



The Group Conscience

Memories of Thanksgivings *Anonymous*

"On Thanksgiving 2000, I went, with one year clean, to my first H&I meeting in the detox. I looked around and saw my own past in every desperate face, my own pain in every pair of empty eyes."

Thanksgiving is a bittersweet time for me. Memories of Thanksgivings past still haunt me sometimes. For example, the Thanksgiving when my aunt threw me out of her house, saying it should be much easier to get handouts during the holidays, and dropped me off at the nearest shelter. That Thanksgiving I spent in an emergency room, hallucinating and delirious, after I had started talking to "the voices" during the shelter's 12-step meeting.

That was just one of the series of institutions, hospitals, rehabs, detoxes and treatments. Canned turkey, shelter dinners, awkward and shame-filled family visits- these were the holidays for me. Worse by far, though, were the holidays

when I was outside the institutions that protected me from



myself. Those were the holidays darkened by my lying and deceit, money and presents stolen, violent and sloppy intoxication, and hours and hours of lateness, or absence. Whether I was there or gone, I

was a shameful, painful presence in my family's life.

On November 15, 1999, I reached the end. I was done. That Thanksgiving my family made their last visit for hospital cafeteria turkey with a side of shame. I stayed clean and began the journey of recovery. On Thanksgiving 2000, I went, with one year clean, to my first H&I meeting in the detox. I looked around and saw my own past in every desperate face, my own pain in every pair of empty eyes. I looked into the mirror of myself and saw my own past and future, and I knew I could never, just for today, look back.

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Sharing Honestly by Allen J.

I prefer silence. No sharing. No revealing. No Vulnerability. It is safe. I may look like a fool, but without speaking, there is still some doubt. Yep, I prefer silence.

My disease prefers silence too. My addict needs to be sneaky. Bright light and truth reveal too much. My addict needs to work quietly, invisibly. The ambiguous phrase. The subtle humor. Wave the flag with the right hand while lifting a wallet with the left.

Yep, the addict prefers silence.

My Recovery demands sharing, revealing, honesty. I am shocked, amazed, astonished. My Recovery feels good. There is warmth, comfort, hope. Sneaky actions lose their importance. Respectable behavior yields self-respect. Yep, Recovery is Kool!

I shared honestly the

other day and felt better. My fears, my hopes, my expectations. Someone took offense. Sorry about that! I love you too, yet I cannot love you if I don't love me. Shared once it is a burden lifted. Shared often it is gossip. Yep, there is balance in sharing that includes silence sometimes.

Recovery is Kool! ■



Though I can't control which thoughts fly into my brain, I can decide which ones I'll allow to take up space! Just like a restaurant or store, anyone can walk in the door, but as long as I display the sign, "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone," I can choose which customers get to stay!



Untitled by John H.

We were talking at work the other day, and I made a self-deprecating remark about my "spaciness," saying, "I hadn't used my brain for years, so its like a new thing to me now." Truth of the matter is, my brain is where I'd lived for my whole life, blindly following this fantasy path that always ended up as a horror story. You know the question in the Basic Text, "In the end, did we realize that we hadn't used the drugs, they had used us?" That's kind of how it was with my mind. I put wrong information in at first, created this program for living that I thought would bring me happiness and fulfillment, but since the core was corrupt, the program could never succeed. I'd get close every now and then, finding a good relationship, job, or living situation, but then the "John" factor would enter the equation, and things would get all screwed up, all over again.

Miraculously, I got clean, and began replacing the misinformation in my sick, addled brain with truths that had worked for you, and so gave me a little hope that they could also work for me. Now, my brain isn't like a hard drive on a computer, so I can't just wipe it clean and reformat it. All of those lies I have learned

from the time I was a kid are still there, and they still try to corrupt my thoughts today. I call this my disease. Little by little, through the honest appraisal I am giving myself through the inventory process and through sharing openly about the insanity I still struggle with in different areas of my life, I'm slowly becoming able build some firewalls in my mind if you will, recognizing the symptoms of self-centered, self-destructive behavior, or if I am acting obsessively or compulsively in any way. I'm learning more about the God of my understanding, and seeing more quickly the things that my loving Higher Power would not have me do. With this awareness comes a willingness to change my beliefs, attitudes and behaviors on a daily basis, resulting in a happier, saner, more serene "me."

This isn't an easy, do it once and forget about it process at all, for even my best beliefs or efforts can be tainted by that one diseased thought that I let creep in as a reservation, so I have to be constantly vigilant, always on guard. I can be going along, feeling totally God-centered, and one of those fleeting, insane thoughts sort of swoops down into my day. Whether I grab

onto that thought and let it take me off in another direction (which always leads to the same place—unhappiness, shame and guilt, desperation and fear), or shoo it away and continue on the path my God has chosen for me, is up to me. Some days, I have to admit, I still fall into the trap, for many times these thoughts seem exciting and fun, and they try to make this recovery path seem boring and dull. They promise the rush of instant gratification that my mind and body have obsessed over for all of my life as opposed to the steady, calm serenity of doing the next right thing, and some days, the carnival ride seems too good to pass up. Its kind of like the other sentence in the Basic Text though, that says, "the higher the drugs took us, the harder we fell." I'm growing to appreciate the steadiness of recovery's choices more and more today, for the joy I feel through them beats anything I had found "out there," so when I catch myself paying too much attention to an idea, attitude or behavior that I know is harmful to me, I put up that sign, "We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone," and my Higher Power and I go back to improving my life and the lives of those around me. ■

Thanksgiving continued from page one.

Since that day 6 years ago I have never missed a Thanksgiving at detox. It gives me the kind of gratitude I can never forget or take for granted. This program and my life are a gift given to me those few years ago that I only keep by giving away constantly, cease-

lessly and without reservations. My disease never slept- neither can my gratitude. My gratitude continues to speak today as I carry this simple, lifesaving message to the people just like me, like us, who suffer alone in treatments and detoxes and jails during the holiday sea-

son. The message is one of hope, yes, but today we can tell those people suffering, swallowed by their shame, that they not only never have to use again- they never have to be alone again. They can come home to NA. We are all here waiting. Welcome. ■

There Are No Musts... by Bruce F, Massachusetts

From time to time, people make statements at NA meetings with the force of a proclamation. Sometimes these statements even sound profound when we first hear them, but they simply aren't true.

A case in point: In my area, it's popular to include the following statement in meeting formats: "There are no musts in NA, but we do have one rule that applies to everyone: There are no drugs or paraphernalia allowed at our meetings. This is for the protection of our group."

I'm not arguing with the rule that disallows drugs and paraphernalia at meetings. It's the other part, the "no musts" part. As I found by reading our literature, there are many "musts" in Narcotics Anonymous (about 175 just in the Basic Text, *It Works: How and Why*, and *Just for Today*), especially if you want to stay clean. Unfortunately, the "no musts" statement has become accepted to the point where it is being routinely included in meeting formats. I believe this to be injurious to the newcomer (and everyone else). I also believe it to be contrary to Traditions Four and Five. It does reflect on NA as a whole and is hardly in keeping with our primary purpose.

As I went through our literature to find the musts, I was struck by what a beautifully crafted, God-given program we have, and, not having seen a list of "musts" anywhere else, I wanted to share a few of them with you.

From the Basic Text

"We...must abstain from all drugs in order to recover." p. 18

"We must separate what was done to us from what we did to others." p. 37

"...our recovery must involve much more than simple abstinence." p. 53

"Unity is a must in Narcotics Anonymous." p. 60

"Staying clean must always come first." p. 82

"In order to receive, we must be willing to give." p. 102

From *It Works: How and Why*

"...we *can* learn to be honest and we must begin to try." p. 9

"No matter how difficult our progress, we must persevere." p. 62

"To work the Seventh Step, we must get out of the way so that

God can do God's work." p. 69

"...we must rely on faith." p. 71

"We must avoid projections..." p. 77

"We must let go of resentments..." p. 78

"...we must make amends." p. 82

"We must make use of what we've learned..." p. 113

From *Just for Today*

"We must live the program everywhere we go, in everything we do." p. 5

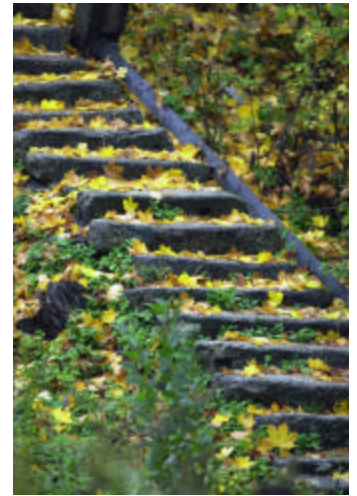
"...we must come to our own understanding of a Higher Power..." p. 46

"...we must also share this inventory with another human being." p. 76

"We must trade in our old cynical doubts for new affirmations of hope." p. 115

"...we must allow others to get close to us..." p. 348

As an addict who used for 27 years, and who now—through the grace of God and the help of Narcotics Anonymous—has been clean for more than twelve years, I am grateful our program has things we must do. Our "musts" point the way to recovery and offer hope to the still-suffering addict. ■



Celebrations to Announce!!

11/30 - Mike B. 6 Years
@ Plan B - Unity Club

12/14 - Art J. 10 Years
@ Plan B - Unity Club

12/14 - Jim M. 17 years
@ Plan B - Unity Club

1/4 - Dan J. 5 Years
@ Plan B - Unity Club

12/5 - Gary B. 5 Years
@ Free to Live - Cascades

12/29 - Daniel T. 5 Years
@ New Beginnings - Chantilly

Anniversaries to Announce!!

11/28 - Steve K. 8 years

11/28 - Charlie R. 19 years

11/29 - Joanna J. 6 years

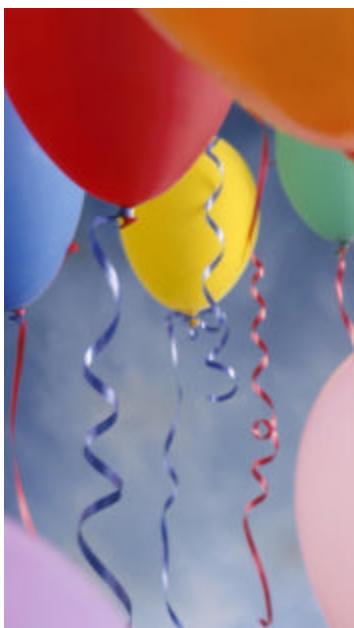
12/17 - Howard G. 24 years

12-20 - Om S. 5 years

12/21 - Ronnie B. 19 years

12/21 - Dan S. 9 years





Dulles Corridor Area of
the Narcotics
Anonymous Program

E-mail:
groupconscience
@hotmail.com

www.dcana.org

Upcoming Events!

Submit events to groupconscience@hotmail.com to be posted

DEC 17th - SHEVANA presents Christmas Lunch and Play

Lunch at noon, "A Christmas Story" at 2:30 pm

www.waysidetheatre.org

DEC 18th - Area Service 2-5 pm St. Timothy's in Herndon

DEC 30th - Jan 1 EORACNA VI Convention in DC

Sophie G. Registration Chair 202 636 5680

DEC 31 New Years Eve speaker & Dance 7:30 pm

Community Lutheran Church, Sterling

For More Info call Rick C. 703 860 8386

DCANA Ski trip coming up soon!

deposits due!!! Call Rick for info 703 860 8386

NA is a nonprofit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We meet regularly to help each other stay clean. We are not interested in what or how much you used, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help.



Our area is located in Northern Virginia and holds about 20 meetings per week in Oakton, Reston, Chantilly, Centreville, Sterling, Leesburg and Round Hill.

24 Hour Help Line 703 435 1230

C & P Region Help Line 800 543 4670