



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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