange toilets, in Canberra. I wanted to die, but only because there didn't seem to be an alternative to the misery that my life had become.

I think that in the life of every addict there are multiple cross roads - times when we could have stopped and taken responsibility for our lives. I went through the crossroads that day in the interchange toilets and chose the wrong path - but by the grace of God, I was given another chance.

I woke up about a couple of hours later, crumpled on the floor of the toilet, completely defeated, my life a shambles. I walked, trudged, not knowing what to do or where to go. In that state of blind confusion and desperation, the winds of chance blew me like a leaf into a detox centre across the highway, where they took pity on me and admitted me even though I wasn't the required 48 hours clean. I lay naked, curled up on the bed sobbing that night feeling a particular sense of freedom, because deep inside I think I knew it

was over, I had surrendered, I just didn't really know what that meant yet.

At that detox they took people to meetings daily. I struggled through those painful first few days and in a meeting on a Wednesday night in a homeless centre called Ainslie Village I heard and felt the NA message for the first time. "I didn't have to use drugs anymore, there was a way out". I was inspired by the other people who were clearly junkies but didn't seem to be using. They made me believe that maybe there was a chance for me to really stop and have a go at life. I feel sad now writing this; I am much more emotionally in touch with my old mad life now than I ever was back then.

I couldn't imagine how life would play out. I just saw a black hole of the unknown, but I had decided, even if it was just a novelty to give it a go for a couple of days and see how long I could last.

I lasted 49 days. Then I relapsed and the compulsion to take drugs was back upon me with a ferocity that was undeniable. My life spiraled immediately out of control again and I realized that the previous 49 days had been the most trouble free in the last ten years. The relapse lasted for about 2 months, before another detox and the death of another friend through overdose. I have been clean now since the 25th of January 1989 and my clean time is my treasure. I protect it with my life, because it is my life.

I have gone on to do many of the

things that should be done in a life. I own a house and a business. I went to school and got an education. All the normal social assets have returned. But more than any of that, I have loved - at times deeply. I FEEL things, I FEEL everything which I had always been scared of - but it is amazing to FEEL, brilliant and frightening, sad and awesome all at the same time. I am excited to be alive. I am excited about what is to come. I still suffer with existential angst from time to time, and wonder what we are doing here on this planet, but I have decided on a purpose which makes it easier for me with those issues - I care about people getting clean. I have dedicated myself to the path of NA and serving others. I attend meetings regularly which I have for the whole time. I am a member of the local area and the region. I sponsor people and I have an NA sponsor. I work the steps to the best of my ability and I am trying to become the best person I can be. NA truly gave me the key to another life, we keep what we have by giving it away.

Thank you.



What Addictions Does NA Treat?

*by Jeff Gershoff,
WSO Group Services Coordinator*

"I have been a member of NA for six years. I attend meetings three or four times a week. I have a sponsor who is also a member of NA. I follow sponsor direction. I work the steps to the best of my ability. I have written on the steps under sponsor direction. When I came into the fellowship I weighed 158 pounds; now it's 190. I'm only 5' 8" tall. Why have I gotten so fat; why can't I lose weight? I must not be working a program. I eat all the time and can't seem to control my eating. Every day I say that I'm going to cut down on my eating, and every day I fail and eat cookies and chips all night in front of the TV until it is time for bed. I feel discouraged."

You can take the example above and substitute any one of a number of scenarios for the one given: "I can't stop shopping, I can't stop smoking, I can't stop going to prostitutes or cruising singles bars, I can't stop gambling. What is the matter with me? Why can't NA cure me of all of these problem behaviors?"

We hear addicts complain about these things all the time, at meetings, at coffee after the meeting, on the tele

phone. This can give rise to a perception that either NA is failing many people who come here for help, or else the addicts themselves are failing in the execution of their program. Is this so, or is there some other explanation? Is NA not delivering the goods, or is it possible that people expect NA to be more than it is. In other words, to be all things for all people.

Our first step states that "We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable." To try and dispel any notions about what type of addiction the first step is addressing, I've researched our literature: In WSB Bulletin #17, "What is Addiction?" it says: "What about other kinds of addiction? By the word addiction we do, in fact, mean drug addiction. Our Third Tradition says, The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using. Clearly, we mean ...a desire to stop using drugs. . . If we were to broaden our focus beyond drug addiction to include other types of addiction, we believe we would seriously damage the atmosphere of identification in our meetings."

In our Basic Text, on page 3, it says: "Very simply, an addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs." and finally on page 12 of It Works How and Why, we find "No matter how hard we fought, we finally

reached the point of surrender where we realized that we couldn't stop using drugs on our own. We were able to admit our powerlessness over our addiction. We gave up completely."

It would certainly seem by all that is said above, and by other passages in our literature, that Narcotics Anonymous is simply a program focused on recovery from active addiction to drugs, and that any other benefits that might come along are completely gratuitous and are not necessarily within the scope or control of an individual addict, or of the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous.

But what if we look deeper in our literature. Is it possible to find statements seemingly in conflict with the above? Again, from page 12 of *It Works: How and Why*: "The disease of addiction can manifest itself in a variety of mental obsessions and compulsive actions that have nothing to do with drugs. We sometimes find ourselves obsessed and behaving compulsively over things we may never have had problems with until we stopped using drugs. We may once again try to fill the awful emptiness we sometimes feel with something outside ourselves. Any time we find ourselves using something to change the way we feel, we need to apply the principles of the First Step." And from page 9 of the same source, "We address obsession and compulsion here as they relate to our drug use because, when we first come into the program, our drug addiction is how we identify with each other and the pro-

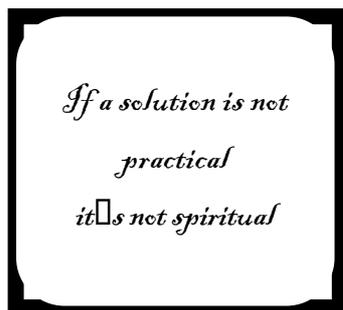
gram. As we continue in our recovery, we will see how these aspects of our addiction can manifest themselves in many areas of our lives."

It appears that what seemed black and white initially is really much more ambivalent than we had previously assumed. Because Narcotics Anonymous has no professionals, and is a program of suggestions rather than "musts," there are many instances where there is not a definitive right or wrong way of doing something. This is not always the case (as might pertain to our traditions, etc.) but in this situation, i.e. applying the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous to behaviors in our life causing us grief, other than drug addiction, it seems that the individual member must ultimately determine what works for them and what doesn't. In interviewing some members with substantial amounts of recovery in NA, one thing is clear: almost every NA member with whom I spoke believes that our Twelve Steps can be applied to virtually any area of one's life where obsession and compulsion have taken root and refuse to leave. It is also clear by the spate of other self-help fellowships, Overeaters Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Prostitutes Anonymous, etc., that the belief that the steps will work in other problem areas as well as drug addiction, is widespread.

In concluding, I'd like to offer a couple of observations. Number one is that in Narcotics Anonymous we are all drug addicts. There should be no mistake

about this. There is one requirement for membership in our fellowship and that is the desire to stop using (drugs). Number two is that some of us might have to loosen up a bit on our too tight grip on what the Twelve Steps might or might not be applied to. Although in Narcotics Anonymous our focus is on the desire to stop using drugs, it appears that the Twelve Steps might help many addicts as well with other problem areas in their life in addition to drug addiction. Number three is that we are confident in the outcome when someone applies the Twelve Steps of NA to their drug addiction, but this outcome is not nearly as clear when the same 12 Steps are applied to other areas. In other words, bottom line, NA is a program for recovery from drug addiction. Granted our methods for this recovery may be applied to other areas of our lives, however the results are not nearly as predictable and are, by definition, not the province of Narcotics Anonymous.

reprinted from NA Way June 1998.



Safety in Meetings

I was assaulted in a meeting. I was hit from behind and hurt quite seriously in the kitchen of the meeting. I charged the person with assault.

I felt that maybe I shouldn't have, but what recourse did I have? The person who hit me was smaller and if I retaliated, I would have hurt them. Plus I thought that the spiritual program implied that I shouldn't be violent anymore. I didn't know what to do, so I did what I thought was the right thing in the circumstances and went to the police.

I know this brings up a lot of issues for us NaNas, because we don't want to be dogs and we want to be forgiving of people and show compassion for where they've come from everything and we don't expect people to change over night but we also have to draw the line somewhere.

I think we should draw the line exactly where everyone else draws it. I'm still cool with what I did. The laws of our society operate inside meetings, if people are violent, or thief, or molest or sell drugs or whatever; they should be liable for the consequences. The law doesn't stop at the doorway of the meeting.

Narcotics Anonymous In Iran

Iran faces up to its most lethal threat - drugs

One in 17 people are addicted, but groups such as Narcotics Anonymous are fighting back

by Robert Tait in Tehran
Thursday October 27, 2005
from The Guardian
<http://www.guardian.co.uk>

The longing for pilgrimage to Mecca should have been enough to give Hasan, a devout Muslim, a spiritual high. But even while paying homage to the Prophet Muhammad, he needed a little help from a friend. "When I went on the haj, I put a lump of opium inside my walking stick," he says, clicking open the fold-up device to show how he concealed the contraband. "I went abroad like that many times, to Mecca, Turkey and elsewhere. I was carrying the best quality opium. I was financially well-off, so I could afford it." The drug-hazed trip to Islam's holiest shrine was the moral nadir of Hasan's 30-year

battle with addiction, which, he says, left him socially stigmatised and emotionally alienated from his wife and sons. The physical signs of a titanic internal struggle against his need to take opium five times a day are manifest in the tell-tale bulbous black bags beneath his eyes. But now he has found redemption. Aged 80, he is the

oldest living success story of Narcotics Anonymous, a rapidly growing grass-roots movement confronting Iran's addiction level - an epidemic defined by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) statistics as the worst in the world - through a nationwide network of open-air counselling sessions.

According to the UNODC, more than 4 million of Iran's 70 million people are addicted to drugs, and the addiction cuts across educational, class, age and economic barriers. Middle-aged professionals and academics are as vulnerable as under-educated, socially deprived teenagers, say experts. Through a cathartic blend of advice, prayers and no-holds-barred confessionals, Narcotics Anonymous is offering an escape. Every night at 10pm, thousands of recovering addicts meet in public parks throughout Iran to exchange tales of shared agonies. Bonding them is the determination never again to yield to the tyranny of addiction, a goal attainable, according to the group's dictum, only through total abstinence.

Gathered in a semi-circle under a moonless night sky, the 40 or so men in Tehran's Barzegar park could have been mistaken for a group of amateur star-gazers. But the impassioned speeches, random hugging and spontaneous outbreaks of applause attested to the earthly nature of their con-

cerns. In this meeting, one of the nightly gathering's most seasoned participants stood up and recounted how he conquered his addiction. He told his fellow-gatherers they could only achieve the same if they admitted their sins before God. The gathering then joined in a "comfort prayer", asking for the strength to overcome their drug habits. Established members, deemed to be "clean", were then assigned as spiritual counsellors to recruits seeking a cure.

Hasan, who owns a laundry business in Tehran, discovered the sessions through his driver, an opium addict. Having cleaned up his act, Hasan is now a mentor to the afflicted. "I have cleaned up this entire commercial neighbourhood," he says, gesturing to the street. "The owners of nearly all the shops round here, the housing agency, the baker, the butcher, the florist, were addicts until I took them to the meetings. As the oldest member, I am an inspiration for other addicts."

Hossein, a 50-year-old doctor who has now recovered from a 12-year heroin addiction, was persuaded to attend following two months' jail for possession. "I had hit rock bottom. When I first went to the meetings, I remember it was hard to admit my addiction and express myself. I was scared. Now, I get drug addicts coming to me for prescriptions for morphine, opium or tranquillisers. I only write the prescriptions on condition that they go to the sessions."

Sheer necessity has dictated that sessions be held outside; demand for Narcotics Anonymous meetings has far outstripped available accommodation since the group began organising in Iran in the mid-1990s. With membership now above 30,000, the group holds 2,200 weekly meetings, the vast majority outdoors, in 183 Iranian towns and cities. Meeting outside has led to some up-lifting human triumphs. In Mashhad, in north-east Iran, a man who had been sleeping in a park was drawn to the large gathering nearby and eventually joined up. He had been one of Iran's leading architects but had lost his status through drug addiction. Through the meetings, he recovered and eventually returned to his former professional life.

The group has encountered tolerance from officials. "When the police come across our outdoor meetings, they leave us alone," said Siyamak, 47, now one of Narcotics Anonymous' leading Iranian organisers after kicking his heroin addiction. "Normally, mass public gatherings in Iran would be seen as political and a threat. It shows they respect us."

Equally unlikely liberal traits are apparent in other facets of Iran's response to its drugs crisis. These include officially approved needle exchange programmes to prevent the spread of Aids, prescription of the heroin substitute methadone, and the distribution of condoms to promote safe sex. It is a marked departure from the previous approach, when addicts were incarcer-

A Moving Story

Nearly 10 years ago when I felt the urge to run from the re-hab I was in, some one said to me "well ya better get another suitcase 'cause ya disease is going with ya'. Somehow, in all my fear and turmoil I got it! I understood that statement to be true. This disease has only one home, In Side Me. Not in the syringe, pills powder or bottle. I can't leave it, sell it, stash or hide it someplace. It comes with me wherever I go. This is a good thing to know.

Recently I relocated. This time not only did the disease come along but also my recovery. When I arrived I found NA waiting for me, not me personally but for any addict stepping through the doors. What a gift! The impact of walking into a room full of strangers knowing (perhaps not feeling but knowing) I belong and can get support continues to be literally life saving. The opportunity to share with other addicts about where I am at today -good, bad or ugly-without interruption, knowing I can have fellowship pretty much wherever I choose to seek it is beyond parallel, not to be minimised. I find the same banners, steps, traditions, uncomfy chairs, tea/coffee making stuff in various degrees of manageability, same literature, same identification, same problem/disease, same solution.

This major move may very easily have compromised my recovery in earlier

days. I needed to stay still long enough in the one location to receive a good grounding education in the program. Having gone through the steps formally more than once, practiced (sometimes well, sometimes not so well) establishing and maintaining all sorts of healthy relationships, learning how to front up and not use no matter what, are essential assets I can't afford to leave behind.

When the time came to move there were not many doubts, but I still checked it out with sponsor, friends etc. It was/is very clear that I was not running away, this was not a "geographical" this was a moving forward, leaving no dirt/grime or unfinished business behind. I am welcomed back anytime. Anyway my HP had/has it covered; nothing was overly difficult, all went smoothly (that's always a hint for me that I have my will aligned with God (a l u h)?

I'm not saying it's easy, sometimes its not, but it is simple. The things I was shown in my first thirty days continue to apply: go to meetings no matter how I feel, reach out, collect phone numbers and use them, share when asked, seek out service opportunities, talk to newcomers, talk to OCM (talk with anyone really, just don't listen to my head in isolation). We may not be able to talk this disease to death but by bringing it

ated in often inhumane conditions in so-called rehabilitation centres.

"They have reached the stage where they can no longer have a hostile reaction to this phenomenon," said Behrouz Meshkini, a consultant on drug addiction, instrumental in introducing Narcotics Anonymous to Iran. "It's a recognition that the approach of arresting addicts and putting them in jail has failed. The key to Narcotics Anonymous' success is its independence. It is the only truly independent NGO in Iran."

Iran is being overwhelmed by a pincer movement of drugs flowing in through its eastern and western borders, as well as its southern sea ports. Enormous quantities of opium and heroin are smuggled from the east - Afghanistan, Pakistan and former Soviet republics such as Turkmenistan. Compounding this is an influx of hallucinogenic and chemical-based drugs, such as ecstasy, from Turkey and through the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, more than 2.6 million Iranians have been arrested on drug offences. Almost half the prison population is serving time for narcotic-related crimes. Iran's police and security forces have been fighting a losing war against the smugglers. In 2003, the country's anti-drug forces seized 220 tonnes of drugs, reckoned by the UN to be just a fraction of the amount entering the country. Since the revolution, about 3,200 members of the security forces have been killed in clashes with

traffickers. For this grim landscape of addiction, the regime has found a convenient scapegoat: the US, Britain and other western countries with forces in Afghanistan, are blamed for failing to stamp out opium and heroin production there. Independent experts see it differently. "We have a traditionally positive attitude in Iran towards opium," says Mr Meshkini. "But the main problem is the sense of depression and disappointment that exists, especially among the youth. A young Iranian is under much more pressure than a young man in, say, Austria, Switzerland or England. Young people here have obstacles to education, finding jobs or getting married."

The Damage Done

Iran has the highest rate of heroin and opium addiction per head of population in the world, according to the UN: one in 17 is a regular user and 20% of the Iranian population aged 15-60 is involved in drug abuse. There are an estimated 500,000 drug dealers in Iran, circulating narcotics with an estimated street value of £1.7bn to £2.83bn. Drug abuse is the main factor behind 60% of divorces in Iran, according to a survey. Official government figures estimate that illegal drugs cost the Iranian economy £630m in 2004. More than 3,200 Iranian law enforcers have been killed in clashes with drug traffickers since 1979. In 2003, officers seized 220 tonnes of drugs, up 54% on the previous year.

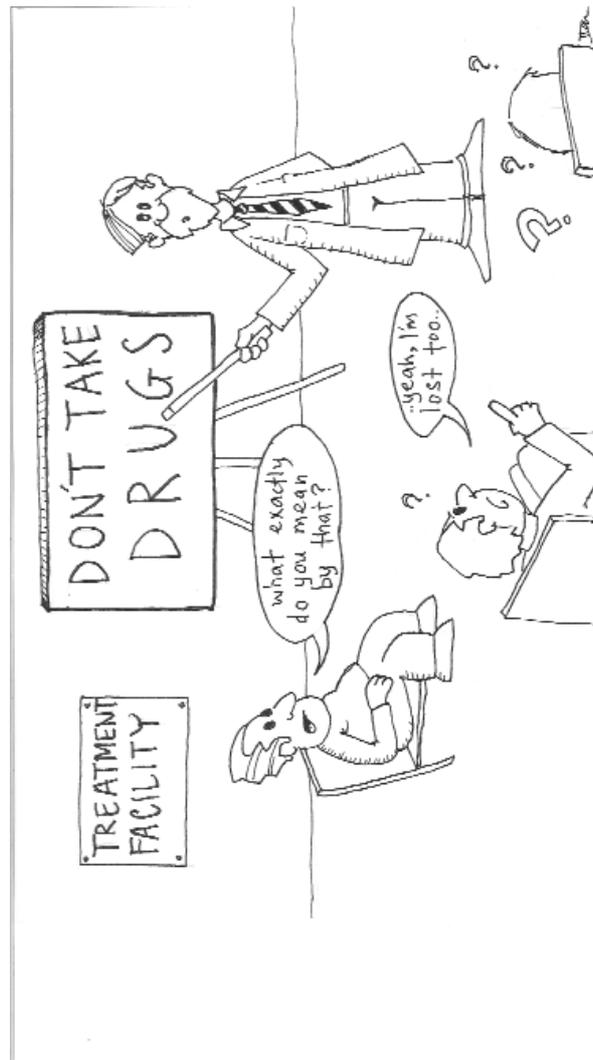
out into the light in company with other addicts seeking recovery we can sure make it weary! I have learnt service and sponsorship are two-way streets, everyone benefits.

One of my favourite cliches in NA is "sometimes you can't save your face and your backside at the same time" it reminds me I don't have to be or look perfect or even good, my primary goal is to get/stay clean, and help others do the same and it is best to drop the pride and ego and just be.

When I first got clean it was very obvious I needed help. Maybe I looked like a train wreck or a wounded animal caught in the headlights, now days thanks to the program, fellowship and abstinent time, it is not particularly obvious. I have to nurture humility and boldness to let people know I need support. No mater how long I am clean, no mater what my circumstances, recovery is always just one day at a time, contingent on my willingness to live the program, be of service and walk a spiritual path. In Gratitude

Lee S L





From Vegas to New York

I just completed the biggest amends I've had to make so far, to my son, by taking him to New York to meet his father and African American family for the first time, on the eve of his twelfth birthday. While I was there I did several meetings and was made feel incredibly welcome by our fellow American recovering addicts. At the first meeting I attended, a lunchtime gig on E14th Street, I was approached by someone to guest speak the next day, and asked if I could get a message to Garth in Sydney. I was reminded just how small the world really is. It was amazing for me to be doing recovery in the neighbourhood where I lived on the street 13 years earlier, among the African Americans and Puerto Ricans who once I used with.

NA meetings in New York aren't as big as I thought they would be; most of the ones I attended were similar in size to Brisbane meetings. At all of the meetings I went to, all of the NA cards were read out in the beginning. A guest speaker spoke, and then called speakers from the room, who raised their hand to indicate their willingness to share, or "qualify", as it's called there. Speakers stayed in their seat to share, and were timed to four minutes. At several meetings the floor was opened before the end for those with a burning desire; who were at risk of using, hurting themselves, or hurting others.

I had lunch with a woman after my second meeting and we became holiday buddies, doing several meetings together, some shopping, and the odd donut and cable TV show. There was real magic at hearing my own New York story shared back to me, and in making a heart connection with another recovering addict. Being able to attend meetings meant I could process the stuff around my son meeting his father (let alone seeing him myself for the first time in over 12 years, meeting his other children, their mother and his new pregnant partner) as it was happening, and I could create a new and healthy relationship with a city I've always loved.

I didn't make it to the women's meeting called Valley Of The Dolls but there's always next time. I did get to watch Willis from Diff'rent Strokes KO Vanilla Ice in a Celebrity Boxing match though, talk with a sponsee in Australia from a game at Yankee Stadium, and eye the Donald Trump menswear line at Macy's... I did get to hear addicts from the other side of the world tell my story, and I was blessed with the opportunity to heal some of the past and create new beginnings for both myself and for my son who now has an open line of communication with his father, brothers, sister, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. I was actually able to go there with an open heart, com-

passion and forgiveness... none of which would have been possible without NA. The whole experience has given me a new perspective on my recovery, and some real gratitude to a program I sometimes take for granted.



Kelly C. Qld



Recovery - A Rare and Precious Gem

I have been clean now for 4 and a half years, but when I stopped using the last time, I really thought that stopping wasn't possible and that a stint in a detox would just be a little holiday from the ground hog day that my life had become;

Up at seven thirty, get my young daughter off to day care, knock on the dealers' door before nine then back to the shop (we lived above) for a long days work sub-contracting to another jewellery shop.

I had to time my visit to my contractor so I wasn't hanging out nor too noticeably stoned. Then pick up my daughter and back to the dealer for a top-up and some take away. Some more work at home before a quick feed for us both and maybe a bed time story. Then back downstairs to work till maybe three in the morning. Day after day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. Probably did 70 hrs a week for the last three years of my using, yet I was in debt and in trouble with the tax department also.

Towards the end I thought it would be a good idea to take up an offer from a relatively big shot to purchase from them as it was cheaper even though they only sold in quantity.(Of course I could control my using and save money!) Before too long I was acting as a go-between to small scale dealers, had a

raging habit and was wanted by the local cops. My work as a legitimate professional had dwindled to next to nothing. I could hardly function as a normal person.

I don't think I realised how miserable I had become. I was 41, I'd been a chronic pot-smoker and heroin-dabbler since I was 15. I'd destroyed two long term relationships (both with kids) and had been hitting up smack full-on, in solitary isolation, for about 4 years. I had ceased contact with all my family and had no friends. I had only one hostage; my daughter, who I dragged through the mire with me.

So, finally approaching my rock bottom, I had sought help first with a D+A counsellor and then, after a few more unsuccessful attempts at stopping, I continued surrendering by going to detox. It was in there that I was introduced and welcomed into NA. Sick and tired as I was, I got dragged off to an H+I meeting where I heard stories far worse (or so I thought) than mine. I saw recovering addicts whose spirits had been returned to them. (mine had gone AWOL!) A faint thought occurred to me that if they could get clean then maybe I could too. I also attended a regular NA meeting while I was in there, and by the time I was to leave I felt a little excited about the prospect of attending meetings on the outside.

Fortunately my area has many meet-

ings each week and I was able to attend every day. The crew from the H+I panel were there and they remembered me. I felt a little bit special. I soon met some others in early recovery and started to feel a part of something! I was asked if I'd like to join a group. I did. Before I knew it, I had been secretary of that group for well over a year and had been back into the detox on H+I panels myself, to share my story.

Life has changed dramatically in what seems such a short period of time; my dark past seems so far away and I must pinch myself from time to time to prevent me becoming complacent. It is only too easy to forget how bad it was for me. I am now married again (to someone in the fellowship) and we have a new baby boy. We are very happy. My eldest son regularly holidays with us (I can even be quite civil with his mum!) and my young daughter is soon to blossom into a young lady. She doesn't remember any of my sordid past (thank God), but she won't come to meetings with me any more!

Today I work only for myself, and no longer do I work ridiculous hours; I'm sure they'd kill me now! Besides, I'd have no time to smell the flowers! I've paid my debts and am able to do all the things that I always wished to do. But I'll never stop going to NA because that's what keeps me clean and on a spiritually rewarding path. I do have an atrocious memory but I'll never forget to have gratitude and also to carry the message, as it was carried to me.

Mark S. Byron Bay



"Any lengths!"

A Bloke Should Be Dead

I left school feeling excited about the future and life in general. I believed that I could do anything. I didn't like rules and I didn't respect adults, as far as I was concerned they were hypocrites. I thought that I was smarter than the average bear and would be successful in life. I didn't need anyone or anything. I really enjoyed drinking on the weekends and smoking pot but wasn't worried about it. Within months of leaving school I became a daily pot smoker and was getting drunk regularly.

Over the next couple of years it seemed that I was always having problems: I couldn't hold a job, I got into trouble with the law, I ended up in hospital a couple of times, I was continuously arguing with and lying to my family, girls didn't want to know me, I changed friends often. I felt that no one understood me. By the time I was 17 I realized that I couldn't live without pot and alcohol. The problem was that I couldn't deal with the world with it either. I couldn't stand my life, I felt suffocated by it. I knew I had a big problem. What had happened to me? What had gone wrong?

At 18, I tried heroin for the first time. I can't really say why, maybe to prove to my mates that I could do it without getting hooked, maybe I was just curious

or maybe I had nothing to lose. I think now that it was probably because I didn't care enough about myself to worry about the consequences. Whatever the case, I loved the feeling it gave me, I couldn't believe it, I was in heaven! I was free! I turned to my mate and said "this is it!" I thought I'd found the answer! Heroin was to become my everything.

I didn't look back, and plunged headlong into a new reality, a world of jails, institutions and death. During my addiction I spent five and a half years in prison. I was admitted to about a dozen hospitals with things like septicaemia, burns, broken bones, dehydration, and overdose. I was locked up in a psychiatric hospital (which I escaped from). I became infected with the hepatitis C virus. I went to seven drug rehabilitation/detox centres. I used in India and ran dope from Thailand. I have had several car accidents and police chases, losing my driver's licence for 21 years (another 12 years to go). I also experienced a great deal of personal loss, missing out on seeing my kids as babies, I lost the trust and respect of my family and two marriages, I saw my friends die but in all this I lost myself, my humanity, the spark of life was dead.

In a rehabilitation centre in 1986 I was exposed to NA for the first time. When

I saw the steps I thought "oh...so that's it, I've gotta make a deal with God and live a life of complete abstinence! Even alcohol! No way, I can't do that! I won't do that!" On some level I realised that it was the truth but, needless to say, I kept using.

During this time I saw people get and stay clean whilst my life got worse. I told myself that I was different to them, that there wasn't anyone in NA like me, certainly no one I knew. I thought they were either weak or old has-beens that couldn't cut it anymore. I wasn't like them.....was I? I didn't believe in the disease concept either I thought is was the biggest cop out I had ever heard. In the years that followed I tried many other things to stop using: I went to counselling with a sincere desire to stop using. I tried going to church and having people pray for me. I went on and off various methadone programs (I always used other drugs when on methadone). I thought getting married and having kids would help me. I moved interstate a couple of times. I tried swapping drugs. I tried drinking alcohol only but none of these things worked, eventually I would use again, usually worse than before.

In 1992 I was released from prison and found that my first wife had left me, so I got some money together and jumped on a plane bound for India. I had the idea that once I was there, I would use for about six weeks until the methadone was out of my system. I would then go to an ashram, dry out, meditate and live happily ever after (or

something). Six months later, I was back in Australia, broke, in a detox unit, in the middle of winter, wondering what had gone wrong! I often thought about NA but I was so resentful and full of pride that I wouldn't go back. "I'm not going to reduce myself to that!" I would say, totally unable or unwilling to see the reality of my situation - as usual, denial was at my side.

One day I was in a motel room in Chaing Mai, Thailand, when I had a seizure. I thought "this is it, you've gone too far this time, you're going to die or end up brain damaged!" I finished up in the shower on my knees begging God for help, I said "God get me out of this one and when I get back to Australia and finish selling the dope I have, I'll get clean, I'll go to NA.....just help me!!!" This was just one of many pledges I made to God. "Please get me out of this one?" I'd say, and when the heat was off, I would forget all about my promise. It seemed that it was always "I'll get clean when....." Or, if I was clean (getting out of prison or detox), then I would tell myself things like, "I'll just have one! I won't let myself get a habit again? This time it'll be different! You're older, wiser, smarter, fitter, you've got more to lose this time, you won't do that again, surely one will be OK....just to take the edge off". Inevitably the compulsion to use would take over and the cycle would repeat.

In 1994 when I was in prison (yet again), I heard that there was a new rapid detox program in Israel. It was

claimed that it would 'cure' opiate addiction. They interviewed a woman from Melbourne, who stated that she was cured. I was sceptical but thought "that sounds like me, an easy way out of this...put me to sleep for three days and I'll wake up a new man!!!" I never made it to Israel.

I was seeing my friends and acquaintances dying more regularly and I began to think that maybe I too was doomed to the same fate, or even worse, that they were the lucky ones! I had all but lost hope. Again I heard of the rapid detox, this time there were free trials beginning here in Australia. I thought that was my chance, and in March 2002 I went into hospital. At the time I was on 150mg of methadone, I had a benzo addiction and was drinking alcoholically. I came out of the treatment a mess, nothing like I had expected, this was no cure. I was in agony but still vowed not to go to NA. I remember being in so much pain at one point, that I dragged myself up and ran head long into a wall to try to knock myself out. I was sleepless for weeks. I started to ring the NA phonenumber for someone to talk to in the endless nights, I must have driven them nuts, they just kept telling me to go to a meeting. Eventually when the pain got great enough I did. I was beaten.

I can't remember much of that first meeting but I knew I had to keep coming back, that there was no magic cure and that by staying clean things would in fact get better. It was hard, I hated everyone, their smiles, the fact that

they had friends and jobs and lives worth keeping. They seemed confident. I wanted what they had but I still didn't think that it could happen for me or that I would be truly accepted by them. I remember thinking that the only reason that people were talking to me was that it is part of the 12th step.

I met a bloke at a meeting who had been asked to talk to me. This was the first person in NA I'd met that I couldn't deny was like me and we quickly became friends. He and a number of other men rallied around me, even when I busted a couple of times, they continued to encourage me and told me to keep coming back. We started a saying, whenever we would see each other or one of us was complaining about life, we would say "A bloke should be dead". The meaning of this was, to be grateful, remember how much worse things could be and how lucky we are.

I felt myself slowly coming alive. In time the aches, pains and headaches left me and I started feeling a little more comfortable in meetings and possibly even optimistic about the future. I felt like the guy in the Matrix movie who was just waking from a life-long sleep. It was like I was experiencing everything for the first time, my senses were alive.

I was still full of fear though, fear of people, fear of not being accepted and fear of being hurt. How was I ever going to make up for the past and be free? I had to find something that real-

ly worked for me, not just the words that everyone else was saying. I had some belief in God and I prayed to have the obsession and compulsion to use removed. I had a little bit of faith in a few men in NA and at times believed that if they could do it then maybe I could? I still often felt that I would have to use one day, that I really wasn't good enough or maybe I was fooling myself? Was I ready to believe in the disease concept?

I have since felt like using many times but no matter how I feel, I don't have to use and that things always get better, not just better, I have learnt that if I hold on in times of crisis, that things get better than I can possibly imagine. If I think I know how things are going to turn out, I can almost guarantee that I'll be wrong. I have learnt that I often don't know what's right for me and that recovery is truly about the journey and not the destination. I remember hearing someone share "don't leave before the miracle happens" I didn't know what he meant at the time but I am starting to. The most crucial things for me in recovery have been to look for the similarities and not the differences, try to accept myself and others, realise that I need help (I can't do this alone) and try to be of service, not just to NA but in my life in general. Today I believe in the disease of addiction. When I go to meetings I relate to everyone who shares in some way, which is a far cry from the guy who thought he was so different. I am not a cardboard cut-out either, my life is different to others' as is the way I have done my recovery, what

has changed is the way I choose to look at things.

Today, I am in a relationship with an amazing woman. I have the love and respect of my family, the same people who wouldn't answer my calls or bail me out of jail a few years ago. I am learning to be a parent and getting to share my kids' journey. I am getting to know myself, my values, likes and dislikes. I can work and be reliable. I have been able to finish things I start, including a course of study. I have had the privilege of being involved in starting meetings in my town and building friendships through service. I am getting better at taking care of myself. When I make mistakes I am able to own up and make amends. I try not to give myself a hard time, tomorrow is a new day, all things pass, nothing is worth using over. Recovery has given me a lot of things but the greatest gift of all is choice, the freedom to choose how I want to live my life. I was a long shot, I was different, but today I'm clean and I'm a winner.

Karl - Lennox Head



Cartoon Connection



Could I get the person behind the pole to come up and share?

WHERE DOES RECOVERY START?

Do you have a home group?
Do you welcome the newcomer? Or
do you sex and romance them?
Do you work the traditions?
Do you have a sponsor?
Do you work the steps?
Do you have a relationship with a
higher power?
What do you do for the newcomer?
Do you go to meetings late, leave
early or spend half the meeting out-
side?

Whether we like it or not, we are role
models for new comers. Newcomers
watch us, like we watched the old
timers, when we first got clean.

Here is an example

Johnny G is 6 years clean, comes to
meetings, maybe once in a while,
arrives late, and disrupts the meeting,
when he arrives. Then goes outside for
a cigarette, after only being there for
ten minutes, again he disrupts the
meeting. Johnny stays outside, and
comes back in, just in time for the
Serenity Prayer.

Q...What message does this give to
new comers?

A...Freddy arrives late, leaves early, it
works for him, and I might try that.

This may sound harmless to you. Well
its not. This is harmful to the newcom

er. Ask any one who has relapsed, they
will tell you, they stopped making
meetings/recovery a priority.

Recovery starts with us as individuals,
and our home group. With out new-
comers, we don't have a fellowship,
and we don't have recovery. As individ-
uals we need to make the newcomer
welcome. As a group, we need to make
them welcome, meet and greet them,
introduce them to other group mem-
bers, make them a coffee.

Maybe as a group you could offer
group sponsorship for that person. The
group could take turns in ringing that
person, picking them up, taking them to
meetings. Maybe just give that person
a meetings list, with all the group mem-
bers' phone numbers.

Points to Consider

Make your recovery a priority;
Arrive at meetings on time;
Share your Experience Strength and
Hope.(Sponsorship,Steps,Service);
Always greet the newcomer,don't sex
and romance them, make them wel-
come;
Encourage newcomers to join your
group
Offer group sponsorship

Remember what our purpose is...
To carry the message to the addict who
still suffers.

Neil D

You're All Stars

	Aries	Don't worry too much. Worry never helps. The best thing is to move forward regardless of how you feel, which I am guessing is pretty shit. There are two worlds, outer and inner. The inner turmoil can be transperceived by focusing on your outer success. Try it. The devil is in the detail.
	Taurus	What a load of codswallop, balderdash, bunkum and any other type of nonsense you have been going on with. Be very real this month. It will pay big dividends. The tasks you have been trying to achieve have been stymied by your own inability to let go. Just let it go mate! It will be OK.
	Gemini	Many times this year you have thought you had it, but then you realised for about the millionth time, there is no "it". Dammit, how did I forget that again? You are a slow learner and a fast forgetter, but you are not Robinson Crusoe in this. Focus heavily on the moment.
	Cancer	Brains are not everything buddy. You could do with a bath, a candle, an incense stick and a good rub down, maybe even some Enya ... oh maybe not! Some music anyway. We have to stop and hear the music or our lives grow silent in passion. The red rose beckons you. Take it. It's yours!
	Leo	True character is revealed when a person is given power. Measure the mark of self by your behaviour on committees. Be kinder, more compassionate, forgiving, but draw a line for those who are not. You are learning the basics of community and are doing a fine job. Roar if you have to lion.
	Virgo	Fastidiously organised, you have really made something of this year so far. The belly rumbles for something different however. How long will this particular brand of reality go on. Are you really happy with it? Making a decision and sticking to it is good, but flexibility gives true freedom.
	Libra	Outer space - how did you get there? You are drifting - Come back to the program. People do know you are gone, they are just afraid of telling you because you have become a little unapproachable. They are feeling nervous too. They love you even if you don't see it or believe it.
	Scorpio	You have suffered the wrath of the fellowship lately, but don't let that blind you what beauty there is. It is important not to confuse the rantings of an individual with the collective kindness of the whole group. You know the old saying, "to find a person's true character, give them some power"
	Sagittarius	Things have panned out well for you, congratulations, but don't forget that half of all good and bad results are luck. The real things in life are likely to blindside you on some tuesday afternoon, they can't be avoided and who would want them to be. Keeping out of harms way doesn't necessarily reduce the chances of harm, life should be a daring adventure or nothing!
	Capricorn	You could take a tear drop and drop it in a teacup, take it down to the river side and throw it in. Your sadness comes from deep below, a rip in your soul that cries to be worth more in your own eyes. We are all equal -never forget it. No one is better or worse in the eyes of a loving god.
	Aquarius	In amongst the riddle of the night lies a dark and daring fright. Don't go out if you fear this thing, don't go out for anything. A monster lays in cautious wait to take you on a romantic date - what's it means this rhyme you'd ask, that is your metaphoric task. Good luck Aquarius
	Pisces	When all things are said and done, you are very happy with your recovery. God is in the broad picture and the devil is in the detail. How you feel today should not affect the program you work. Keep encouraging others to work it with you. Our collective job is to keep waking each other up.



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Registration Steve 07766125728



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Gold Coast QLD: (07) 5571 9222

Sunshine Coast QLD: (07) 5441 7706

Townsville QLD: (07) 4755 2489

Cairns QLD: (07) 4054 3483

Sydney NSW: (02) 9519 6200

Sydney Recorded Meetings Info:
(02) 8230 1645

Adelaide SA: (08) 8231 4233

Melbourne VIC: (03) 9525 2833

Geelong VIC: 903) 5221-0803

Perth WA: (08) 9227 8361

South Coast NSW: (02) 4272 2398

Nth Coast~NE NSW: (02) 6651 3646

Hunter Valley NSW: (02) 4969 6767

Byron Bay NSW: (02) 6680 7280

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