

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. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only one requirement for membership, the desire to stop using.

— The Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Fifth Ed.

It's Not a Cage If You Call It Home

For many years of my active addiction I felt confined to a certain mindset of a lifestyle. It became a natural component of my life, for a time I accepted that this was how life was going to be. My life would revolve around the topic of getting and using, nothing else seemed to matter.

When I first started using I was young, in my early teens and as time moved on I always thought to myself: 'when I am an adult I will stop using' and when I became an 'adult' this idea was long gone. What I thought were youthful indiscretions became my adult lifestyle. As time progressed so did my addiction, taking me from what I use to consider recreational drugs to harder drugs. I would have moments of dire panic when obtaining was difficult or not having the means to obtain and doing unimaginable things to be able to continue this life. This seemed how life was supposed to be for me, I knew no other way. I became trapped in the cage of addiction and it became home.

My life was progressively getting worse and worse but I wasn't aware of this, my mental state became fragile and I did everything that I could not to be in that mental state. My cage felt like home and I was a resident. Not a house guest, a squatter or even sub-letter but a mortgage signer. I had vested interest. Why would I leave? What was to gain outside this cage that would make leaving worthwhile? This life had become so ingrained in me that even with a desire to discontinue, I could not. It took me a long time of thinking about doing something and a longer time to actually do something. But when it all finally came to that moment of clarity, I knew it was time for a change.

I hit my bottom and wallowed in it for a period of time because the pain was what I was use to. It was my way of knowing that I was still alive. If things were feeling good and going well I would have questioned whether or not I was dreaming. But the pain let me know that I was in reality.

Life could not continue like this, I was self-imposed to my cage and self-imposed to not leaving. Something had to change and I thought about what that change could be. I would go to sleep at night and wish I would never wake up, I hurt so much physically and mentally I rather die than do something about it. My wish never came true and finally a friend of mine told me of his experience working the program and gave some encouraging advice. I was frightened, so frightened inside that when I went to my first meeting I had to circle the block just to get my emotions to settle and walk into the front door.

That meeting was the first of many miracles and changes to come to my life. For the first time in my life I had heard other people say out loud the crazy ideas I kept in my head for so many years and that I thought were my ideas. My feeling of uniqueness went away and I was surrounded by people who were once in their own self imposed cages and would show me how to get out of mine as long as I asked. Actually, some people told me about how to get out without asking. They could see the bars around me and knew the right words to say.

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The message of our meetings

"The fact that we, each and every group, focus on carrying the message provides consistency; addicts can count on us."

Basic Text, pp. 64-65

Tales of our antics in active addiction may be funny. Stories of our old bizarre reactions to life when using may be interesting. But they tend to carry the message more than the message. Philosophical arguments on the nature of God are fascinating. Discussions of current controversies have their place — however, it's not at an NA meeting.

Those times when we grow disgusted with meetings and find ourselves complaining that "they don't know how to share" or "it was another whining session" are probably an indication that we need to take a good, hard look at how *we* share.

What we share about how we got into recovery and how we stayed here through practicing the Twelve Steps is the real message of recovery. That's what we are all looking for when we go to a meeting. Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the still-suffering addict, and what we share at meetings can either contribute significantly to this effort or detract greatly. The choice, and the responsibility is ours.

Just for today: I will share my recovery at an NA meeting.

From Just for Today p. 368, copyright NAWS, 1991

It's Not a Cage If You Call It Home

(continued from page 1)

As I kept coming back to meetings and meeting more and more people the readings started to mean something more than just words, one phrase always stuck out to my ears:

“The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.”

The program of Narcotics Anonymous and the people who make this program what it is have done so much for me that paying them back is impossible. All I can do is try to one day help someone out of their cage. The feelings I had and my desire to change are not complete but are a work in progress. I have heard many times ‘progress not perfection’ from many people but I have believed since I started this program, progress is perfection.

As long as I keep coming back to meetings and stay open to friendly advice things will get better. As long as I continue to actively strive to be better, to not be that person whose only thoughts were circled around getting and using I am doing something better for myself. I am working the program.

— Gary L.



Perfectly Flawed

It's hard for me to imagine feeling any way other than flawed. In so many ways I see myself as less than, incomplete, unlovable. As long as I can remember something has been unbearably wrong with me. I'm too fat, my face is out of proportion, my nose is too big, my back is crooked, I'm shy, I'm scared, I'm grossly scarred...I am perfectly damaged if I have any perfection. Most days it's a task to look in the mirror and see the image that glares back at me. Sometimes I don't know if the unapproving scowl I see is my own, or if it belongs to the reflection I see. It's often as if it were its own independent image devoid of any ownership on my part, telling me it wants no part of me at all.

Feelings are such a mixed bag for me because self loathing is such a prominent theme in my life. Obviously I love feeling happy and a part of something, but that is so rarely the way I feel. So for a long time it was just easier to dull any feelings at all. Now that I'm not living in an anesthetized state, it's so difficult to comprehend what's going on in my own head. So often when I am happy I have a lot of shame...why should I truly feel good? But at the same time, the small glimpse at joy often gives me hope that maybe I can live life without feeling like a pile of scum.

So many people throughout my life have hit me with the old “you can't love anyone else until you learn to love yourself.” For me, it kinda works a different way these days. I'm learning to love myself because I have people that tell me they love me everyday. I know these people get me, because I've heard them share the same feelings that I have. I believe they get me, and I believe that they want what is best for me. And no, everyday is not a good day for me; some days I just want to crawl into a dark hole and hide. But being a part of this “we” that I now live in, most days I'm not afforded the “luxury” of a pity party.

I don't think I'll ever feel perfectly comfortable with myself, in fact I'm sure I won't. But I do have gratitude to be where I am these days, even with all the flaws.

—Jason K.

I Live In A One Spoon Apartment

Heroin was my lover. He wrapped me up in a warm soft blanket and reassured me everything was going to be alright. And it was most of the time. Even when I was sick, he would return and make everything perfect again. He was my entire world, he and I all alone but together. No one else mattered, there wasn't time, the outside world didn't exist, I had no friends, no family, just a perfect lover, an insulated life, and my beautiful cats. When he was good, I couldn't get enough. When he misbehaved, I made do and waited for him to return in all his glory. Our love affair lasted for two years. Imagine how lucky I felt!

Do I miss him now? Rarely. It was a brutal breakup I wish on no one. Do I want him back? Not when I look at the scars that are on my feet, hands, and legs. He left me physically beaten but grateful. I will always wear these scars of what was and hopefully will never be again. He left me with one spoon. I cherish it. It reminds me I have food, clothing, shelter, an apartment, great friends, family, and a brand new world to explore freely again.

I purposely scarred myself tonight for ever. It was a beautiful thing, one addict tattooing another addict in my very own one spoon apartment. Even if I lose that one spoon, I will never forget it or him. It will be with me always as a constant reminder of a war fought and thankfully lost.

The significance was not lost on him, either. He has ten years clean and has obviously worked hard on himself. Even though his life is difficult now, he impressed me with his graciousness. He seemed so healthy. He never complained, just spoke of the situation with sorrow. He was so inspiring. He spoke of positive future plans. I knew in my heart that this was good recovery. He has what I want. I cried when he left, not for me, but for what can be. He gave me hope with that new scar that I will always love.

I now know I need to surround myself with people who have strength and I need to relax and be tolerant. I thought a lot of clean time equaled good recovery – not so. I need to not react to situations I cannot control and experience them for what they are. I need to step outside of myself and stop judging so I can learn that much faster.

Today, like every day that I have been clean, I am grateful for so many things. I wish I could share that with everyone. I try to always see the silver lining and live every day as best I can. I try to laugh and have fun, for I know I will not regret that. I try not to live in the past or the future. And now I am going to curl up with my cat on the couch and be thankful I met someone who gave me hope and a smile today.

And you know what my new tattoo says?

“One Spoon Apartment.”

—Dee Dee M.

A Pet Peeve

One of my pet resentments is when the chairs at meetings I go to select speakers who are clearly working a program in another fellowship – if they are working a program at all. Here is what the Narcotics Anonymous information pamphlet titled “The Group” says about selecting speakers for NA meetings:

Speaker

The NA member chosen to speak at a meeting needs to be someone who is working and living the NA program of recovery, which is the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. In areas where there is not an abundance of NA members with substantial clean time or experience with the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, there is the possibility that a group inexperienced in Narcotics Anonymous may misunderstand NA traditions and invite speakers from outside the NA Fellowship. There are several ways to avoid this situation. Our Basic Text, for instance, reminds us that NA members from other areas are willing to drive long distances to support new groups. The speaker helps fulfill the group’s primary purpose, carrying the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. When speaking at an NA meeting, we should be careful to deliver a clear message of recovery by identifying ourselves as addicts recovering from the disease of addiction. It is not necessary to dwell excessively on our active addiction or “war stories,” because we all know what it was like to use. We came to Narcotics Anonymous to stop using and we are here to share our experience, strength, and hope of recovery.

Perhaps by publishing this section from “The Group” in Straight Hope and letting other members know not just about my own feelings of resentment but of what a meeting chair’s responsibility is when it comes to choosing a speaker, I will be able to let go some and enjoy my meetings better. Thanks for letting me share,

—*Shyam N.*

When you are ready for help with your drug problem, call the N.A. Helpline.

toll free: 800.543.4670

local: 202.399.5316

With the frosty season fast upon us and the holidays all fraught with their own baggage of what might have been and what should be, with the deaths that are inevitable at this time of year so completely out of keeping with decorations and all the jingles exhorting us to go out and buy, it is for me so completely necessary to keep near you and the comfort our recovery generates when all can seem so bleak and hopeless, vapid and dull, and so downright sad and lonely. Then too there’s the likelihood of having some fun with old friends, brushing up close to grog and nog, the Red Noses snorting happily in the bathroom, and those cute little dwarves and reindeer who so often crop up in festal throngs, replete with crystal flakes falling from the sky: Dopeie, Huffy, Puffy, Guzzler, Vixen, and all the rest of the HoHoHoes that can so easily spell my undoing even these many years from my last hit. Yes, good times can be a trap too it says in our literature and for my money — too sparse this year to buy lavish gifts but plenty flush enough to get me in a new pair of handcuffs — the best right place to be for the holidays is at an NA meeting.

If I survive Christmas, which is fairly likely since I will take a service position at one of our many marathons, I will spend the second-to-last day of this year (or at least an hour or so of it) taking a meeting into the biggest detox in Montgomery county. There I will be greeted by addicts in all stages of withdrawal from a vast and potent panoply of different compounds.

One of the first times I carried a meeting to this particular detox it was New Year’s Eve and I felt so resentful for being dragged away from my friends who were getting ready for the talent show at Jennifer Street and Connecticut Avenue where we hold meetings marathons each year. It was a long drive. There was a lot of traffic. And I was feeling like, “no fair, why do I have to do it, and on this day of all days,” etc., etc., etc.. Then I got there and felt the whacked energy of a whole bunch of recovering addicts at the giddy edge of a new, different, hopeful way of life. Never in my life had I felt so completely in the right place for a New Year’s Eve. And now, many years later when this time comes around, I always look forward to the most rock and roll party of my party season, the warmth of a big group of people really getting right in a nice, warm, slightly smelly detox cafeteria.

And death, too. A friend died earlier this week. He overdosed and died just turned 22 years-old. And I tried my anger and I tried my resentment and I tried my survivors’ guilt and I tried as I always try when a friend dies to be angry at God, but what came through as I thought, and was reminded of all my legion dead all from our disease, is how important it is that we all stick together in the hard times and the good, and remember the fragility of this recovery we so tenuously hold and keep by sharing. Out there at this time of year is no very pleasant or warm place to be. Anybody remember trying to cop when nobody was out Christmas morning? Even the dealers were nice and comfortable and warm inside. Or that aching, pathetic loneliness crawling up from out of a black-out...

The salve for my survivors’ guilt and, most important, revenge against the vicious, cunning, baffling disease of addiction is to get to a meeting and keep our home fires burning. The friends we lose are lost forever, but new ones come if only we save a place for them. And the only way I know to really help a suffering addict is to bring him to an NA meeting. That’s why this addict who suffered plenty enough in service to his addiction will be providing service to Narcotics Anonymous come this holiday season. The one life I am sure to save will be my own. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for it.

With love from Brie S.

It works if you work it!



LIVING MIRACLES

Doug K.	Dec 6	The Alternavie``	23 yrs
Juanita	Dec 6	Progress in NA	1 yr
Carolyn F.	Dec 13	Progress in NA	9 yrs
Jamie S.	Dec 19	Fresh Start	1 yr
Jen M.	Dec 25	Good Times	15 yrs
Hot Rod	Jan 9	Speak Easy	19 yrs*

**There was something about food at Rod's anniversary and dancing?*

Area Events For December/ Early January

December 12: Regional Service Committee Meeting

10a-12p subcommittee meetings, 12-1 lunch, 1-4 RSC
 Carmody Hills Baptist Chrch,
 6501 Seat Pleasant Dr., Capitol Heights, MD 2009

Free event hosted by South Potomac Area

Holiday Meetings Matathons

Dec 24-25, Dec 31-Jan 1, 10p-7p

Food, fun, fellowship & meetings every hour through the night and day

Wesley UMC, 5312 Conn Ave NW DC

Free events hosted by the Rock Creek Area

Subcommittee Meetings

H&I (Hospitals & Institutions): Third Thursday every month at 7:00 P.M. at Christ Congregational Church, 9525 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, MD. Contact Latonia R. (301) 467-4124
 Lania.Rich@verizon.net

Montgomery County Area Service: First Tuesday of every month at 7:30 P.M. at Silver Spring Presbyterian Church, 580 E. University Boulevard, Silver Spring, MD 20901. For more info, ask members with clean time.

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Service Positions Available:

Beginning Miracles needs a chair. This meeting needs support
 Older Toddles needs a GSR and GSR Alt.

Meetin' in Wheaton needs a GSR and GSR Alt.

NEW MEETING in CIARKSBURG

Score Some Hope

Mondays, 8-9p

Community of Faith UMC

22420 Frederick Road, Clarksburg, MD

THE LIE IS DEAD GROUP—Tuesday at 7p

Now 60 instead of 90 minutes

BEGINNING MIRACLES GROUP—Monday at 7p

GOOD TIMES GROUP—Friday at 7p

OASIS—Monday at 8p

WOMEN WITH HOPE—Monday at 7p

ALL NEED YOUR ATTENDANCE SUPPORT

WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE A MEETING!!

A Special Invitation:

Straight Hope is a newsletter for, by, and about members of Narcotics Anonymous and our adventures, tortures, trials, and travails, happiness, joy and freedom living a life of recovery from drug addiction the NA way. We need your help! Please submit your NA recovery related prose, poetry, drawings, cartoons, musings, anecdotes, doodles, and whatever else you deem useful for serving our primary purpose to:.. Uh oh, I just checked the address and can't get access to it. For now, please e-mail your work to:

briesalzman@verizon.net

Thanks for your help!

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**Straight Hope should be available as an HTML at
 CPRNA.ORG**

Save Paper. Check it out.



For Help Starting A New NA Meeting.. Contact.

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