A Matter Of Principle

A story of how Narcotics Anonymous came of age...

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Foreword

This book is semi-autobiographical. It’s my story about how the Spiritual Principles found in the NA program affected me and effected change in our fellowship. I don’t intend it to be anything more or less. There is a great deal of detail about the history of NA here, written from my memory and from the perspective of my personal experience. Someday I may document it - all of it could probably be documented - and I welcome anyone to document these events either to support what I say or to oppose it. However I did not write this as a history book.

We, in recovery, learn from “day-one” that in order to keep it we must give it away. This book is my attempt to give away the spirit of the lessons I learned during the development and maturation of participatory service for Narcotics Anonymous. It became obvious to me that the Open Participatory spiritual atmosphere is what allowed NA as we know it to develop. Open participation defined what our program of recovery from addiction became philosophically, and what most of our local group recovery meetings are to this day. It was this frame of reference that allowed our Basic Text to
be written by addicts for addicts, and this frame of reference is the virtual source of the subsequent growth of our fellowship. The NA we have today is the direct result of Open participation.

I want to keep what NA and the loving spiritual force I found in NA have given me, so I am giving it away, as completely and as concisely as I know how. Just like in sponsorship, I will share how recovery happened to me, how I learned about Spiritual Principles, issues that present challenges to my recovery, and how I deal with those challenges. My recovery was enhanced and encouraged by my experiences, and my recovery was challenged by the forces of addiction I found in those experiences.

Regarding the people I mention on these pages: I have prayed and meditated on this question, and the guidance I seek is not yet clear. I have mentioned people who are dead by their full name, and people who are still alive by their first name only.

Much of what you read here may be surprising to you. I know of no other attempt to share accurately how and why NA grew from the obscure isolated fellowship of the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s to the major force for recovery from addiction it has now become. There are very few people who can relate the truth of this time in NA to you, and fewer still
that would be willing to. Several people, who were there and knew the truth have died, some have been driven away from our fellowship, and many others are still around but are not positioned so the fellowship can hear them or learn from their vast experience.

And, of course, the disease is still with all of us and, some are still controlled by it. Perhaps the future will bring positive change to our fellowship so that the best of how we got here is no longer hidden or marginalized or lost. I can only pray and take action so that may become possible. Here is my first attempt...
Introduction

I am the author of this book.

It is written in the first person because all of the experiences and observations are mine, yet since it is about recovery and service I cannot claim originality. Many others have influenced me and many participated in the events I shared.

Part of this effort is service to NA, part is service to mankind, and part is observation and expression for the sake of antiquity.

As far as credit goes I have called myself Anonymi. Some will figure out my identity from my story. Please honor my anonymity, for it does not really matter who I am for the purpose of this book. My public anonymity is precious to me for all the reasons anonymity is sacred to our fellowship.

But more than that, many members could have written this, since many experienced nearly everything that is shared here. And you could have too - it’s just a question of time and place. I was there, and now I am here so I am obligated to share this.
This book has a mission: to make the principles of Recovery from Addiction more available to addicts seeking recovery, and to make the principles of service more available to NA Members seeking to be of Service to NA. Above cost, all money collected through the sale of this book goes to funding that mission. See www.anonymi.info for periodic accounting.
Beginning at the Beginning

Danny Ward was really a good kid. He wanted to do well in school, but it was hard for him, so I had been hired to help him with English. All those rules just didn’t make much sense to Danny.

To be honest, those rules didn’t always make much sense to me either, especially the ones about spelling. Maybe it was my own tendency toward rebellion, even anarchy, which touched something in the boy. In any case, Danny and I always got along well.

I wanted to succeed at helping Danny. He was very bright, but because he failed to fit into the academic model, the school had labeled him a slow learner. They’d wanted to teach him English as moral etiquette or religion and, of course, they had failed – as they do with so many. I was teaching him how to use English as a tool, and he was responding – I was succeeding.

But success was not something I was prepared to accept. I’d approached success many times and many ways in the recent past. I’d come right up next to it, only to hit some tangent and fly off directly into the comfortably familiar waiting arms of abject failure.
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That day Danny was on a repetitive practice task in his studies, so I went to the bathroom. This was a situation I always programmed to “inadvertently come up” about halfway through each of our hour-long tutoring sessions. You see, I was going into the bathroom to “get well” enough to make it through the next half hour.

I measured out just enough white powder to get the job done, and I injected myself. The familiar blessed narcotic euphoria washed over me for a split second, then the familiar sickening narcotic remorse flooded it out. My conscience screamed at me – “You filthy rotten addict! You are completely hopeless!” I had become everything that I despised, and there was no escaping the deep black hole whose walls defined the boundaries of my life.

When I went back out I told Danny that he was OK now, that he didn’t need my sort of help any more, and that the tutoring sessions were over. He looked bewildered and hurt, since I had managed to cut him loose in a way designed to make him feel that he was somehow at fault. You see, like all addicts, I was an expert at transferring the blame for my failures over to those people I had failed.

No one needed to convince me that I was an addict, or to help me believe that my condition was completely hopeless. I’d never known anyone as
bad as me who had ever done anything but get worse – and I was getting worse. I needed more and stronger drugs every week just to get by. When my drugs ran out I did desperate things to find more. I associated with desperate people, capable of anything. Death or incarceration were the only prospects I could see for my future, and I all I wanted out of life was to stay as high as I could until one or the other came along.

And so I had sacrificed my first wife and my son on the altar of addiction. I had sacrificed my second wife and her children. I had sacrificed my profession and my career, and every subsequent job. With nothing left to sacrifice, I was just treading water in a sea of drugs.

No one needed to convince me that I was an addict!
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CHAPTER 2

Clean

The fact that I ever really got clean is a true miracle. But like most addicts, before there could be a trigger for that miracle to get me clean I had to hit rock bottom.

My first overdose may have been a cry for help or it may have been a half-hearted attempt at suicide. Three things are memorable:

1) They didn’t admit me for an overdose. My condition was listed as “…cellulitis of the forearms…” The community was covering up for me and my family.

2) As soon as I could talk to people I started in swearing that this would never happen again. I told everyone who would listen that I was committed to change what had caused my trouble and that this would NEVER happen to me again. At the time I believed it myself.

3) I was really scared. I didn’t know what was wrong with me. I had never wanted to get this way, and I was overwhelmed with shame and remorse. For the first time in my life I’d found a problem I could not solve.

It wouldn’t be the last.

When I left the hospital I tried to do what I
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had devoted myself to doing. I tried to stop using those hardcore harmful drugs.

Oh, sure, I continued to smoke a little weed and drink a little beer. Just no more chemicals, no more “hard stuff.” Nothing but a little marijuana and the occasional beer, like any “normal” person. And everyone who heard me swear to this change in my life agreed that I should do that.

But being around the same people and doing the same things soon took its toll. In no time at all I found that beer and marijuana weren’t enough to even “take the edge off.” When something significant came along for me to feel I had to feel it, and I found that I didn’t like that very much. Without the shelter of the drugs I had nowhere to hide from myself.

Looking back, I can’t remember exactly what I needed shelter from, and I guess it doesn’t really matter. All that matters is that as much as I wanted to moderate my use to socially acceptable amounts and types of drugs, moderation turned out to be just plain impossible for me.

So I tried to get the help that I knew was available to change my life and my using. I tried the county Mental-Health Clinic and their best therapists. I tried going back to my family church and re-committing to the religion I grew up in. I
tried my family Doctor and his suggestions.

I know I was never completely honest with any of them. An addict gets so good at lying to himself that lying to other people becomes second nature. And I’m also sure that they all meant well, but they really didn’t know what to do with me or my problem. The important thing is that I tried everything I knew how to try, until I came to believe that there was no help for me.

No help except going back to the drugs. So naturally, I went back to using.

My second overdose came at the end of an eighteen month active “run” that had been keeping the reality of my desperate life at bay. I was injecting cocaine to the point of cardiac arrest on a daily basis – the only way I could get even a glimpse of euphoria. And just in case I went over the line I kept strong injectable sedative close at hand. Most days I’d need to balance the stimulant with a small shot of sedative to keep from feeling like my heart would pound right out of my chest.

The last day I shot drugs was exactly like that. I injected the massive dose of cocaine I needed to “get there” one more time, and then quickly realized that it was too much. I did a stiff dose of the sedative to keep from dying of a heart attack.
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And that’s when the lights went out.

Hours later I woke up in the hospital. My friends had found me and rushed me to the emergency room where the medical staff revived me from a state of technical death. I’m not sure I was grateful.

Then came the remorse. I knew that everything that had happened to me had been caused by me. Closing my eyes, I could see the pain my actions had painted on the faces of everyone who had ever cared about me, pain that had driven them away from the “user me.”

The next day my family doctor came to see me in my hospital bed. He suggested that I go to a physiatrist associate of his, “to get to the bottom of my problem.” I agreed, eager for any way out. The physiatrist arranged to see me daily after I was discharged from the hospital.

I can’t remember what we talked about. I know I honestly wanted help, and that I did my best to cooperate. I also know that the psychiatrist was really a genuine and helpful professional. He just was not prepared to deal with someone like me – an addict.

My mood swings were barely tolerable. One day I would be joyous and euphoric, rapturously pleased with myself. The next day I would be
overwhelmed with thoughts about how I’d ruined my life and hurt everyone around me in the process, that the world would be better off without me in it. At times I could go from insatiably manic to absolutely suicidal in a matter of minutes.

Looking back, I now know what was happening to me physically. I was going through detoxification.

My psychiatrist suggested that we would have to stabilize my behavior before he could help me get to the bottom of my problems when I was feeling and acting this way. He thought perhaps I had some sort of chemical imbalance in my brain, so he prescribed a non-habit forming medication for me. He explained that it would not immediately change how I felt, but would straighten me out so the mood swings would subside.

I can still remember my reaction. **YES,** I thought! Medical science had an answer for me! There was hope! Now I could get well, and do it in a way that I understood – through the magic of chemistry!

So I went to the drugstore and filled the prescription. The pills looked potent, menacing, just plain bad. In all my drug-dealing experience I’d never heard of them, or seen anything that looked so potent. As soon as I got the bottle in my hand I
looked at the directions which said, “Take 2 every four hours, as needed.” I swallowed two right there and then without even a drink of water. Let’s get this show on the road!

Then I got into my car and began to drive. As I drove I realized that I wasn’t feeling “better” like I expected. Where was the rush, the buzz, the high? I shrugged then choked down four more pills, figuring that the pharmacist must have got the directions wrong.

By the time I got to my favorite bar, the one where I dealt most of my drugs, I had come to the conclusion that I must be immune to those pills, no matter how wonderfully valuable they might look. I parked the car, went inside, and poured those bad-boys out on the bar. People gathered around and I sold what was left in the bottle for $10 per pill.

I pocketed the cash, left the bar and went to my dealer’s house where I bought a bag of the stuff I knew would work for me. Addiction had won again.

I was loaded, after being clean for more than two weeks for the first time in over 10 years. At the time I didn’t understand that the compulsion of my disease had been triggered by my obsession with getting “fixed” by using something. I didn’t
understand the disease of addiction – it never even occurred to me that I had a disease.

I stopped showing up at the psychiatrist’s office, too embarrassed to tell him I’d used again.

Several nights later I called my family doctor in desperation. I’d seen a sign on the way to the airport recently that said something about drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and I asked him to help me get into that facility. He called me back and told me I’d need to go into a mental hospital first for a referral. I agreed.

In the mental hospital, medicated with psychiatric drugs, my fear caught up with me. I just knew that this was where I truly belonged. I just knew that they were going to give me a lobotomy. I just knew that it was over forever for me, and now the world would be a better place with me gone from it.

The second day there I met with the medical director. “You are an addict,” he said. “We can’t really help you here.”

I felt panic rising in me, terrified at the idea that I was too tough a case for the mental hospital! My head spinning, I almost missed the doctor’s words when he went on to say: “We can only detox you here, and then we’ll send you to a rehabilitation center. They can help you.”
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CHAPTER 3
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My Spirit Comes Back

My first day at rehab, in treatment, I perfected the art of lying. Oh, like any addict I already knew how to lie to get along. I had practiced daily for years. But I didn’t anticipate how much I would need it here.

I was sitting at the intake desk and the person across from me asked, “How long have you been an alcoholic?” I responded that although I drank occasionally, I didn’t drink every day and really didn’t consider myself an alcoholic. The intake clerk explained that they received state funding for alcoholics and not for other drug users. Then she smiled and asked again, “So how long have you been an alcoholic?”

“5 years,” I lied in reply.

My first day in group therapy was pretty much the same. The therapist suggested we introduce ourselves around the room clockwise, and called on the person to my left to begin. Each person introduced him or her self as an alcoholic, then some of them added “and a drug addict.” Again I got it, and although I wondered if anything could work based on a foundation of fraud, I did the same. I wanted to fit in, to be accepted. I
wanted to make this rehab thing work, so I complied and told them what they wanted to hear.

Three things of real significance happened to me in treatment. First, I found genuine hope, more real than the addict’s wishes and dreams that had been passing for hope for many years. I met people similar to me, people who wanted to change as much as I did.

And there were also people who came in to the meetings from the outside. These were people who had been able to change, and had lived to tell about it. Gradually it began to seem to me that if they could do it, so could I.

Second, I learned the real meaning of the word “addiction.” After 3 ½ weeks in the protected environment of the rehab center I was near the end of my stay and about to reenter the outside world. The executive of the facility gave a presentation designed just for those of us who were about to leave.

Most of us were afraid. We all wondered just how the changes we had undergone in rehab would affect us in the real world. I had been clean, drug-free for the longest period of time in over 16 years. My head was beginning to clear and I had more valid information about how drugs affected me than ever before. I’d been told to go to meetings,
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but I knew that my life would take me into difficult situations where there would be nobody close at hand to help me. I knew it would be tough, so I listened very intently.

This guy had been helping people like us for a long time. He threw out the question, “Where is the worst place for you to go after you leave here?” Our answers were varied but predictable and he discounted every one. Someone said, “A bar;” another said, “A party;” and a third said, “My dealer’s house.”

The executive rejected all these as too obvious. “The single worst place for you to go,” he said, “is to the office of a Doctor who doesn’t know or understand what is primarily wrong with you. That person can unwittingly help you to relapse. But you can head off the problem by informing the Doctor first.”

“We have been treating this disorder for many years,” he went on. “At first we believed the problem was simply ‘alcoholism.’ That was all we saw. But after someone had stopped drinking and began to establish a new life, something would take them to a Doctor’s office and the doctor would prescribe a sedative. That sedative nearly always led the patient back to drinking. So, since alcohol is a sedative drug we thought perhaps the problem was really ‘Sedative-ism.’
“Then we began to see and treat people with the very same problems who used stimulant drugs and hallucinogens, and of course narcotics. These were people with the same living problems the very same malady. The only difference was they used different drugs.

“And we also began to see people who had stopped using the drug that had brought them to us for help start using a pharmacologically different sort of mood or mind changing drug, then eventually return to their drug of choice. They would relapse. It did not seem to matter what drugs a person with this disease used, the result was the same.

“So we concluded that once a person with the disorder is addicted to any mind or mood changing drug they are, in fact, addicted to all mind and mood changing drugs, whether they have ever used them or not. We realized the problem was not the drug but the addiction itself.”

This short lecture by the director put the first real crack in my denial system. I had learned the concept of addiction as a disease.

The third and perhaps the most important thing that happened to me at that treatment facility was the Narcotics Anonymous meeting. There were lots of other meetings, and lots of speakers who
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shared their stories. But NA was the one meeting that carried the message of truth to me. These people were more like me. They had done what I’d done, been where I’d been, used what I’d used.

And now they were clean.

They came in from outside to share their experiences and how they were living today. They shared NA recovery with me, and I was hungry for what they were offering. They seemed so much more intense and focused than anyone else I encountered. They knew this was a life and death matter, and that staying clean was critical. They made it absolutely clear that any attempt to experiment with “controlled” use of drugs was virtually suicidal.

And they accepted me. They told me to keep coming back.

Rehab taught me a lot about the effects of drugs, and all of that was helpful. But it didn’t get me clean. Rehab taught me that the most important thing I could learn was to not pick up that “first one” and to go to meetings.

At first I only got half of it. As it turns out, I did pick up the first one, yet I also did continue to go to that NA meeting every week.

Rehab taught me that I needed to admit that I was beaten, that I was powerless over drugs. I saw
the logic of what they said. I just couldn’t force myself to accept the lie of being powerless over drugs.

You see I had the misfortune of understanding the language literally. I knew that being powerless over drugs meant that the drugs could impose themselves upon me. The phrase, “powerless over drugs” meant that drugs could compel me to ingest them. It stated that these inanimate objects had the power to inflict themselves upon me – the power to force me to take them! That of course was absurd!

And if the basic rehabilitative premise I was taught in treatment was absurd, how was I supposed to stop using? How was I supposed to put down the drugs when I was required to repeat – and believe – a lie? How could I base a new life on that lie?

Deep down I may have understood the logic of needing to admit defeat, yet I knew I was not powerless over drugs. What was I to do? How could I get what all of these NA people had without a real starting point?

As it turns out, I couldn’t.
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THE TRUTH OF NA

I had fit in very well at rehab. I had complied. I was voted most likely to stay ‘sober’ at the end of the 4 weeks, and I chaired the meeting to celebrate our “graduation.”

What I did not do was stay clean.

The agency that funded my treatment at the rehab gave me an official certificate of drug rehabilitation as soon as I got a job. I’d learned that I needed to change my life, so I traded my denim in for double-knit, got a non-addict girlfriend, and a four-door sedan. I even went to work back at the treatment center. I went to meetings regularly, walking in just a little bit late so everyone turned around to see me arrive.

But I continued to use. Not the same drugs and not the same way, but I continued to use.

The only thing I did right was that I kept going back to that NA meeting. I really wanted to get whatever it was those people had. They seemed so very “Ok” with themselves. They shared how their lives had changed, and how their new living situations helped them to live clean.

After each meeting I came home in quiet desperation. It was beginning to seem that I just
couldn’t get clean and I felt increasingly hopeless. But I didn’t tell anyone at the meeting that I had used and was continuing to use, because I wasn’t able to be honest. I couldn’t admit that I knew I was not “powerless over drugs,” even as it became increasingly obvious that addiction was controlling my life.

I became more hopeless than ever before, but I kept coming back to the meeting.

I think that by the time we hit them, all our “bottoms” are pretty much the same. Which drug or how much we were using doesn’t really matter. Our living situations don’t matter much. Who we know and what we own don’t matter much. All that matters is how we feel, how this disease affects us inside.

Our bottoms are all the same, full of total desperation, total devastation, complete hopelessness – and ultimately the beginning of surrender. Mine was just that way.

It was my thirty-second birthday and I had taken some muscle relaxors the night before. Not to ‘party’, you understand, just to self-medicate. So I was celebrating my birthday treading water in a sea of guilt and remorse.

The NA meeting, my meeting, was that very night and I showed up early. I sat in the back with
my head down. The meeting started, and people got up and read the passages from the literature I had heard so very often. I wanted to admit defeat, yet I knew that I was not powerless over alcohol or drugs. Drugs could not force themselves on me – something inside me had forced me to take them.

The readings made me feel at home and grateful to be where I was. I just couldn’t understand why I’d used again and again in conflict with my will. I wanted desperately to just stop using. But all I’d been able to hear was that I must admit complete defeat, by admitting I was powerless over drugs. It was obvious that I was defeated, and that night I felt more defeated than ever before, yet I knew that I was not, could not be, powerless over drugs.

The familiar readings were soothing and my desperation quieted down to an undercurrent. But I still needed to know, I needed to ‘get a grip on’, what caused me to use over and over, again and again, against my will, against my very instinct to survive. Why couldn’t I admit defeat? What stood in my way?

Then someone stood up and read: “How It Works” the 12 steps. Starting with: “WE ADMITTED WE WERE POWERLESS OVER OUR ADDICTION, … THAT OUR LIVES HAD BECOME UNMANAGEABLE.
At that instant the truth of NA settled around my shoulders like a comfortable blanket. I had listened to those words many times but never heard them before. It did not say powerless over drugs, it said powerless over addiction. Addiction itself was what caused me to use against my will.

Addiction was the disease that controlled me, the monkey on my back, the demon whispering in my ear, the knot in my gut, the yearning in my heart, the malady that I am powerless over.

Finally I understood. Finally I had a clear picture of just what it was that had been defeating me. I was powerless over addiction itself, over the condition that caused my irrational, self-destructive, drug use: yes, powerless over addiction not the drugs it had forced me to use.

Now I finally knew what they had meant by the disease concept. All my silly attempts to look good and act good to show everyone how good my life had become, how manageable my life had become, were now humorously absurd. It was suddenly crystal clear. I had found the key to real surrender: the truth.

In that moment I did admit complete defeat. I finally recognized the truth, that addiction had beaten me and that I was powerless over it.
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And at that moment I KNEW!

I had a true REALIZATION! Although that sentence had been read in every NA meeting I had attended this night was the first time I really heard what it said: ‘...powerless over addiction…’

I have not used drugs since that night of May 1979 and I am sure that the message of recovery couldn’t have come from anywhere except Narcotics Anonymous. The truth is not available anywhere else, the truth that says Powerless over ADDICTION. That truth – the most basic truth of NA – set me free, honestly free at last, clean by choice, and able to recover from addiction.
Staying clean was the hardest thing I had ever attempted. Everything about me and everything around me argued for me to use again, every minute of every day. The only relief I got was when I was at meetings or on my way to a meeting, or at coffee after a meeting.

Something happened to me at the meetings; I felt hope. The people there talked about their new clean lives. They talked about their triumphs. They shared how life threw situations at them that previously would have caused them to use and now, somehow, they managed to stay clean through those times.

And they were right there to tell me how they did it. Maybe they called another recovering addict. Maybe they picked up some literature and read it. Maybe they had a chat with their Higher Power. But however they did it, they did it – they stayed clean.

This inspired me. Every time I heard them talk about their temptations and their successes, I became more hopeful that I could follow in their footsteps. Eventually I began to trust them and what they said. I became convinced and I began to
believe that I could stay clean too, if I could just do what they had done and followed their instructions.

You see, there was a consistency to what they said and what they claimed to have done. Each time I asked a question of several different NA members, hoping to get a variety of answers so I could pick the answer that suited me best, I was often amazed at how similar the answers were. Frequently they were exactly the same.

Although my questions covered a wide realm of living situations the answers always seemed to be variations on the same theme. Their words of wisdom would always include: “call another recovering addict… listen to the winners… read NA literature… get to a meeting… reach out and offer help to an addict seeking recovery…” When my questions dealt with my innermost feelings or ideas, the usual answer was, “…work the steps”.

Of course the message they delivered most consistently was, “Don’t use, no matter what.”

I knew that it was irrational, even insane to want to use all the time, but I did. And when I asked questions about that I was mostly told “keep coming back…” or “get to a meeting…” or “help someone else…”

After repeated reinforcement of the same set of basic ideas I began to actually trust that if I did
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as I was told, if I tried the things that worked for others, my need to use would subside. And amazingly, shortly after this seed of trust began to grow, it started happening for me.

And so the first vestiges of any real sort of working faith in my life came to me through my experiences with other recovering addicts in NA meetings. It wasn’t till much later in my recovery that I recognized that his experience constituted the beginning of working a second step. At the time, however, I just knew that I was on the road to victory over the very insanity I needed relief from.

COMMITMENT

The flier was everywhere: at the rehab, on the bulletin board at our meeting, on the literature table, on the refrigerator door in my sponsor’s apartment, and stuck inside the frame of the mirror in my bathroom – “NA World Convention, Sept. 1979, Atlanta GA.”

The world convention was then the only NA convention available, and several of us from my first home group had made plans to go. I was excited. I had a vision of what I thought NA was and even though I didn’t really know what might actually happen at this thing called a convention, I
expected to find that NA at this event.

I was in for a surprise.

I had been clean for about 3 months. We had started a little fledgling NA meeting near my hometown in a familiar meeting place in our largest local city, so now there were two close-by meetings for me to go to each week. About an hour’s drive away there were a couple more, and we members would get together at people’s homes whenever someone needed another meeting.

Literature was very hard to come by. Our orders took from 6 weeks to over three months to fill, and newcomers to the group would clean us out of the few pamphlets and copies of *The Little White Book* in very short order after we did get an order.

I had been elected group literature chairperson at the mother home group, which meant I came early, set out the literature we had, and stayed after to put it away. I also arranged with our group treasurer to order more of whatever we needed whenever we needed it.

When we got down to just one pamphlet each we made an announcement asking anyone who picked up a piece of literature to return it after they had read it, till we got in our next supply.

So I headed to the World Convention with, among other things, a lot of literature questions on
my mind. Just why did it take so long to get orders filled, and just why were so few items offered? Why wasn’t NA’s Book on the order form, and where could I get one?

I had high expectations going into this convention. I expected a gigantic version of the powerful support network we had built at home. Even though we were spread out in two states and multiple cities we were a tight-knit group, who truly cared for and supported each other.

What I would learn changed my life!

At home we constantly told each other: “Don’t use and Go To Meetings!” Somehow, even as good and important as that was, it felt somewhat incomplete. When I got to that Convention the first, best and most important thing I learned was, “Don’t use, go To Meetings, and work the steps or die!”

I came to realize that around home in NA, although some people talked about working steps, very few NA members could articulate much regarding their experience working steps. And if they did, they spoke mostly about work with a sponsor from another fellowship or study of a big non-NA book.

Although, when desperate, I would get help from anyone anywhere who went to NA meetings,
I really wasn’t interested in hearing much about recovery from someone unless they understood the first step the same way I did; that we were Powerless over Addiction. Many NA members had the ideas right, but very few could express those ideas clearly.

I knew what trying to embrace the half-lie of the other fellowship’s first step had gotten me – very nearly dead – so I wasn’t too interested in listening to experience from someone who worked nothing but that first step and built their recovery on it.

There were several folks around who had a substantial term of time abstinent, who spoke about no longer having the alcohol but still having the “ism”. It seemed to me they about half “got-it,” so I listened to them half-heartedly. I needed some real help from someone who fully “got-it” from the very start, someone who had built their recovery based upon acceptance of their powerlessness over the disease addiction, and who had worked all the steps on that basis.

I was to find those people at this World Convention of NA. They said it simply; “Work the steps or die.” And they made it Okay for me to work the steps for myself, in NA, the NA way, as fast as I could thoroughly and as hard as I wanted to. This convention taught me the simple reality of step
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three to make an absolute commitment to work the steps to the best of my ability.

And this is where and when I learned and started to work the third step of NA. I just didn’t know it was happening and couldn’t have predicted how it would happen.
The Power of Convention

Get it in the halls!

If you are going to a convention, don’t give up because the speakers are lousy. Don’t give up because the hospitality is awful. Don’t give up because the convention’s workshop program feeds your disease more than your recovery. And don’t give up because the people who participate in the workshops are terminally phony. Get it in the halls.

Many times, convention committees kill off their best members early by design. They meet about 10,000% too often, debate endlessly about the least important things possible, and usually get it just about 90% wrong.

But people with real recovery experience do come to conventions and sometimes, if you are really lucky, they are the speakers or the workshop leaders. Sometimes you’re not so lucky. But these people are there – you just need to seek them out.

Just like sticking with the winners in your home NA group, you need to find the winners in the larger universe of the convention. You may find them speaking about unpopular subjects like history, or the Traditions. They are almost always controversial, because they really do work the Steps. And they are frequently disenfranchised or outcast,
because they uphold the 12 Traditions. But they are there and they will share with you.

That’s the way it was for me at my first convention, and how it has been at most every convention since.

At that first convention: the 1979 Atlanta NA World Convention, the speakers were from another fellowship. They shared a different, foreign message, a message of something called sobriety rather than Recovery from Addiction. They focused on reading some big book, an incomplete, archaic historical piece written years ago by people who didn’t quite understand, people who believed erroneously that someone with our malady could be addicted exclusively to one liquid chemical.

These speakers were basically non-malicious, what they said was basically harmless. What they had to say just had very little to do with recovery or NA. They weren’t evil; they just didn’t belong at an NA convention. And so it was with most of the workshops, except for a few.

Even so, I met personally three of the very members who would influence the philosophy of Narcotics Anonymous more than any other members in the history of our fellowship. I met the man who would sponsor me for nearly 20 years at one of those workshops. I met the man who would
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become my best friend in recovery and my severest critic in service in those hallways. And I met the most inspirational leader our fellowship has ever seen in the coffee room. They were all there, but due to the misdirection of the convention committee none of them really were in the limelight of the convention.

I did “get it” there, because I sought it out. A local clubhouse designed by and for NA members was having an anniversary party the afternoon following the close of the convention. Several of us from the home group went. There was a genuine NA speaker at this event, someone who shared my exclusive commitment to NA recovery.

Just after the speaker meeting I followed some folks into an adjoining room. I’d just met a big cordial fellow named Greg, who suggested I listen very closely to what was about to happen. I paid quiet, studied attention to the session.

It turned out that this was some sort of assembly of members called Trustees and World Service Conference officers discussing World Service Conference affairs, and I was in awe.

Immediately after the assembly broke up I started in asking my hundreds of questions. Greg quickly stopped me and explained that this was the very lowest, least important level of service. He
made it clear to me that group level service was much more important because addicts seeking recovery come to group meetings, not to the World Service Conference. He also explained that world service acted on the instructions and requests of NA Groups.

Then Greg and another guy named Bo, who lived next door, and who I’d seen doing what looked like important things at the convention, produced a little yellow booklet called the NA Tree. They told me to look that booklet over, that it would help me understand. On the way home in the plane, I did study it.

I was uplifted and inspired by the NA members I’d met at that convention. My personal recovery was enhanced because I had received the key to the third step, and I had made an absolute irrevocable commitment to work the steps in my life to the best of my ability. I’d seen the contrast between some of the bad and some of the best of NA service, and I’d made some contacts that would enhance and sustain my recovery and service in the future.

Oh, and by the way, what we learned from that little yellow booklet, the Tree, on the way home on that plane led to the start-up of the first Area Service Committee in western PA. Soon a few of us branched off to form an ASC in northeastern
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Ohio. Those early efforts supported the needs of and were directly responsible to about 7 groups of NA. Today those entities have grown into 3 regions of NA and thousands of NA groups.
CHAPTER 8
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HONESTY AND FREEDOM
FROM THE PAST

My commitment to working the steps led me directly into step four with a quick detour along the way.

I am a very self-directed sort of person. I carefully think through ideas and philosophies, and make decisions that direct how I behave and relate to others. And unless I gather new and different information clearly showing my previous decision to be wrong, I stand by my decisions.

A great deal of my early recovery was characterized by changing my mind regarding things I'd previously believed, and modifying my behavior and relationships accordingly. Most of my new information came from the spiritual principles in the steps and traditions of NA, but some came from ideas I received and philosophies I considered during that time.

Once I got clean, “honesty” meant to me that I would openly share what I thought the person I was dealing with could handle. There were some things, while true, that in my opinion did not need to be written or verbalized, and my judgment or discretion was the only gauge I trusted to determine the extent to which I would choose to be
“honest.”

Two forces of change went to work in my life when I began the process of writing a 4th step; the first was my limited view of honesty, and the second was an aspect of denial.

I’m sure that once I put down drugs and stopped using, that denial became the most obvious symptom of addiction in me. I had just read a book by a great philosopher, and one phrase from that book challenged me to release my denial and embrace reality. The phrase went, “Argue for your limitations, and they will be yours forever.” I interpreted this to mean all those thoughts that go, “I can’t do that because I’m ________ ,” or “I must do that because I’m ________ ,” or, “I need to be ________ .”

My view of honesty and the idea of taking a searching and fearless moral inventory clashed, so I spent months arguing for that fundamental limitation till it built up a sort of “critical mass” of intensity.

I reverted to constantly thinking about, even considering, using drugs.

This was my state of mind one evening when the chairperson of my home group’s meeting said, right before the end of the meeting, “If anyone wanted to use today and would like to talk
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about it before the meeting ends – speak up now.”

I spoke up. I admitted that I’d wanted to use, owned up to the fact that I needed to change my clean date. I shared that I’d been lying to the group when I’d accepted a cake for a year clean and I really only had ninety days.

I expected to be shunned, ostracized, and told never to return. But that is not what happened. I was loved and hugged and congratulated on opening my heart, and in the process lost some of my fear of real honesty.

This experience set me free to really take that truly honest, in depth, look at myself and conduct the necessary searching and fearless moral inventory.

What I found helped me much more completely understand and appreciate addiction, how it affected me and how very completely powerless I am over it.

Later in my recovery I would revisit this step, but this first abjectly honest self-appraisal was vital to my newfound life. I followed it with an honest 5th step; admitting the exact nature of my wrongs to another person and god as I understood god.

The result was a sort of freedom I had never experienced before. I had given lip-service to freedom all of my life but was locked into repeating
the same fatal errors and the same tragically misguided actions over and over, again and again. The character of my life and my behavior were directed, choreographed, by the disease addiction, amplifying my powerlessness over this disease.

Most of my actions were not consistent with my self-image. I was always acting differently than I wanted to act. Seeing this clearly and honestly, and sharing it aloud with another person gave me a foothold to begin climbing the mountain of change.
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Act as if

When I got clean there was no NA Basic Text. The only information about working the steps in NA was verbal, passed along by members who had worked the steps.

Because of this, when I got to step six I went to the archaic historical literature for some direction, where I was reminded to prayerfully aspire to universally high ideals.

I knew the instructions well. I had studied them before. They were good, but not all that well attuned to my needs, and not thoroughly practical. I had already identified at least the most glaring things that reflected the defects in my character, and I prayed for their removal.

I prayed genuinely, I prayed on my knees, I visualized doing things differently, saw myself acting differently following the removal of my apparently natural tendency to do these self-destructive things. But I continued to do them.

After the fact, full of remorse, I would wonder if I were being genuine or intense enough. I had stopped using and had taken some preliminary action to co-operate with the Spirit of recovery. I honestly aspired to the highest ideals, but my actions did not line up with my words or my
desires. I still thought and acted like an addict.

I was ready, I was willing. I just needed to know how to make the change I needed to take the next step.

The old adage goes: when the pupil is ready the teacher appears. My answer came at a meeting, where the perfect speaker for this point in my recovery shared the things he had learned that had changed his life.

He had learned that the prayers he spoke aloud, even the prayers he said on his knees were in reality meaningless. Only the prayer that he walked in his life had any true meaning. He challenged all who listened by exclaiming, “Watch what I do – that reflects who I am. Don’t just listen to what I say, that only reflects who I want to be.”

That was my lesson. I needed to act differently.

So I started trying to behave as if my defects of character were gone. I considered how I would behave if I were who I wanted to be, and I acted that way to the best of my poor acting ability. I made lots of mistakes along the way, but I began to improve with time. It was hard.

It is still hard, but it’s all that works for me. And soon the acting sank in and I began to respect myself more than ever before, even though I still
came up short most of the time. Eventually this process matured from catching myself having done things I regretted, to catching myself in the process of doing things I would soon regret. Often I’d be able to change course, behave a new way and avoid the effects of my character defects. Eventually I became able to catch myself thinking about acting out on my defects and committing to some changed action before I began to act.

The most impressive miracle to date from my higher power – the spirit of recovery I refer to when I use the word God – is that sometime in the process of all this acting my way to change I realized that the obsession to use drugs had been lifted from me. It was gone. It never has returned.

This thing called recovery really does work!
Rescue

Addiction comes around a new corner in a different disguise every day and says to me, “Hello there, I’m really not me. I’m your bills; I’m your clients; I’m your employees; I’m your taxes; I’m your family.”

Addiction is cunning, baffling, and supernaturally powerful. Only complete and total surrender has ever fully countered the effects of addiction in my life, and that surrender takes a level of humility that does not come naturally to me.

As I go through my life in recovery, steps six and seven come into play more actively than any other personally applicable spiritual principles. Open-minded willingness followed by active prayer through changed behavior are able to mold my character, but they do not change it. Change, true conversion, comes as a gift when I am humble enough to ask for it.

To me spirituality is active more than passive. I’ve found that if I shape my thoughts with the spiritual ideals I am moving towards, my God changes me into what I really yearn to become.

Surrender involves an active ongoing change of my behavior, followed by a spiritual change in my motivation. Surrender is not the spiritual part of
the program, but rather the spiritual nature of the program.

It all comes to fruition as I make amends for the wrongs I have done others, either in the here and now, or as part of an ongoing process of becoming a better me in recovery.

My first sponsor was a no-nonsense kind of a guy. When I told him that I wanted what recovery had given him he backed me up into a corner, got right up in my face and told me, “The time for talk is over. To get what I have, you’ll need to do what I did.”

He said that if there was an event, any event; regular meeting, service meeting, party, dance, or anniversary; if there was any event for NA he would be there if it was at all possible. No excuses. He’d be there no matter how inconvenient.

He lived that rule, and he took me and several others along with him while he lived that commitment. As a result, we went everywhere there was something going on for NA, whenever possible as a group. We had meetings on the way there, and on the way back. We made a true – and for me exclusive – commitment to NA.

And so it was that I found myself on a plane headed for Los Angeles, heading to the World Service Conference. My sponsor was the
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representative and I was the alternate. We got the jobs because we were willing and could afford to go. It was the very first time our part of the fellowship of NA would be represented there.

But there was still something in our way, something personal standing between us and our ultimate goal.
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Advance

As an addict I was by nature a sneak-thief, a passive-aggressive back-stabbing small minded jerk. If you were a major influence in my life and if I wanted to be like you, I would sneak around the circles you moved in and insidiously assassinate your character. Not in any open confrontive way, and never, ever to your face.

I’d undermine your reputation with the significant people in your life. I’d cast a shadow on your efforts by questioning your motives and projecting alternative agendas on your most wholesome actions. I’d raise suspicion about your intent. I’d make people distrust you without ever being openly critical. I would never disagree with you publicly and you’d probably never know I was doing any of this.

This was what addiction had made of me. I had no desire to behave this way; just the opposite. But I did things like this without thinking. This defect in my character was a function of envy or jealousy, and is one of the last self-destructive traits I discovered.

And so, sitting beside me on the airplane on the way to the NA World Service Conference was the one person I admired the most – and the one
person who I had worked on the most to undermine.

Yes, believe it or not, I had committed my special brand of character assassination on my sponsor.

I wanted the best for this week, so I was going over in my mind what my present was like, updating my inventory in the here and now in an attempt to spiritually prepare for the week ahead. And looming large in that inventory was the covert general assault I’d been making on the friend and mentor sitting next to me.

This particular self-destructive personality trait snapped clearly into my mental view. I saw myself a little more clearly, and I wasn’t very pleased with the view, so before my rationalizations took over I just blurted it out. I admitted to my sponsor what I’d been doing and how wrong I had been to do it.

What a relief! Of course, my sponsor’s reaction was rather ambivalent, not exactly unconditionally forgiving. But he stayed in his seat, and the clear vision this tenth step gave me was like a breath of fresh air.

There’s a saying; “God won’t give us more than we can handle.” I had absolutely no idea how much I would need all the spiritual tools I had been given
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in the next 48 hours.

Recovery can be a two edged sword. At its very foundation is reality and the need to accept that reality. I often found this hard to tolerate because like most addicts, I had a severely distorted view of the world.

When I was using drugs this distortion made life feel acceptable. Now that I was clean and actively seeking recovery, I had to constantly struggle to see the distortions and embrace reality as it really was; life on life’s terms.

Through a progressive peeling away of the layers of distortion, the 12 steps open the recovering addict to the power of the Spirit of Recovery. Each time a distortion affects me my higher power allows me to see the reality to counter that distortion. And to a great extent the quality of my recovery depends on how well and completely I accept that reality.
CHAPTER 5
It Will Be Ok

I expected the members at the 1980 World Service Conference to be at least as committed to NA and recovery from addiction as I was, even to inspire me to greater levels of commitment and service. I had a rather simplistic view of service – I thought it was 12 step work and all the tools that might aid in 12 step work. I just blindly believed in the 12th step and the 5th tradition, which direct each NA member and every NA Group to help carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

As the first day of the conference began, I became increasingly more dismayed. Each person, nearly every participant, introduced themselves as an addict and something else, most commonly as an addict and an alcoholic. Why was this so? Didn’t these people understand the 1st step?

Over and over I heard people who were Trustees, who were, according to what I had read in the Tree, supposed to be guardians of the Traditions. I heard them speak of their membership in AA. How could they guard NA’s traditions when they spoke openly of membership in another 12 step fellowship? How could they serve the groups and members of NA when they had not even made an exclusive commitment to NA? How could they guard what they did not even understand?
The longer I listened the more I realized that these people considered NA to be only a point of identification: A place where they could be ushered into the more experienced fellowship where the real help was located. They considered NA to be a “back-door” to AA. It was totally obvious to me that these people and I had different 1st steps.

I had come to them for wisdom and inspiration only to find that they were basically newcomers to NA philosophy – newcomers with significant time clean but newcomers all the same. The whole idea of powerlessness over the disease itself rather the symptoms was a foreign concept to them. They saw recovery as synonymous with sobriety in AA. They just didn’t get it. I was devastated.

Fear rushed in. Was the organization I had staked my life on for the last year just a façade? Was I participating in another self-projected addiction-driven distortion? How could my recovery survive without the guidance of members who went before?

How could I survive?

I had never seen the Pacific Ocean, so I took some time and went there alone. It was 40 degrees outside and the beach was deserted as I walked down close to where the waves came in. I sat down
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full of misery and hopelessness.

It seemed that my dream of what NA represented was an illusion. Perhaps my recovery was an illusion too.

I prayed for guidance to a god I did not understand. I prayed inside myself, I prayed aloud, I prayed till I was just about empty. And I felt overwhelmed by my fear and anger and devastation.

And then, as the waves were beating a rhythmic pulse on the shore, I began to let go. Those waves were hypnotically soothing and I began to relax and just listen to their cadence. I began to feel the power of the natural course of things, and my fear began to subside.

Slowly but steadily a new encouraging feeling started to swell up inside of me; an internal warmth, a sort of strength, a sort of courage, a firm, clear knowing that it would be Okay. I knew that I would be Okay, I had found the Truth, I knew that our program was real and that our fellowship would be Okay. If we just did the next obvious thing and simply followed the Twelve Traditions.

I knew deep in my soul that there was design in all of this, and that I didn’t need to do any more than just listen and follow. The answers and the inspiration I sought were there, free for the
surrender. All I needed to do was offer to help, pray and meditate and act on my inspiration. It was all going to be Okay.

And through this experience I finally understood and for the first time fully participated in the eleventh step.
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CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER 5

Literature Subcommittee

I hadn’t been able to speak at the WSC. Only representatives could address the floor, their alternates needed to stay mute. In retrospect, that was probably a good thing. But the second day we broke up into subcommittees. Everyone got to choose what subcommittee they wanted to help with, and each person who was in the subcommittee session got to talk and vote and be a full and complete part of the process. I joined the literature committee.

The chairman was Bo. He had made an impressive entrance the day before dressed all in black, with two big guys following him into the room carrying a steamer trunk on their shoulders. Then he gave the report from the literature committee and stated that since that committee had announced they were putting together a book for NA that they had received a massive amount – a steamer trunk full – of input from the fellowship.

As I got to know Bo I learned about “staging” as a leadership and communication technique. He was a master at it. Bo had first come to California NA in 1977 demanding to know who was writing our book. He made a lot of noise and soon found a few people who had written some material; one in particular, who shared his vision of

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a potential book for NA.

Bo had been elected chairperson of the WSC Literature subcommittee in ‘79 and was reelected. A committee had formed around him when he asked the fellowship for help and promptly included everyone who volunteered to help, everyone who expressed any sort of interest and was the least bit willing to help.

This committee he had formed by asking for help had held a conference and wrote some committee guidelines for themselves. The conference accepted the guidelines, for the subcommittee and they became how we wrote literature for the fellowship. Anyone who wanted to be part of the committee could be. We were looking for all the input and participation we could get from across the fellowship. There soon was a second conference where it was decided that the Little White Booklet would be the outline for the new basic text. Each section of that booklet would form a chapter heading and introduction. That gave us a way to categorize input into sections and begin the process. Members had written everything from short phrases to essays on certain topics to personal experiences at meetings and in their recovery. Each piece of input was treated as precious. Each member who submitted input was honored as an instrument of a higher power. This established a
process that would allow us, the fellowship of NA to write literature for ourselves. Literature representative of true NA recovery. This is what we mean when we say literature written by addicts for addicts. The inclusive process is the absolutely critical element. I believe members still think we write our literature this way. Our true literature, real NA literature, the literature produced by this process, had one thing as its goal: to more effectively carry the message of recovery from addiction to the addict who still suffered … to the addict seeking recovery.
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Principles in Practice

The next thing for NA in my life was an event called the First East Coast Convention. The program committee at that convention asked me to share on the 12th Step … with two other people. My part was, …Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps…

On my way to the convention I stopped in at my friend-in-recovery’s house for some moral support. He wasn’t home but his wife, who was also recovering, had some good advice for me when I told her how unqualified and inadequate I felt. She said: “Just tell them what happened to you and don’t jazz it up.”

I’ve used that advice many times over the years.

The rest of this book is all about sharing a 12th step. Everything that I do for NA is my attempt “…to carry this message to addicts, and practice these principles in all our affairs.”

At that first East Coast Convention we established a powerful bond just by being together, sharing and validating each other’s recovery. There was a lot of “buzz” about the book, and about the literature committee that was developing it. This was our book it was of us and for us, and everyone
who wanted to help could be a part of the effort.

To some extent it was part of a movement that became sort of “pure-NA”. As NA was sensing its own uniqueness, we were staking a claim to a separate realm, no longer a weak sister to an older more established – but less complete – program. We were addressing the disease, the problem in a completely different way, with a different much more accurate first step. For many of us this was obvious, taken nearly for granted, while for others it was a giant leap, a complete turn-around.

For most of us east-coast modern NA members the 12 Traditions were the truly non-negotiable Spiritual Principles of the organization. All we had ever read or studied was the “black print,” and there was no need for interpretation since we thoroughly understood the language they were written in. We saw them as absolutes, and would tolerate no compromise for fear that if we violated these spiritual principles addicts who might have found recovery in NA would die or remain lost. We treated the traditions with the respect they deserve.

Looking back, that pure simple view was the best from a spiritual standpoint. We saw the 12 Steps as the way to personal recovery and the 12 Traditions as the only sure way to share recovery
with others. Here are some of the pure, simple perceptions we had:

1. Common welfare equals consistency of message; total abstinence from all drugs, powerlessness over addiction, and uncompromising adherence to the other 11 Traditions. An addict is very simply an Addict, as opposed to an addict and anything else.

2. Ultimate Authority, any real authority is found in Group Conscience; therefore, trusted servants take their instructions only from the conscience of NA Groups. The Group’s conscience hinges upon the Member’s Spirituality, along with the Validity and completeness of the Group’s information. All service grows from the needs of NA Groups; all service policy decisions are made by NA Groups; circumventing any of this violates Group Conscience …

3. Membership is the choice of the member.

4. NA is comprised of autonomous Groups free to advance recovery in their community according to the needs and desires of the members of the group, through the 12-Steps and within the 12-Traditions. NA is only
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those groups – Service Boards and committees are separate from and directly responsible to NA Groups, not the other way around

5. The NA Message is the province of and responsibility of the Group; “Any addict can stop using, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live,” and “We are powerless over Addiction.”

6. NA is a distinctly unique and autonomous program of recovery from addiction, and we need to appreciate the real separation of our fellowship from any apparently similar entities.

7. We need to be financially self-supporting, and creatively self-supporting through active participation, without artificial limit or conventional perceptions.

8. NA is clearly distinct from treatment; all centralized services are directed by the fellowship via group conscience.

9. All decisions on the policy and philosophy of NA must be made via the Conscience of NA Groups. Service boards and committees are not autonomous, nor are they free to set their own policy, yet they are expected to behave with dignity, and establish procedures
that enhance these ideas rather than contradicting them. No service boards or committees should ever rule, censor, dictate, or decide anything other than how they will carry out the directions given by NA Groups. Service boards and committees are for NA not of NA, and their one and only mandate is to provide simple, complete and accurate information to NA Groups, and then to ACT ONLY upon the decisions of those groups i.e. Be Directly Responsible


11. The focus is on the message not the messenger.

12. Our foundation is a personal spiritual Anonymity, meaning that each member is of equal value and can be as much a part of anything for NA as any other member.
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CHAPTER 5

Memphis— Early Spring 1981

If you ever wondered when NA as we now know it was born, it was at the world literature conference after the majority of the fellowship became aware of the writing of our book: WLC-3 in Memphis, Tennessee, in February of 1981. As far as I’m concerned, everything that happened before then simply formed the foundation upon which NA as we now know it was built. But that foundation does not define the true philosophy of NA, any more than the things that happened to each of us prior to our surrender define the philosophy of our recovery.

If you disagree with me show me the writing about recovery from addiction in clear concise terms that occurred before February 1981. Show me the written discussion of powerlessness over addiction as opposed to powerlessness over drugs. Show me the testimonial to exclusive commitment to Narcotics Anonymous as the program of recovery from addiction.

This is not to minimize the contribution of the many folks who went before, or the many supporters from outside the fellowship who paved the way for us.

There were many sincere people who helped
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NA before we clearly stated our autonomy as a fellowship and the uniqueness of our 1st step at Memphis in ’81, but who still retained their affiliation with other fellowships and other philosophy’s.

If you need for some reason to know who the “founders” of the program are, look at the names printed in the front of the Review Form of the Basic Text, commonly known as the Grey Book. I personally believe this program to be a gift from the god of my understanding, and all who came before me to be the messengers of that god, anonymous members of the fellowship of people who found this program to be the answer to their problem.

They were no more than suffering addicts who found relief here and tried to leave a better, more effective fellowship than the one they found. How some of them expressed things has helped me and, I am grateful for that.

But I don’t thank or blame them for their contribution. I know it was nothing more or less than what they needed to do to recover. When I mention these people throughout this book, please understand that I do it without either praise or criticism.

In February of 1981 the World Literature
Committee for NA held a conference in Memphis, Tenn. The two previous conferences had taken care of some important details but this conference was where the serious writing and editing began, and this conference is where the fellowship came together and made the first serious attempt to address recovery from addiction in the history of mankind. I was there. You could have been there too if you were clean then.

For months and months every known group in the fellowship and every member who had ever expressed an interest in literature had received letters from the NA World Literature Committee. These letters were the most ambitious attempt to include everyone in our fellowship in a service project that has ever taken place, and I took them seriously.

Actually I joined up with a group of members who were headed to Memphis a few days before the start of the conference. I met them in Marietta, GA and we all helped Bo finish a job before traveling together. In the process we learned a bit of how to work together.

Page, Hank, Bo and I got to Memphis just before the conference began. It was held at Memphis State University, and we were all able to stay right at the site in the dormitories. Joseph had arranged it all and provided constant organization.
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One of the really terrific things about open participatory service is that it allows people’s talents and abilities to come to the forefront so they can be best used for the good of the project. When we got to Memphis Joseph had, with the help of the local fellowship, taken care of all the details. Our working facilities, food, lodging, supplies, equipment such as typewriters and copy machines, and comfortable work-spaces all were ready for us to begin. Additionally, the local fellowship was ready to support us with regular meetings and positive energy. Joseph himself did very little if any writing, but he made it possible for the writing and editing to be done, and he verbally participated in final editing.

I can remember being tremendously excited to be a part of this effort. Having spent some time with Bo and several others who had been working on this project for a while was helpful and encouraging. Three things stand out in my memory:

First, every bit and piece of input that anyone had ever sent in was treated as precious, and although its form might change the thought included would find its way into the manuscript.

Second, every member who came to help was given a valid, important job, never marginalized or patronized or ignored, no matter what their apparent educational level or perceived ability to
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write.

Third, when we got jammed up or started to argue or became impatient with each other – whether it was a small editing group, or an assembly of the entire conference – we would stop and join hands in a circle and pray. We prayed the literature prayer; “God, relieve me of self-will and ego sufficiently to use me as your instrument”.
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How can we write a book for NA if we don’t know who we are?

There were about a hundred people who came and eventually registered at WLC-3 in Memphis. I don’t remember how many were there at the opening assembly, the first “Group Conscience” – maybe half that number.

Periodically throughout the conferences we would meet together as a whole in sessions we called “group consciences”. Of course we weren’t a group of NA, so these sessions weren’t really group consciences. But the idea was to bring that spiritual principle into our efforts, assembling together to seek the will of a loving ultimate authority.

At this first such meeting Bo suggested that we go around the room introducing ourselves, sharing where we were from and what we hoped to accomplish here at Memphis and WLC-3. We shared a lot of spirit and positive energy, and as each person spoke up several things became eminently clear.

Many local literature committees were active around the fellowship, and had generated a lot of input for possible inclusion in a book for NA. The members attending WLC-3 were from all over the fellowship — East coast, West coast, Midwest, and
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South – and were each strongly committed to NA as they perceived it. Everyone was happy and excited about creating a book, a basic text for Narcotics Anonymous.

Yet as each person introduced themselves each vocalized a different identity, some were addict-alcoholics, some drug addicts, some cross-addicts, some dual-addicts, some junkies. Perhaps the majority said they were an addict and an alcoholic, while very few said they were just an addict.

When it came my turn, after saying that it was good to be there, I shared that I didn’t see how we were going to write a book for NA with any sort of useful consistency of narrative if we didn’t even know who we were. How could we share a clear message when we identified ourselves as so many different things?

Then I went on to talk about being very simply an addict and that I believed it was critical that we spoke clearly about powerlessness over addiction, distinguishing ourselves and the NA program from other superficially similar things and ideas. I wanted to use the best right words in the simplest clearest way. My passion was very well received and the consensus overwhelmingly agreed. My editorial job soon became that of clarifying expression.
Early on in the conference Joseph and I with the help of several others wrote up a Style-Sheet to formalize ideas that were commonly expressed in misleading or non-acceptable language into the language of NA. I was absolutely committed to getting the words we used to express ourselves right. To me we needed to say exactly what we meant. For instance the word “sober” has a lot different meaning than the word “clean.” When NA members say they are clean they mean totally abstinent from all mood-changing chemicals. Sober means something completely different, and implies that abstinence from one drug is somehow different than abstinence from other drugs.

The majority of the participants embraced this concept of using proper diction from the very beginning. Others resisted, and referred to it as semantics and nit-picking, though eventually the idea of using the exact correct words for our meaning became vital to everyone involved.

Some members regularly used treatment terminology. We took the same stand on all language and jargon that had its source anywhere other than NA. We simply used the appropriate common-usage term or the commonly correct NA term rather than the inappropriate treatment or religious or technical terminology. I’m sure we were imperfect, and from time to time offended the
more scholarly members who insisted upon effete
niceties like tense and number agreement.

What our goal was, and in my opinion what
the goal of all recovery oriented literature should
be, was an accurate expression of the message of
NA philosophy, effectively communicated to the
majority of readers who are addicts seeking
recovery. We strove for the best communication.

A Matter of Principle
Process

How we did it may be just as important as what we did. In retrospect, it may be even more important. The previous literature conference had decided to segment the book into sections or chapters based on the sections of the Little White Book, so our first work at WLC-3 in Memphis was designed to accommodate that idea.

All of the input was typed up, then we did actual physical cut and paste, cutting apart essays and experiences which contained sentences or phrases that applied to different outline or chapter headings. Then we pasted them back together in the places they seemed to fit best. Often we would need to add a simple bridge sentence or phrase by hand.

Once we completed cutting and pasting a section it was typed up and evaluated by a different group. If some sentence, phrase or idea seemed to fit better somewhere else, we would go back to the scissors, and cut it and paste it there. During the course of the conference at Memphis we probably went through the whole mass of input about three times over.

From time to time when a whole paragraph or section needed to be added, members with
current experience on that topic would write and factor their own contribution into the text. Our goal at this conference was to expand on all topics, and not to condense or edit to any extent.

As each chapter got to what the smaller groups of evaluators felt was a point of completion we would pass out copies and read them aloud in a large group – the whole assembly if possible. This reading allowed us to note the places where ideas failed to flow together well. We would then go back over the chapter as a group only referring to the places we had marked during the flow-reading. Again our goal was to expand, not to edit or condense.

The overall process of producing Literature for NA was discussed in the beginning of the conference and we pinpointed our place in that process. Members, groups and local literature committees would have an idea regarding a piece of literature that they believe would be useful for the overall fellowship of NA. They would then submit that idea to the WSC Literature committee.

We would then distribute the list of the topics to the groups we served, asking them to prioritize and select, then instruct their representative to vote at the next WSC according to their ideas. That way, by going down through the structure from area to region to world, the
committee gained a broad mandate from the fellowship.

General input was collected from the fellowship through direct communication and at its next conference the WSC literature committee would factor the input into a draft manuscript, called a Review Form, which was then distributed back to every group of NA. This Review Form alerted the broad fellowship that a new piece of literature was being developed and shared the input on the topic from the members and local literature committees.

We were asking the fellowship to review the manuscript for errors and omissions, and giving them a logical and reasonable length of time to submit input. After all of the input to the Review Form was addressed in conference, an Approval Form was drafted, which was then distributed to the entire fellowship for approval.

The groups of NA would then vote and instruct their representatives how to vote. This process was mirrored at each descending level of service, from Group down to areas, down to regions till the consensus of the fellowship’s group conscience was determined at the world service conference. There the literature that had been deemed acceptable would become “fellowship approved,” and that which was found to be
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unacceptable might be returned to the committee for more work.

Perhaps the most important part of this process was our deep commitment to the concept of open participatory service to Narcotics Anonymous. This meant that anyone who wanted to be involved in its core operation could be a full voting member of the world literature committee. Our process was designed in full adherence to group conscience, self-support, and direct responsibility, the 2nd, 7th, and 9th Traditions of NA.

At Memphis WLC-3 we completed the Review Form of the Basic Text Narcotics Anonymous, the first manifestation of mankind’s primary attempt to address recovery from the disease of addiction in clear concise terms. Its cover was gray and it is often referred to as The Gray Book.

And with the initial flight of the Gray Book, the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous truly took wing.
Starting Over

A new spirituality took control of me at this event in Memphis. I was, quite literally, changed. And spirituality became a much more personal and practical thing for me.

My old vision of spirituality was all confused and linked to the religion I’d learned as a child. I really didn’t believe the dogma, so I didn’t trust the more acceptable ideas that sprang from the dogma.

It’s really hard to explain these changes to my vision and experience of spirituality.

Over the course of my recovery I have come to believe that this “God” thing, whatever it is, reveals itself to us through other people and through spiritual principles. I now realize that addiction was what was primarily responsible for separating me from this spiritual power.

Spiritual Principles are now like natural law to me. They are absolute, perfect and complete. I can choose to bend my will to them, to live by them, or I can choose to compromise them, to violate and ignore them. Unfortunately, the results that derive from living by Spiritual Principles were never logically predictable using my “rational” thinking as it was distorted by addiction.
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At WLC-3 in Memphis I discovered that when I am honest and forthright, I get certainty in return. When I love and am kind and considerate, I become empathetic. When I accept reality, I see and experience truth clearly without confusion. When I believe in the hope that is available to me, I am given faith. When I make irrevocable commitments, I find strength and courage in me that did not exist before.

When I surrender I win.

I had learned so much, come so far, during this experience that I went right to work integrating my discoveries into my recovery.

Several of the people I had met had become significant influences in my recovery. Each of them, in their own unique way, personified the NA-exclusive idea of powerlessness over addiction and recovery built upon that basis. Greg Pierce became my sponsor. I became Bo’s structural service understudy. And Joseph became my best friend, confidant, and sounding-board in recovery and service. I did a new 4th step and re-worked 5 through 9. And I re-Committed irrevocably to regular 10th steps, and daily 11th and 12th steps. And I decided that I would share my recovery in written form on a disciplined formal basis.

Following the conference the Memphis
fellowship continued to work on the manuscript we had drafted. It was proof-read, and then laid-out in the form we had agreed to, with each page and sentence numbered for easy reference during review. Then it was printed as a manuscript on 8 ½” X 11” pages ring-bound with a gray cover. All of the personal stories that were submitted for inclusion were published after the basic text portion.

The literature committee obtained a list of all the registered groups of NA and, following some research to find valid mailing addresses, mailed the Gray Book to the 600 outposts of our NA fellowship.
A Matter of Principle
Review Form – Literature Review & INPUT

Each group of NA responded heartily to receiving the large manuscript with the Gray Cover imprinted with Narcotics Anonymous. Inside the cover was an introductory letter, along with a form they could use to submit the input we needed to complete the work.

Perhaps most important were addresses and phone numbers they could use to get in touch with the Literature committee, send in input, and participate actively in the process, plus an invitation to the next literature conference.

The responses from people scattered across the fellowship ranged from the huge majority who felt the manuscript should be approved and printed with very little change as soon as possible, to a small minority who were dismayed with the “non-professional” common language presentation, or questioned the idea of having a book for NA at all.

Many local fellowships planned “Gray Book” review sessions, announced them at NA recovery meetings, and welcomed anybody and everybody who wanted to come and participate. At the review meetings they read through the manuscript and made notes of input to be sent on to the literature
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committee.

This simple process of getting together to review NA’s definitive written work was in reality our fellowship’s coming of age, our self-definition, our manifesto as a fellowship and as a program of recovery from addiction. It happened through this work at the local group level, then was confirmed and refined by directly responsible efforts of dedicated trusted servants, many of whom were sent to the literature conferences, formally or informally, by local fellowships.

You may be wondering how all of this was funded. All of this communication – paper, printing, postage and the use of equipment and facilities – costs money. From a practical standpoint the financial concerns and funding limitations did indeed dictate many of our procedural decisions. However, what we discovered was this: if the spiritual purpose of the project is right, the money will always be there. The truth about real service in NA: one of the least known of spiritual principles.

Perhaps this is the very best test of any project, a sort of natural check and balance, and this is exactly how we funded the development of our Basic Text. We communicated what we were doing to the local groups we served, asked for the money we would need and specified why we needed it. Clearly they recognized the spiritual purpose in
our work, because the money, all from contributions by NA groups and members, was there when we needed it.

Gina Helgara and I discussed this at great length. Gina was a very special literature committee participant from Tennessee who wrote, “Everything we know is subject to revision, especially what we know about the Truth.” Gina and I spent hours pondering, considering, and writing about what I call “modern NA topics,” such as autonomy of the fellowship. She and I, together with Ed C, started something called “Anonymi” one day at the Rising Sun clubhouse based on the idea that much of what is perceived as difficult or impossible in other realms is easy and practical in service to NA.

True service to NA is quite different from most apparently similar “service” situations. Skills and practices we learn in government, corporate, or civic organizations, are generally counter-productive in NA service. Because some of the events that happen in service resemble events that happen in these other venues, many members bring their personal expertise from outside NA to bear in their service to NA. Usually this practice ends with thorough understanding of the Traditions or thorough training from a directly responsible trusted NA servant, and no harm is done.
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Yet occasionally these inappropriate procedures become part of policies developed outside of our group conscience, and functionally so defeat much of the true service that could have been performed by the folks who are otherwise participating for the right reasons.

Many of us have very strong personalities, and involvement in service can be quite a positive surge of self-esteem for those who have been nearly ostracized from society and organizations. Also, due to the nature of their responsibilities, service committees sometimes draw folks who have been made predatory by the disease. The money property and prestige referred to in the 6th tradition are ever-present adversaries.

Nevertheless, making the message of recovery from addiction more available to addicts who still suffer was a service function powerful enough to transcend these issues.

Up to March 1981 less than 300 members had contributed material toward the Grey Book. During the time from early March through late April of that year literally reams of input was written to the review form. During the next world literature conference, from minutes and rosters of local literature committees and numerical estimates of conference participants we determined that over 10,000 members had been a part of the process of
writing our book in some way or another.

Most NA communities during this time also developed a service structure based on the outline found in the Blue service manual for NA. The services they developed were directed by group conscience, collected by representatives and defined in communities in the area service committees. Then the collective conscience of groups was passed on to regional service committees at the next lower level, perhaps defined as states or huge metropolitan centers. Finally each region elected a representative and an alternate to carry the conscience of the regional NA groups to the lowest level of NA service – the World Service Conference.

An outside observer might credibly claim that the 1981 WSC for NA was the first true World Service Conference, because it was the first one where we could hear multiple voices from varied realms of influence. Ohio, which I was representing that year, had eighty-one NA meetings, up from two or three the previous year. And many representatives from east of the Rockies reported similar growth.

Representatives from regional service committees and states were at least equal in number to the sub-committee chairs, WSC officers, and Trustees. This count was probably so important
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because due to a perceived lack of voting participants in earlier WSC’s; all of these non fellowship representatives – sub-committee chairs, WSC officers, and Trustees – had a vote at the World Service Conference. That was eminently different than other higher levels of service, where predominately only the representatives of valid group conscience – ASR’s at RSC’s and GSR’s at ASC’s – had voting power.

The second Tradition clearly indicates that only representatives of a Group Conscience should have voting power on questions of policy (defining direct responsibility) at any structural service meeting designed to define the conscience of part or all of the fellowship, if that service committee were directly responsible to those it served via the 9th tradition. Because up to 1981 only up to four representatives of the conscience of groups were present at the World Service Conference, this had not been functionally practical. But now it was, so the 1981 WSC for NA was probably the first true World Service Conference.
The fellowship of NA had responded to the call for input to the book, and we had reams of input to factor into the review form of our Basic Text. We also had many more participants closely involved in the process.

Many more and more varied participants joined the effort at Santa Monica. The Trustees of NA now were taking the writing of the Basic Text seriously, and some had even joined our effort. While Sally and Chuck had become more than superficially involved, Jimmy Kinnon was noticeably and painfully absent. It was so very sad for some of us to see him deny himself the realization of his dream. Of course his earlier writings which were part of the white book were included in the Basic Text, so in a sense he was at least spiritually involved. Maybe he felt that those earlier seminal writings were the best he had to offer.

We expanded and adapted the same basic process to include the sheer volume of new input we were receiving, and worked individually and collectively to include every single idea in some form. We divided the work up into teams: the first team would “factor in input,” placing the ideas
where they were suggested to be placed or correcting the language or wording according to the suggestions.

Of course, several different specific manifestations of the same general pieces of input were common. When that happened the team would consider the possible variations then pick the compromise or combination that seemed to best solve the problem. Next a team would read and evaluate the changed chapter and write its own suggestions for additional changes, perhaps including new bridge sentences or phrases. Then an editing team, consisting of two members and a typist, would smooth out the chapter and condense it by removing redundancies and improving diction. Finally the chapter would be read to the entire assembly and additional new input would be written. And then the process would be repeated, so that entire book went through two or three of these cycles.

After having served two consecutive terms as chairman of the WSC Literature Subcommittee, Bo stepped down and did not seek a third term. I ran for Bo’s position, but Roger Teague was elected. Although I had wanted to serve, I knew that I could probably contribute more to the writing if I were an active participant than I could as chairman.

The next world Literature Conference was
scheduled for Warren, Ohio in June. Roy, Pam and I were co-chairpersons for the conference, so we got busy with preparations. Roger had intended to live with me for the near term so the WSC Literature Sub-committee address was my home address following WSC’81.

No one really knows how the Santa Monica final draft files got lost. Roger traveled around for a month or so on the west coast with a couple of other members, during which time the draft files were stored here and there, and later they were shipped to me. During the conferences and in between those files had been treated with the utmost security and oversight, and this breech of the committee guidelines was deeply troubling to many members.

One of the very first actions taken at the conference was to make three additional complete copies of all of the literature files for safety’s sake. Bo took one copy, Greg a second and I still have the third. The copy machine we rented didn’t do the greatest job of copying and over time they have faded even further but that original material including all drafts of the book up to that point is certainly precious to me.

Roy Drum made the arrangements for our facility and equipment at WLC-5 in Warren, Ohio, and he did a great job. We had an old three-story
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schoolhouse where we had a kitchen and dining facility to prepare and eat meals, several ideal meeting rooms on the main floor, and sleeping quarters upstairs. It was a wonderful experience and really led to a powerfully productive conference. The second east coast convention was held the week before, and many members from modern NA were there.
Final Form

We repeated the process as it had developed at Santa Monica, working several times through the manuscript in small teams. Each time we factored out more and more redundancy and factored in additional new input. Each time a chapter was read to the entire assembly in a conference “group conscience” session, the work had notably improved. We were getting pretty good at this whole thing.

The editing teams were now moving around sections of the chapters so they made more and more sense and flowed together nearly as if it had been written by one individual or a very closely knit team. Each of the chapters went through several drafts. The forth, sixth and tenth chapters required maybe 4 drafts or more.

This conference was the one where the Trustees and other longer term members finally got comfortable with the process and began to contribute much more prolifically.

We brought chapters one, two, three and eight to final form in Warren, Ohio at WLC-5. When it got to the point that the majority of us felt the work could not be significantly improved we called it “Final Form”. At that point we believed that if we worked on it any further the quality of
the work might deteriorate as a vehicle to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffered and was reaching out for help.

When we had brought all the chapters up to this point we would have an “Approval Form” of the Basic Text, ready to be distributed to the fellowship for a yes or no vote. At WLC-5 we had brought the introduction, forward, and chapters 1, 2, 3 and 8 up to final form, ready for proofreading and publishing in approval form.

The last six chapters were scheduled for completion at WLC-6 in Miami, Florida which was held in conjunction with the world convention of NA in September 1981.

We worked diligently, but got off to a slow start because a lot of curiosity seekers. Members with no real interest in helping came in regularly from the convention and were quite distracting.

Chapter 4, “How It Works”, had probably been through the most drafts of any part of the book. There were two distinct opposing viewpoints on the wording of several of the steps and the last few edits simply changed language back and forth from one viewpoint to the other. We assigned three people the chore of bringing the job to completion and chapter 4 to final form, one from each viewpoint and the chairman of the committee to
break any ties. This process took two full days.

In the meantime we brought chapters five, six, seven and ten to a point acceptable to the committee as final form. The last part of the book to be completed is also the one part with the most Spiritual nature; chapter 9. I am proud to have been on the editing team to bring it to final form, and I also feel that it may be the most useful part of the book for daily reference.

As the conference closed, Roger was to stay with the fellowship there in Miami to get the proofreading done and ship the proofread final forms on to Joseph in Memphis where the approval form was to be printed.

There are two or three times in my life I shall never forget. One of those times is standing on the balcony of Joseph’s motel in Miami with Joseph and Bo the evening after WLC-6 ended. The Basic Text for Narcotics Anonymous was written. It was done, and we had a significant part in it. Our love, sweat, and tears, our enthusiasm, our encouragement of others, our command of the language, and our organizational skills had all contributed to mankind’s first attempt to address recovery from the disease addiction in clear concise terms.

Every human being yearns to make a
contribution to civilization. We three had done that. Not completely in and of ourselves, but through surrender, through just doing the next obvious right thing, through listening to and being guided by those we served, and through living and freely sharing our recovery.

I learned right then that recovery affords me gifts beyond my wildest dreams, free for the surrender.

We had a book.
CHAPTER 7

Approval Form

Joseph needed to extract the final drafts from Roger personally so he could have the proofreading done in Memphis and arrange for the printing. At Thanksgiving we all met again in Memphis. Unfortunately, Roger had become dysfunctional as a chairperson.

We mailed out well over 1800 copies of the Approval form to the current registered groups of NA. Our fellowship had tripled in size in just 9 months behind the literature movement, the writing of our book, and the development of a structure for service designed to support, nurture and be directly responsible to NA Groups.

This growth was made possible by the idea of Open Participatory service guided by Group Conscience. Those of us who had participated in the process knew what had worked, and we had a pretty good idea why. The more we as trusted servants strove to be inclusive, the more we asked for help, the more we listened to what the groups needed and wanted and bent our personal will to group conscience, the larger and stronger and faster the fellowship grew.

The book, our Basic Text, was truly written by the fellowship for the fellowship. And the very
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process that had matured around its development fostered the growth of the NA program. Recovery from addiction was more than ever a genuine reality for all those who sought it. The groups had the means and the message to stand alone and offer recovery.

And it was all a result of adherence to and service by the Traditions, especially group conscience, self support, and direct responsibility. The spiritual principles of recovery and service are truly stronger than the disease of addiction when applied liberally with love, care, and concern. But that disease is also strong.

Every step of the way we had met opposition. In many dark corners of NA our characters had been assassinated, and just about every time we asked for help from the office we faced their fear and resistance. We knew that the structure as outlined in the blue service manual, with its open participatory service committees, was the foundation of our Literature Committee’s success and the frame of reference that allowed NA to have this book and the growth it caused. We had seen and participated in the application of that service structure at the group, area, and regional levels and were working effectively at the sub-committee level in world service.

We also could quite clearly see how the
structural parameters broke down at the world service level. So those of us who wanted the fellowship to share in this phenomenal effectiveness at all levels brought our vision and spirit to the Policy sub-committee. One of the California members who had participated since the Santa Monica conference was also the chairman of the WSC Policy Sub-committee. So at this Thanksgiving meeting in Memphis we drafted a proposed revision of the service manual: the green service manual.

The Green Service Manual and the structural changes proposed at the world level of service would have prevented many of the problems we were soon to face with the world service office.

I believe that nearly all of the difficulties we currently have, or indeed have ever had in NA service are a consequence of violation of the 9th Tradition. There is no clear line of direct responsibility to those served therefore the so-called service provided is someone’s idea of what is needed rather than anything the fellowship has directed its services to provide.

The most significant proposed change offered up in the green service manual was that the office would have a clear line of direct responsibility. Rather than being administered by a self-perpetuating board it would be administered by
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a directly elected sub-committee of the conference. This presented a simple and elegant solution to a problem that now has mushroomed into the total demise of any directly responsible world-level service committees in NA. It was an easy job to develop some simple revisions to the written description of structural service based upon our successful experience.

The literature committee now needed a chairperson. Roger had effectively resigned so the committee elected me as new chair and Page as vice chair. My regional service committee required me to resign because they believed I would have a hard time fulfilling the commitment as Ohio Regional Policy chairman and the Lit committee chairman, so Page became chairperson and did a great job.

The really significant event at this workshop in Memphis on Thanksgiving 1981 was the publishing and distribution of the Approval Form of the Basic Text. If you do not have a copy of that you need to get one! It is the purest form of our Book that has ever been printed.
The Fellowship Report

For a short time after the release of the Approval Form there was a stream of honest, open, trustworthy, objective information from World Services pouring out to the fellowship of NA. The primary reason was that Bo had been elected WSC Vice Chairperson in 1981, and Joseph had been elected WSC Treasurer. Bo and Joseph are two of the best communicators that have ever been involved in NA service, and both believe in total inclusiveness.

There are two limiting factors in the development of Group Conscience in NA. The first is personal conscious contact with a higher power in each group member’s personal recovery.

The second is complete, accurate, timely, objective, and pertinent information on the question to be decided. Good communication is a key factor here, and this needs to be among the primary responsibilities of a GSR. The other primary responsibility of a GSR is to determine and accurately describe what services the group requires from the structure. For a short while in NA service the Fellowship Report was something a GSR could trust for much of the timely, accurate, and pertinent information necessary to fulfill this role.
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The spring Fellowship Report in 1982 distributed to all the groups of NA included the motions in need of group conscience which would be placed before the WSC in May of 1982. Additionally, we distributed the approval form of the stories for the rear of the Basic Text and the Approval Form of the Green Service Manual.
The idea of the NA Way came to me in the spring of 1981. I’d been completely energized and inspired by the literature development process, and many good articles were being published in local and area newsletters. I felt that the many talented voices in NA desperately needed to have a place to share ideas with the entire fellowship, without any sort of censure.

And I also knew of many semi-isolated members with barely enough energy to keep a one meeting a week fellowship going. Wouldn’t it be great, I thought, for NA to have a monthly meeting in print? Wouldn’t it be great to have a place to develop recovery and service ideas, which would allow freedom of expression?

I’d discussed this with lots of the members I knew, both back home and around the fellowship, and I knew it was a popular idea. The office had published the “Voice” of NA as minutes of the WSC, once in ’78 and again in ’79, then a third time as a small magazine in 1980. But that was all: Never any consistency, no regular schedule – just a sweet promise, and then nothing. And no way to offer any help.

I suggested the NA Way at the 1981 WSC. It
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was rejected rather flatly by folks invested in keeping NA the way it was, and isolating the World Service Office as the only publisher for NA. At that time anyone could write a motion to the WSC; all you needed was the form.

So I wrote a motion for distribution to the entire fellowship, proposing that “The WSC create a sub-committee to administer the publication of a monthly magazine on recovery from addiction, to be called The NA Way.”

The motion was distributed with the fellowship report in spring 1982.
WSC ‘82

I believe that the 1982 World Service Conference may have been the pinnacle of true service at the ‘World’ level in NA. There was definitely a powerful spirit and energy there. It was an exciting time for NA. We were about to have a book of our own, and an identity of our own, and a real means to share recovery from addiction with the whole world.

I’ll let others deal with numbers and data. Suffice it to say that this WSC was the height of fellowship involvement in its own services, with very little distance between the services and those served. The fellowship of NA was in that room, generally speaking with one clear voice. And that voice said: “We are in charge; you take your direction from us…”

That sort of insubordination from an upstart fellowship, however, could not be tolerated for long and the powers that would ‘rule, censor, dictate and decide’ saw to it that this sort of intervention into their power would not survive. But for that fleeting moment, in May of 1982, NA World Services were as they should be.

The reports from the regions and states were a celebration of a growing NA. Some service needs
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for the future were identified, but for the most part the message was centered on service and literature becoming more available and the growth of the fellowship.

Even though many members applauded the fellowship report as a long overdue venue for WSC direct responsibility, there was noticeable anxiety during the office report, clearly indicating change on the horizon for the office.

Members involved in certain service projects had been told by office personnel that their NA membership had been revoked, that they were no longer officially members of NA. I know this is true because it happened to me.

In addition, literature delivery was irregular and unpredictable. Apparently certain people and places were treated differently by the Office than other people and places in the fellowship. Sadly, politics had overcome the World Service Office.

The literature committee made its report and we took the vote on approval of our Basic Text. The Book was approved, by a large majority. There were some dissenting votes, but to the best of my knowledge no one ever recorded the reasons for dissention.

The policy committee chairperson arbitrarily withheld the second portion of the green service
manual slated for full approval, and called for a vote on the first half. This described services down through the regional level, but left the blue service manual description in place for the world level of service.

He claimed that this action was at the request of his committee. However, since the entire piece had been distributed for Group Conscience, his capricious action was a clear violation of the 9th Tradition. In retrospect I wonder why no Trustee stood up and declared the action unacceptable and out of order.

Ironically that very policy committee chairperson was elected chairman of the WSC '83, and so he gained control over fellowship-wide communication via the Fellowship Report. Later in the conference it was announced that we now had a temporary working guide to the service structure, instead of a service manual.

The fellowship of NA is a very innocent and forgiving body, accepting actions done under the guise of “service” as true service. Unfortunately, from time to time there seems to be a great deal of suspicion among folks involved in structural service. I have always been amazed how easy it is for those who regularly compromise Spiritual Principles to cast suspicion on those who uphold, elevate and personify those spiritual principles.
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Certainly we can look back and be critical in retrospect. I believe that I personally owe amends to the fellowship of NA for my own innocence and forgiving nature. I saw things happen and circumstances develop which I am now sure have cost many lives and continue to cost loss of life and loss of quality of life.

Near the end of WSC’82 my motion to create The NA Way was brought to the floor, and it passed quite easily. Three of us were elected to serve as Co-Chair people of the new NA Way sub-committee. We were excited. We made plans.

At the same time, the Basic Text of Narcotics Anonymous was the first piece of literature to become, in reality, fellowship-approved NA Literature, having gone through a process that genuinely ensured that it was written by addict/members for addicts seeking recovery. Subsequently, thirteen more informational pamphlets were to go through a similar open participatory process. And be approved the following year.

Our book was given to the World Service Office to be published as it was approved. We were promised that a hardcover book would be available by September 1982 for the World Convention.

September came and went with no sign of
our book. In fact, it was not published by Christmas. Many local fellowships copied the approval form and made up makeshift books to use in meetings and to give to newcomers until the real book became available. There was major controversy over this practice. People were told that they couldn’t do that, which of course made for more and more of these copies. NA had a book, and just because the office couldn’t keep its promises was no reason for enterprising members not to carry the message. Most of the fellowship lost what little respect they had for the office amid all the excuse-making and stalling that was going on.

But books were being made available to members.

It was clear to the literature committee, perhaps more than to any other part of the fellowship, that the book was imperfect. We knew that it would need modification as the fellowship grew and matured, and that our book should stay a living document to change and reflect our growth in recovery.

There are several things about the book as it was approved by NA that to me were just flat wrong and needed corrected as soon as possible. As this is written, 24 years later, none of these positive changes have been made. Several really negative and
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erroneous changes, along with a few neutral changes, have been made, all without any true fellowship consensus, input or approval.
CHAPTER 8

Thanksgiving in Memphis - 1982

Many active members of the WSC literature committee had helped develop strong local literature committees. The first thing many of them did is to begin working on informational pamphlets to address issues they felt were not adequately covered in the Basic Text. The ideas and titles for these proposed pamphlets were distributed to the fellowship as a request for input, and the process we used to draft the basic text from the review to the approval form was initiated at these local committees.

We felt that Informational Pamphlets or I.P.’s, should be more specific and directed therefore less general than the book, and that we could bring them up to the approval form in this way. At our formal meeting we finalized fifteen or sixteen I.P.s to be distributed to the fellowship for approval.

Three monthly issues of the new NAWay magazine had been published, and the second issue contained two articles that the literature committee felt were appropriate as I.P.s. One was submitted for approval after a slight change to the title, while the second was held back for more committee work. In addition, two members had written a great short 4th step guide for use in their sponsorship activities, and this was also finalized for approval.
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submission. A professional friend of the fellowship had written an opinion from a medical standpoint, and we finalized that too.

To me the most interesting submission was the proposed revision of the little white book, vastly superior to the revision that eventually passed later, this submission was hampered by an omission that was not caught at proofreading and even though an attempt was made to communicate this to the fellowship, it failed to pass.

Eventually at the 1983 WSC several these IP’s did pass to become the final literature to be genuinely developed by addict-members, for addicts seeking recovery and then honestly Fellowship Approved in NA.

A case could be made for the 1985 revision to the little white book having been produced by the same process as the Basic Text and the original pamphlets. It would not be quite as accurate, because the WSC Literature committee was already being closed down to active fellowship participation, and this revision was produced by a closed committee of the World Service Board of Trustees but at least the fellowship was still involved to some extent.

However this revision actually came from a closed committee of the Trustees that met without
the fellowship or those experienced in literature work even knowing about their meeting. No general call for input was ever made. No review form was ever submitted to the fellowship - only the proposed revision itself for approval or disapproval. No open conferences were ever held, and there was no documented account as to why the superior language of the original fellowship-originated revision was not included.

This has now become the “process” of NA literature development; no real process at all in terms of fellowship input and participation.

From this time till now there has been no literature produced by any open process, any genuinely participatory process. There is no fellowship oversight of the literature committee. There is no assurance that input is appropriately requested, collected, addressed or factored in. And I can assure you, through personal experience, that much input voluntarily submitted is never appropriately considered.

There is no process of literature review in which passionate concerned members can follow through at open conferences. The literature committee has been closed, so we have effectively and arbitrarily determined just who can be used as a spiritual instrument of our higher power and who cannot.
We have muzzled and censored God.

This is beyond unfortunate. It clearly violates the 2nd, 7th, and 9th Traditions. Perhaps even more important is the fact that our literature is being written for us by people who believe that they know better than we do what is in our best interest. This not only limits the potential recovery of addicts seeking recovery, it contributes to the committee members’ disease if they are addicts, and to their ignorance and arrogance if they are not.
Changes to what was approved

It can be difficult to see, or pray, or “12-Step” your way out of isolation.

We asked Jimmy K. for help during the writing of the book, but he refused. The members of the world literature committee who wrote the book had regularly invited him to participate. We pleaded, appealed, cajoled, and even begged him. He was sponsor to some of us, and grand-sponsor to several others.

But he never came, he never submitted input, and he disallowed the use of his previously written material. The people who surrounded him at the office openly opposed the fellowship’s literature efforts. In retrospect I believe they were afraid we were trying to take their position and power away. But I, for one, wasn’t too concerned about service position, and I’m sure that goes for most of the others.

Our Book was done and it was the office’s job to have it printed in hardcover. We who had written it, produced it in two soft cover forms, distributed it to the entire fellowship, solicited, received, and cataloged masses of input, factored that input into the final form, and generally fostered this whole project from a dream to reality.
in less than two years did not see a simple printing task as very difficult.

And true to the 9th Tradition, we expected it to be done correctly. Jimmy K. was a self-professed advocate of the Traditions, at least for the masses, but he and several others must have felt they were not personally subject to them.

I was not there, but I believe these few were influenced by those they sponsored. And I’m sure they were just as subject to the disease as we all are, but that does not excuse them breaking our trust. The most horrible thing is that since that time, more members have followed them and emulated the breaking of trust than those who have upheld our spiritual principles.

In May of 1982 the Basic Text “Narcotics Anonymous” was approved by the fellowship through the World Service Conference. The World Service Office was directed to print it and distribute it. Quoting from the Blue Service Manual (in effect at the time) the principle officers “…shall be subject to and abide by the Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous.” And, “Our office … acts upon the directives of our World Service Conference.” The events of late 1982 and early 1983 at the office, regarding our Basic Text should have given us clear direction as a fellowship.
I am not sure that they did - the book was changed from the way our fellowship had approved it. I can’t question Jimmy to know for sure why he felt the way he did, but it is reported that he believed the language in Tradition Four and nine that he deleted was somehow dangerous.

What I do know is this: the phrases that were deleted were what the fellowship thought were the most critical and definitive descriptions of the reality of those two traditions: The very spirit of the principle. The language in the 4\textsuperscript{th} Tradition gave readers a clear understanding of what is and what is not NA. Narcotics Anonymous is you and I sharing together how we stay clean. When we stop doing that and start deciding when we are going to meet again, or where, we have stopped being NA and have become a service board or committee directly responsible to NA.

Meetings, groups, and members are NA; service boards, committees, offices and conferences are not. It is that simple.

Groups are autonomous. Services must, by definition, be directly responsible to groups and members so they can never be autonomous. We regretfully see the harm that services create when they fail to realize this simple reality.

Further along in the 9\textsuperscript{th} tradition we learn
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that NA stays spiritually separate from its services. NA defines, by virtue of need and the group conscience that expresses that need, what services it wants. And by definition, none of those services can ever be anything but directly responsible to NA.

Those who staff services are either trusted servants or special workers. They do not make law for NA, nor do they issue decrees. They take instruction from NA, and if our instructions are not clear they ask questions: we trust them to serve. They do not reprimand, reproach, scold or criticize NA - they simply give out what they are asked to give. Narcotics Anonymous writes their job description and can fire them if they fail to perform their job.

I think probably most members, when they think about it, take this for granted as if it were the way things are being done. We read the twelve Traditions at most meetings and we blindly trust that these spiritual principles are upheld by anyone we trust to serve us. However, the changes that were made to the language of the 4th and 9th Tradition discussion in our basic text deleted these ideas from our literature.

If you look closely you’ll see the result. Many area committees instead of taking their direction from groups are taking their direction from regional
committees, and the regions or districts or whatever they are currently called are taking their direction from world services rather than the areas they serve.

To a great extent service has ceased to exist in NA and has been replaced by government. A government that does rule, does censure, does dictate and does decide for us.
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“This is not our Book!”

At the 1983 WSC the book was finally made available to the fellowship. Even though it wasn’t quite the book the fellowship had approved, there was an air of celebration for Narcotics Anonymous. The fellowship finally had a published definition, a working philosophy to share with addicts seeking recovery everywhere.

The importance of this was huge. Up to this point in time there was no formal written form validating the idea of powerlessness over the disease addiction. All other material was based on the mistaken idea of powerlessness over some symptom rather than powerlessness over the problem itself.

And Narcotics Anonymous finally had an established identity separate from other fellowships based on the 12 steps but built on the erroneous foundation of their flawed 1st step. All the corruption that was to ensue in NA service, all the distraction of power, property, prestige and diseased behavior could not squash this unleashing of truth. And the result was growth of a major fellowship.

During WSC’83, when it was the literature committee’s turn to report, our chairman, Page, stood up. He announced, “This is not our book!”
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and tore a first edition hardcover book in half. Then he demanded that the book be immediately returned to its approved form, and that no more 1st editions be published.

This probably led to the preliminary reform of the office. Page’s motion passed, and much of the discussion centered around having a businesslike office for NA.

Eventually, I remember, that Bob Stone, a non-addict who had served pro bono as the parliamentarian for the WSC for several years, agreed to bring his business skills to bear as paid manager of the office. This action did make for a businesslike service center, where orders were filled promptly and record keeping became orderly.

There were also other, less desirable consequences.

The literature committee also presented for an approval vote those pamphlets that had been through the same participatory literature development process that had produced the Basic Text. Most were approved. The white book revision was not, due to an error in typesetting that made it look like the 2nd Tradition had been modified. Some of the fellowship had gotten the word that it was an unintentional typesetting error, but many had not, and the fellowship was now in the habit of going
over proposed literature in detail.

For me it had been a memorable year. The service project I was most involved in was the NAWay magazine. We had asked for input and received some immediately after the last WSC. We came out with our first issue in September, and had published nine issues in the first nine months. We welcomed anyone and everyone who wanted to help with the project to help as much or as little as they chose. We traveled around the fellowship attending the newly formed regional conventions and other events. We set up a display each time and let people know that the magazine was available both as a tool for recovery, as well as a vehicle for service.

We drafted a release form, and we published the cash-flow data in each issue. Every article was published anonymously. Everything was done at cost, but we paid industry standard rates for all of the printing. Many members contributed, and it was truly a project of the fellowship, for the fellowship. We used a quick form of the process that had developed through the writing of the book. Members’ articles were edited by the committee so that the meaning and intent stayed intact yet the ability to communicate was enhanced.

We conformed to the style sheet developed during the writing of the basic text. Many members
brought special skills to the committee; typesetters, graphic artists, editors, writers and spirited people who just wanted to see the project succeed.

And succeed it did! The word got out, and more and more members got involved. I believe the quality of those first two years’ magazines was unparalleled in the history of participatory service to NA, but I am not really impartial about this - I was and still am deeply passionate. The fellowship had created the first new subcommittee that was ever seen in the WSC and it succeeded in its endeavor, always true to the directive given by those we served.

Not to say that it all happened without controversy. Some felt that accepting contributions in the form of subscriptions was somehow a violation of the Traditions, even though the magazine was designed to be totally non-profit and came out that way. While I never heard any valid arguments for how they felt, eventually that line of reasoning coerced the fellowship and the conference to give the whole project over to the office.

The quality and participation have never been the same, and now the NAWay is used, like most communication from world service, simply as manipulation – propaganda masquerading as sharing.
The tide of true service versus government by the privileged few turned back to the negative at WSC’83. And this event may be the most important and the most tragic in our history.

In general, the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous believed in the 2nd Tradition, especially since many had seen to it that our Basic Text and its development were compliant with the spiritual principle: “…one ultimate authority a loving God (expressed through) Group Conscience, our leaders are but trusted servants they do not govern.” Home Group members only voted at group business meetings across most of the fellowship. Group Service Representatives only voted at area service committee meetings. Area Service Representatives only voted at regional service committee meetings. And all decisions regarding what service committees did, except for procedural details, were decided by those that the committee served. Groups and members of NA were the decision makers for NA, defining functional adherence to the 2nd and 9th Traditions.

But it was different at the world service conference. Each Trustee and every conference officer had a vote not only at their home group, but at the conference as well. The vast majority of the fellowship saw this as a compromise of the 2nd and 9th Tradition, and at the 1983 world service
conference it was moved that only regional service representatives should have a vote at the conference. This motion had been distributed to the entire fellowship, and the regional service representatives had come to the conference instructed by the conscience of the groups and members of their regions and directed to vote that conscience. When this motion hit the floor there was spirited debate.

I know from personal experience that there is a tendency to feel as if you know more than the mass of members when you serve all of NA at the world level, and I’m sure many in the room felt that way. But in reality, if the conscience of groups and members differs from your experience it means either that you have failed to communicate, or you are wrong.

Group conscience is a delicate matter, especially in a room where one or two members are highly respected excellent communicators, and extremely passionate. In 1983 the fellowship of NA as a whole was very passionate about adherence to the Traditions, and very much active and informed participants in their own services.

The vote was a roll-call vote, so what happened that day is documented in WSC archives. Since the proposal involved a change in WSC policy, the motion required a two thirds majority to
pass. Two-thirds of voting members present voted in favor of the motion. The fellowship had spoken. The Group Conscience of Narcotics Anonymous was clear; the 2nd and 9th Traditions had won! Most of those voting in favor of this motion were RSR’s, and most voting against it were not.

A few moments later the chairperson of the WSC proclaimed that the motion was defeated, because the number of yes votes was one short of two-thirds of the number of voting members present at the most recent previous roll call.

There was nothing in the guidelines to validate this action. It was perfectly clear to anyone present that day that Narcotics Anonymous wanted it one way, and the WSC refused to be directed. To me, a refusal by a service committee to take direction from those they serve is a violation of the 9th Tradition. And I just sat there, as did many others.

In retrospect, I owe the members of NA a large apology for remaining silent and being a people-pleaser that day. NA service has gone downhill like an Olympic bobsled since then, and my guess is that some have died and many have lost spiritual quality in their lives because of it.

I am genuinely remorseful, and this book is my attempt at starting my amends.
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Emotional Plea – Honor JK

You know we like to think the best of people.

I thought the highly emotional plea we heard from the female Trustee would just die in the light of logic and reality. And a group in Nevada was cited as being confused by the language that JK wanted deleted, that concise language which accurately described the 4th and 9th Traditions.

And of course we were all called to task for not respecting our elder, one who many called founder. We were made to feel that we should all do penance for not simply bowing to his wisdom.

Yet there was no logic in his argument. I had underestimated the power of emotion. And I had underestimated the manipulative ability of addicts to use service position as a conduit to power.

So the conference decided to compromise its own guidelines. I don’t remember a valid two-thirds majority vote on the subject, but in fairness that’s not to say it didn’t occur. Regardless, the groups of NA received this single topical question asking whether we should keep the Basic Text as the fellowship Approved it, or change it to the way JK self-willed it. A “pro” and a “con” argument were to be distributed and the vote, recorded by return
mail to the office, needed be returned in 90 days.

This was a real sore spot with many members of the fellowship. The first of many of our best groups and areas began withdrawing from the NA fellowship right then, just because we agreed to do this silly thing that was so blatantly against our 2nd and 9th Traditions.

One very strong group from Philadelphia left NA that very minute - just got up and walked out of the conference. This included the member who had sponsored the Literature Conference responsible for the approval form of the stories in the Basic Text. These people remained committed to service and recovery from addiction, they’d just had enough of NA service’s violation of precious spiritual principles.

The Philadelphia groups were just the first to leave. Many more followed, and to a great degree we lost our best and our brightest because we weren’t able to see our own internal corruption. And those of us who did see found ourselves unable to do anything significant about it.

The communication sent out to the fellowship regarding all of this was a circus, a parody of direct responsibility; a manipulative propaganda piece that supposedly led the respondent groups to vote for deletion. So it was
reported to us late in ’83, and that led to the third edition of the Basic Text that was substantially the same as the 1st Edition. The actual results were allegedly “lost” whenever anyone wanted to see documentation of the results until over seven years later.

This early attempt at propaganda masquerading as service was so successful that it was soon followed by more of the same. A fellowship-wide communication was distributed back then called the “Fellowship Report” which now increasingly promoted the topic of a “vote of confidence.”

The party line on this new idea held that world services received regular complaints from groups that all this ‘group conscience stuff’ - all these complex service decisions groups were being asked to make - kept the members from sharing recovery. So the suggestion was to allow representatives sent to the next level of service to have a “vote of confidence” to act in the best interests of those they represented. That way, when they went to service committee meetings and learned the “real facts about the big picture” regarding the affect some motion or decision would have on “greater NA”, then they’d know how they should vote, and their vote would “exemplify” the conscience of those they served and represented.
When they got to regional meetings or when they got to the WSC in California, the people who really understood would explain and then they could vote in response to what they heard.

This was accompanied by a puzzling and unneeded complexity in how the issues were presented to groups and members. Pages were offered where a few sentences would have done, paragraphs where phrases would have sufficed.

The “vote of confidence” was a self-fulfilling prophesy, when representatives got to California they received special treatment, and they got the idea. The con was on fellowship-wide; truly the 2nd and the 9th Traditions are forgotten ideals. But I’m sure that most of the fellowship thinks those Traditions are alive and well even now. We want to believe the best of people, and denial is a symptom of our disease.

And the book was starting to sell! Printing costs were accounted for at less than $2 and the price was over $8, soon to become $10. Except, of course, for places like Hazleton that bought our book for a standard book-industry distributor’s discount and then resold them for the same price we pay. Now how does that Tradition go; “…NA ought never to finance outside enterprises…” hmmm. Profit for the office, and now the office can pay for services, and is no longer dependent on
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group contributions.

Could this have ever happened if the office were a sub-committee of the conference? If the principle of direct responsibility were followed, the world service office of NA would be administered by a directly responsible subcommittee of the world service conference of NA. And if we had followed the spiritual principle of group conscience, the conference itself would be making decisions based solely on the vote of the membership of NA as passed through the structure. So now comes the time when NA should start to see what really results from compromising its own Spiritual Principles.

But we are all neck-deep in our disease, so much more familiar with justification, rationalization and denial than with surrender, inventory and amends.
CHAPTER 10
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The 4th Edition Fiasco

I hope you can forgive me for my poor memory of what I consider to be unimportant details. The precise dates and times when these things happened are not nearly as important to me as honest representation of what truly occurred.

Sometime, I believe it was in 1985 at the WSC, a motion passed for the Literature committee to propose some changes to the Basic Text regarding grammar and sentence construction that would make the book more technically correct.

Since the book had been developed there was an undercurrent of opinion, seldom expressed anywhere but at the conference and literature committee meetings, that the book was too common, too provincial, and even “low brow” in tone. This opinion regularly implied that if our book became more acceptable in the eyes of educated physicians and treatment professionals, then we’d be more successful in our 12th step work.

The same contingent of thought believed that we should close and credentialize the literature committee, to only allow members on the committee if they had college degrees in English or journalism. In my experience both visionary
activism and insidious disease in service have the effect of drawing like-thinking individuals to their activities.

The open participatory service concept and process brought us the Basic Text itself, the first thirteen IP’s, and growth in our fellowship from relative obscurity with no clearly defined philosophy and 600 groups to the Earth’s source of experience on Recovery from Addiction and untold hundreds of thousands of groups and millions of recoveries.

And now we were about to change that concept in the name of improvement; the educated and elite among us thought they knew better, thought they knew what was in the best interest of the unwashed illiterate masses and group conscience.

One of the pitfalls of being involved in service at the broadest level is the illusion that your “vast exposure to information” somehow makes you better able to see cause and effect. You begin to believe that you and only you can see how and why doing certain things and doing them in certain ways will result in more good for the fellowship.

I know about this personally, because it happened to me. When I was editor and sub-committee chairperson of the original NAWay I
experienced those feelings, and I am grateful for the committee which drew me back into recovery. That mind-set is true insanity, much like the insanity of using drugs day after day when only self destruction and harm to your loved ones is the result. Governing from a position of elitism when you’ve been charged with the direct responsibility of trustworthy service destroys our fellowship’s effectiveness in sharing recovery with addicts who seek help.

So, the motion had passed the conference that the literature committee would make our book more technically correct, basically charged with fixing number and gender agreement errors and other grammatical problems. I really wish that was what actually happened, but it wasn’t. And since this was a task handed to the literature committee, I’m not sure how Bob Stone and the office got involved, but they did. What I do know is that part of the problem was that we (our office) just had too much money.

The literature committee and the office hired a professional writer to do the job. The professional writer totally rewrote the book. Unfortunately, in re-writing the Basic Text many ideas were radically changed. The new 4th Edition was printed in hardback and made ready for sale and distribution before the fellowship found out about any of this,
and without even having gone through any sort of review or approval process.

Many of us felt horribly betrayed, and many more previously dedicated members and groups just gave up on NA and left our fellowship. I can’t remember if the “Concepts” were in place yet or not at that time, but this fiasco and the subsequent events were driven by the same ignorance and defiance of the Traditions as the Concepts were.

By this time there were regional forums around the fellowship I went to the one closest to me, and I remember meeting up with Bo and deciding to go to the literature committee meeting. We walked in and found ourselves seats, and when a time came we felt the need to participate we spoke up. We were quickly told we could watch but not participate.

Bo, who was chairperson during the writing of the basic text, and I who had participated in that writing, and who was the first editor of the NAWay, could not participate in a literature committee meeting. I realized that the system had closed down, and that NA had lost any appreciation of open participatory service.

The 4th Edition was the definitive result. Explore this in depth, and you will find out that there were a group of like-thinking people who
made this happen. These individuals may not be actively involved now but their sponsees or grandsponsees are. Read a chapter of the 4th Edition then read a chapter of the Basic Text, preferably the approval form or 2nd Edition. Compare the two; which is NA philosophy?

These people still think the same way about recovery and about service. They believe that group conscience and direct responsibility are antiquated ideals, not spiritual principles we should adhere to. They believe that they know better than you do what is in your best interest, because they can “see the big picture.” And if you talk to them they will make a convincing argument and a tempting offer: if you embrace their philosophy you too can become part of the leadership of NA by joining a NAWS work group or focus group.

In 1982 I rode to a meeting with their leader in his car. I do not remember our whole conversation, but I recall that he was speaking of leadership and control of the WSC. He was Policy Chair, about to be elected Conference chair, and he was feeling me out to see if I was “on-board”. He was talking about his enlightened agenda, and asked me point-blank: “you do have control over Ohio don’t you?” I said no; I opted-out.

But I was tempted. Power really does corrupt.
By time for the WSC the year the 4th edition came out, the fellowship was up in arms. Here was this book that wasn’t our book. It had the name of our book, and it was printed in hardback, ready to sell and distribute. But it wasn’t ours. The fellowship screamed and chanted, “No more professional writers!”

So the WSC did something totally unprecedented. Without fellowship input, without mandate or instruction, without a fellowship-wide group conscience, and outside of the normal process of review and approval the WSC decided to rewrite the basic text to combine the 3rd Edition Revised and the 4th edition.

They went through the first ten chapters line by line and negotiated, with the office and the closed-down literature committee on one side promoting the 4th Edition, and the 3rd Edition Revised on the other side. They came out of that brain-dead fiasco with the 5th Edition, which survives as the “official” edition of our book. Yet the 5th Edition never went through the process of review for input by the fellowship, and it never was distributed for approval. It was simply thrust upon us by folks who’d decided they knew better what was in our best interest than we did ourselves.

And we tolerated this blatant violation of our 2nd, 7th, 8th and 9th Traditions right along with
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the ongoing blatant violation of our 6th Tradition that our business deal with Hazleton represents. By tolerating it, we co-signed it and now we own this violation of our spiritual principles.

Think about it; in 1982 a self-willed policy chairman withheld the 2nd part of the service manual that had been distributed for a fellowship-wide group conscience. That second part would have re-formed the office into a sub-committee of the WSC, thereby giving the office a real line of direct accountability. He arbitrarily withheld this from a vote.

The rest of the revised service manual passed overwhelmingly, undoubtedly because the fellowship had instructed its representatives to vote for passage of the whole manual and nobody in the fellowship could have anticipated that it would be offered in part.

In 1983 that same individual called the vote “failed” when 2/3 of those voting had instructed the WSC to only allow RSR’s – representatives of Group Conscience - to vote at the conference.

Does it seem likely that an office that was directly accountable to the fellowship through a conference, an office that was really the voice of the fellowship, would have allowed an unsupported re-write of our basic text by a professional writer?
Does it seem likely that a conference which truly represented the fellowship would have allowed a re-written basic text to be published without fellowship review, input, and approval?

How can we say that our leaders are but trusted servants, that they do not govern? How can we say that our ultimate authority is group conscience? How can we say that we support ourselves? How can we say that we do not finance outside enterprise? How can we say that any of our world services are directly responsible to the fellowship?

How can we claim to have kept and honored our spiritual principles when we have so very blatantly and so very defiantly violated them?
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The BABY-BLUE

Most of the fellowship accepted the 5th Edition, influenced by the propaganda disseminated by the office. Controversy repels many members, and we really do want to think the best of people—especially those we believe to be in service to us. But some members knew the truth. We knew that the 5th Edition was not NA approved literature. It had never been through the process required to make it NA approved literature.

David Moorhead was one of the enlightened. With the help of several others, he compiled a basic text that was arguably the only one the fellowship has ever approved. He and a handful of other sophisticated members installed the changes to the italicized portion that were made in the third Edition revised into the 2nd Edition. Another way to do the same thing or say the same thing is to restore the 4th and 9th Traditions in the third edition revised to the way the fellowship approved them. And then he distributed this rendition of the basic text with the help of those other enlightened members who supported him. It was priced at cost, so groups and members could buy it and give it away to newcomers. It was his contention that this was the way the writers intended it, and the way that the fellowship wanted
it.

He knew that the office was allowing significant profit to be made through sales of literature, so that they could fund “services” that those few folks thought we needed without ever asking the fellowship.

The basic text that came to be commonly called the ‘Baby-Blue’ was the 2nd Edition, as approved by the Fellowship, with the Revised Little White Book changes; or the 3rd Edition Revised with the fellowship-approved lines restored to the 6th chapter. Either way you look at it, the Baby Blue is rightfully our only truly Fellowship Approved Basic Text.

This action, of course, upset the office, so they hired an attorney and David along with all others involved were told to, “cease and desist.” Then a lawsuit was brought against David - our service office sued a member! Ironically, they were suing a member for doing just what the fellowship believed the office was doing; for being directly responsible and acting on the instructions of the fellowship. But only the very well informed ever saw it that way. Most believed the political propaganda the office distributed, maligning David and assassinating the character of all who supported him in his brave efforts to do the right thing for the right reasons.
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David was in the process of dying from the aids virus at the time. As a matter of fact he knew that and in many ways volunteered to lead this effort because of his impending death.

The lawsuit was held in federal court, and you might find the transcript of the proceedings very enlightening. At the end of the trial the judge issued a court order, which in my opinion; World Services is currently in defiance or perhaps even contempt of. The court order decreed that the office was to determine through the conference which edition of the Basic Text, was, in reality the choice of the fellowship, and that the office was to produce a lower cost book again at the direction of the fellowship.

Since the issuance of the court order, no unbiased frame of reference has ever been provided for the fellowship to make these decisions, and the office has never taken appropriate action even though it promised it would.
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Concepts of NA Service

In 2003 there was an NA History Workshop in Nashville, Tennessee. To fully understand the drafting of the Concepts you should listen to Terry B’s interview from the workshop. He pointed out that when the 2nd half of the green service manual was withheld from a group conscience vote at WSC’82, a motion was made to study the service structure of other organizations to see if we could learn something that might help us serve our fellowship.

I don’t trust the results of that study and you’ll know why when you listen to Terry. Essentially, the study concluded that AA’s founder-ism and “protect them from themselves” service philosophy was embraced and all attempts to structure services and the discussion of them based on group conscience, self-support, and direct responsibility were rejected.

The Concepts are an intricate and complex set of rationalizations why group conscience, true autonomy, real non-endorsement/non-financing, self-support, and direct responsibility are antiquated ideals, not to be followed to the letter. The Concepts are insidious justification why leadership needs the ability to decide for the masses, and an effective denial system allowing service committees
to be more “efficient and progressive” than they would be if they were seriously committed to spiritual principles. Study them as if you were listening to a newcomer explain why the program cannot work for him and you’ll see clearly what I mean.
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All Subsequent ‘So-Called’ NA Literature

Prior to the closing of the literature committee we had accomplished a great deal, so a lot of real valid NA input was included in the first drafts of “It Works, How and Why”. The true problem is that before the finalization process began the committee had closed, so the results by definition are spiritually corrupt beyond repair. When we close a committee which has finalization responsibility we have effectively placed an arbitrary and artificial limitation on how God may express himself through us. Therefore any literature produced in this way is only input from an isolated segment of the fellowship and can never be called true NA literature, because the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using, and we are “…to be fully self-supporting…”.

Additionally, we are strong-willed people. We are highly influenced by our personal experience and if our experience is unusual and we are charged with the responsibility to finalize literature without the balance of open participation in the process, our specialized experience becomes too overly influential. My most critical observation is that the folks who finalized these pieces were way too “treatment” oriented.
The book “It Works, How and Why” is a masterfully produced volume, but it lacks the input of the best minds in the fellowship. It is written to please treatment professionals not to provide the very best help we as a fellowship could provide to those members who want to learn about the steps and the traditions. It also has many other regional and conceptual biases and it lacks the sort of concrete open guidance and universal experience of the Basic Text.

The fellowship was not told that finalization was a faulty, limited, controlled and closed-off process. They were instead intentionally led to believe that the process was the same as it was for the basic text and the original thirteen IP’s. The results including, “It Works, How and Why”, “Just For Today”, the step-working guide, and in fact all so-called NA approved literature and publications produced since about 1985, cannot be called valid NA literature for these reasons.

Many feel that most of the allegedly NA literature written lately has basically been “new product” for the profiteers and power brokers now staffing NAWS, our corporate management structure that governs NA in pretense of service.

The more literature they produce the more money they control the more “services” they provide the more irreplaceable they become. While
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I’m sure this is true, I’m also sure that there are elitist goals of shaping recovery for the great “unwashed masses” and enabling we “common folks” to ascend to the levels of the helpers too. And I am also sure there are some very genuine members who honestly believe they are being of service after having been fooled by the disease and the diseased.
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NAWS Itself

Just who are our leaders? How many of them participated in defining NA philosophy as members of the literature committee when our basic text was written? What are their real credentials? How do members and groups participate in the electing of them? What is the traceable line of day to day direct responsibility from NAWS to NA groups? When do they ask us questions looking for their direction? How are they accountable to NA?

Direct Responsibility

“NA as such ought never to be organized but we may create service boards and committees directly responsible to those they serve”

I’ve always found it curious that this is the only reference in our spiritual principles where our service structure is mentioned, and it only refers to service boards and committees that are directly responsible to us. Nowhere does it say we may create service boards and committees that are not directly responsible. So what does that mean? Can we disband service boards and committees if they fail to be directly responsible? Can we reform them? Can we replace them?
Well, sure we can! Why don’t we?

The only thing stopping us is our disease - and their’s
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What can be learned by NA Members and what can be done

My disease grabs me now and then, grabs me and shakes me and lets me know in very certain terms that it is still there, that it is still alive and well and that if I fail to keep the guard of recovery up, that it will get me. That happened to me recently - I ran headlong, full of denial, fueled by self-will into its waiting arms – and it hurt me. Today, my disease yearns for my self destruction, just like it always did, but today its methods are more subtle. I no longer use drugs, but addiction can destroy me without them.

I had ample opportunity to practice my recovery, but I ignored and rejected offers of help. Caution and deliberateness were out the window, and I just rammed headlong forward with my willful scheme. Predictably the result was failure, pain and misery.

Recovery, in retrospect, was all around me; all I needed to do was surrender and listen. But I forced humility behind expediency and pain was the inevitable result.

My point here is that if what you have read makes you disappointed: do something real about it. Share the truth with others and make a difference.
through your recovery and service.

Now, after reading what you’ve read about our fellowship’s history and the current state of affairs, you are probably just a bit angry and you don’t know what to do about that. I understand your dilemma. I have faced it regularly for some time now. I’ve done most of the wrong things along the way, yet somehow I ended up doing what happened to be right. I’m still clean and I’m still recovering from addiction. In reality that’s the most that I can do. The most important action I can take is to practice simple recovery from addiction without confusing or corrupting my mind with ideas from outside of real NA.

Yet I feel that I can do more. I can share the truth of service as often as the opportunity presents itself. I can ask probing questions of those who claim to be my trusted servants. I can sponsor, and speak, and share my recovery, share what sustains my recovery, and walk a message that is clear and simple. And I can be directly responsible to those I serve.

To me direct responsibility is the very most important aspect of what I strive personally to be as a trusted servant of NA. I hold no structural service title, I am not officially an officer of any formal service committee, yet I strive for this direct responsibility passionately. If you wonder why this
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is so, allow me to explain:

You see I really believe in the traditions, I believe we as members, groups and as a fellowship have but one ultimate authority, a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience, I believe that those who truly are our leaders are but trusted servants, that they do not govern, they do not try to govern, and they do not confuse service with authority.

And I know there are many ways to govern. Politicians campaign to become elected. They influence our thinking so we will vote for them. They passionately advance their own agendas and sharply defame both their opponents’ ideas and the opponents themselves. Then they are elected and they govern.

One of our biggest errors as members is treating service as if it resembled representative government in any way. Service cannot function if it resembles government, because then there is rule, law, and we become bogged down in endless intricate guidelines and our purpose is lost.

All service in NA is based on direct responsibility, not some sort of theoretical ideal. Thus if an action is truly service to NA then the service board or committee is acting on the wishes and instructions of those they serve. This means
that the service board or committee, the very trusted servants themselves, have asked the questions necessary to learn what they are supposed to be doing, that they have provided the complete, objective data and information those they serve need to make a decision, and most importantly that they have experienced and shared recovery from addiction.

In my life, when I allow ideas into my program of recovery that have their origin outside of recovery, my ideals are diluted. My recovery is reduced; becoming less than it could be if I had concentrated on ideas based on the therapeutic value of one addict sharing with another and the spiritual ideals of the 12 steps.

This is what is happening every time a newcomer reads literature written by self-styled authorities, people who believe they know what is in our best interest better than we do ourselves. Addicts seeking recovery are being given less than the best we as a fellowship are capable of giving, and by that their lives and their recoveries are being limited. I believe that every time we compromise a spiritual principle in one of our traditions we are limiting the life of someone, somehow denying recovery to one who seeks it.

So I seek to be directly responsible. I offer the objective truth of service to NA today.
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Altogether too much of what passes as service in NA now is really self-service, politics, government, and corporate maneuvering. I seek to be directly responsible.

What can you do to help NA return to its principles?

1. Put your recovery first – Seek recovery from people and literature that is all about the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. True, pure NA literature. Written in an open participatory directly responsible atmosphere. You can find all the literature that is truly NA, free to download at: www.nahelp.org. Reject so-called help from people who hold themselves out as knowing better than an addict can, and reject literature that claims to be NA but was not produced by the open participatory service committee method.

2. Share your recovery – Be visible and available. Sponsor, speak, and participate; but never compromise on recovery or service principles.

3. Inform – become directly responsible – decline positions of government in so-called NA structural service – teach others about the traditions – and live them.
An addict alone is in bad company

We do together what is difficult or impossible to do alone; that’s why our meetings work. A group of members with one common purpose, a “primary purpose,” get together and a meeting is born. For each of us this becomes a key way we give it away in order to keep it, and the most important activity this group does is to hold its meetings.

But a Group is more than this, and mature groups do more that just hold meetings. Home groups nurture their members and sponsor their newcomers.

Mature groups have generally been around long enough to remember the time-honored principle that just as we band together in groups to do what is difficult or impossible to do in isolation, groups band together in area committees to do what the groups cannot do for themselves. Many groups can, however, do nearly all of what they need to do for themselves. Participation in a service structure is really only important if there is a process for group conscience to be facilitated. That has long ceased to exist in NA structural service where participation has become a venue for
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compliance and government rather than service.

Ours is a mature Group, we have our weekly meeting and support each other outside of the meetings, yet we do much more. We actively encourage recovery locally by sponsoring and coordinating an annual 12-Step-Retreat. We also hold a summer micro-convention at a campground where newcomers who lack the funds for a normal convention can experience the fellowship and recovery that conventions encourage. We also conduct an annual workshop to study the 12-Traditions and NA History. Our members are well-traveled and have extensive support structures, and these outside members flock to our events in enthusiastic support and participation.

This is the path of recovery and service our group has taken. Yours may follow very different directions; just remember, you do not need permission - you give permission. Structural service only needs to do for groups what those groups cannot do for themselves. But never hedge on consistency and follow-through, and remember your primary purpose.

In Service to NA

We all have levels of personal identification. For me I am very simply, an addict, recovering from
addiction, in service to NA. There are other things I am, but they are not pertinent here.

I am an addict. The first step of NA got me clean. Through the fellowship – at a meeting, after hopeless years of searching for an answer, I learned the truth that set me free to be clean:

*I am powerless over addiction and my life has become unmanageable (by me).*

This is the keystone of the foundation of my life. I do not think there is anywhere in the world I could have learned this truth other than Narcotics Anonymous. So as long as I love life I will be grateful to Narcotics Anonymous.

I tried to repay those who carried this message to me. They told me I could not do that directly, except for being at meetings when they needed help. They said the only way I could give back what I’d been given was to reach out from NA meetings and help others. They told me I needed to give it away to keep it, and also told me to focus first on getting something real, something substantial to give away.

So I worked the steps, and by doing so I lost the desire to use. The personal rewards I’ve received from understanding and exploring the NA program are exactly the opposite of the direction I was headed when I got here. I was alone, on death’s
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doorstep, hell-bent for permanent institutionalization, destitute and terminally hopeless. Now I am healthy and vibrant, a man surrounded with wealth in family and friends, a trusted professional member of my community and a vision of hope.

Now…The program of Narcotic Anonymous allows me to recover as I practice it.

I am grateful to Narcotics Anonymous.

So I am in service to NA. I do all I can to make sure that the program and fellowship that gave me this gift survives and reaches others as it reached me. I am passionate about NA and in all the important ways I want it to stay as I found it. I found a program, tested by time and usage, built on truth, simple to adapt my life to. I found a collection of members using the program as if their lives depended on it; committed members, philosophically exclusive to the Narcotics Anonymous program even though they may have attended other meetings. And I was allowed to be a full and complete participatory contributor to the growth and development of NA.

Here is the challenge of this book:

Formal structural service, in NA, has become exclusive rather than inclusive; newcomers are forced to find something vastly different. I
believe that this vast difference vitally affects their potential recovery in a very negative way I know it is affecting mine, because the longer this goes on the less I’m able to “give it away”. If it continues unabated I may be forced to lose it.

Today’s newcomers see a different vision of the NA Program than I was shown. They see formal lessons to be learned. They see an in-depth, definitive, explanatory study guide and a workbook to direct them through the process of working steps. They find members who are not even clean being allowed to become trusted servants.

On the surface that may even appear okay if you rationalize far enough, so let’s explore the reality. The study guide is called “It Works: How and Why”. This was the first complete piece of literature to carry the NA name to be produced by a non-participatory closed-down service committee. And to a great extent this is the most toxic of all the so-called NA literature written by non-accountable members who believe they know what is good for us better than we can learn in an 11th step or share in a group conscience. Their bias toward treatment is blatant, and their work would not have survived in an open participatory atmosphere. Yet it is out there, office-approved and potentially harmful to the unsuspecting newcomer.

One of the great injustices of NA service is
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that there was a draft of this work that held some real promise. A draft form of *It works How and Why* exists that is the work of basically open participatory service committees. It is akin to the Grey Book – the review form of the Basic Text. It was the first review form that was to be distributed to the fellowship so that everyone would have a chance to send input and be a part of the process.

But it did not get sent to every NA group – I think it was sent to regional or area committees along with some other distracting items. Not only was it distributed improperly, there was no mechanism to insure that the input sent in was treated with any respect. There was no fellowship oversight, no true line of direct responsibility from the committee whose job it was to factor-in the input, back to the writer of the input.

This is the huge philosophical change resulting from closing down the committee. Unless there is direct responsibility there can be no trust between servant and those they serve. There can only be delegation of responsibility.

We, as a fellowship took responsibility for writing our Basic Text. A spiritually-based member/philosopher wrote the Tree, and a spiritually based committee drafted the blue service manual from that so that we had an open participatory frame of reference – the proper frame of reference – for the
development of our Basic Text.

When the 2nd half of the Green service manual was withheld from the conference that entire Spiritual basis started to change. The phrase … “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” defines what happened to change our services at the broadest level. A very limited few members with an agenda - perhaps in their minds a beneficent agenda - gained control of communication fellowship-wide and told us some things we wanted to hear, fed us lies we blindly believed, and got us to abrogate our responsibility. We have given up our vote.
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What we all might consider

Narcotics Anonymous itself is a social movement, a subculture of society, a haven for those among us who suffer from the disease of addiction. It is a fellowship or society of people for whom drugs have become a major problem. NA is a self-help program of twelve steps adapted from AA, the highly successful program for alcoholics that began in the ‘30’s in the USA. Narcotics Anonymous offers hope to others through the employment of our 12 Traditions which define our role in society.

By helping addicts stop using drugs, Narcotics Anonymous contributes much to civilization. Crime is reduced and the community is a safer, healthier place because Narcotics Anonymous exists. Therefore, that which is in the genuine best interest of NA is arguably in the best interest of society.

By reading this book you as a member of the public may become concerned for the internal health and well being of Narcotics Anonymous, and that is an appropriate reaction. Many a positive social movement has stopped doing the good it started doing because of corrupted ideals, corrupted leadership, and compromised spiritual principles.
Many of the individuals who staff Narcotics Anonymous World Services must be intelligent enough to realize the deceit and mass coercion that surrounded the development of that entity and its definitive document the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust*. There is good reason to believe that people who would perpetuate fraud upon a Spiritual Fellowship might also swindle personal profit from that fellowship. And in light of how NA has been cheated of the promise inherent in its twelve traditions, my belief is that the authorities should look at the people who promoted this mass intimidation. I would welcome a thorough investigation of NAWS with a moratorium on the use of any NA money for any sort of defense.

I do not personally oppose these people in any way but I do sincerely oppose how their disease manifests itself: in rejection of the spiritual principles of both recovery and service. This rejection of the most basic principles, particularly in Tradition 9, 2 & 7 has hurt NA long enough. The intentional injury must end now.
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My Plan

If you are a concerned member of NA here are a number of actions you can take to help the cause of reforming or reframing Narcotics Anonymous services or creating a viable alternative.

1. Abstain from financial support of NAWS as it exists today. Do not buy anything from them and oppose any cash flow into their hands.

2. In your personal recovery and in your sponsorship, refrain from the use of any literature that is not truly “NA-fellowship approved.” ...see: www.anonymi.info for a full inventory of all the real NA Literature … all of it available for free download.

3. Refrain from browbeating anyone else into believing as you do. Remember, “attraction rather than promotion”

4. Give away copies of our book in its historical and genuinely fellowship-approved form – either the 2nd Edition (Approval Form) or the 3rd Edition Revised with the original 4th and 9th Traditions (Baby-Blue). Give them to anyone interested in NA recovery or History as Historical documents. Give them to newcomers as literature that
was used by early members.

5. Give away copies of the first 2 year’s issues of the NA Way and reprinted articles – you have permission - as evidence of the spirit of our fellowship and services during the time NA Philosophy was developing. Give away copies of the original “Guide to the 4th Step” and the Grey Book (see:www.nahelp.org)

6. Develop your group. Perform the very local services you need to perform according to your group’s conscience by yourselves for yourselves; ask for help only when you really need help. Never accept government.

7. Start a 12-Step Retreat. Devote a weekend to study of the steps and invite a speaker for each Step. Find someone with time in Recovery who got clean on the 2nd Edition or the Baby-Blue, if you can …someone who uses only truly Fellowship Approved literature in their recovery and sponsorship.

8. Ask probing questions of your trusted servants, e.g. “When did the Groups of NA vote on the prices charged for NA Literature?” or “How can I as a concerned member make sure our group’s input is included in new literature?” or “How do
groups determine what services are performed with the profits from the literature we as a fellowship own?”

9. Educate your fellow addicts about what really happened to establish NA Philosophy as it is today, what really happened to foster the growth of NA from the very small collection of scattered meetings of the late 1970’s, to the worldwide fellowship we’ve experienced since the mid-1980’s …And how our Basic Text actually was written, for this was certainly the most massive service project ever in Narcotics Anonymous.

10. Study the 12 Traditions. Get a copy of the 6th chapter of the Grey Book and study from there. Invite members who were involved in literature and service development in the early 1980’s to speak to your group.

11. Participate in any directly responsible alternatives to the current service structure that appear to fill the void that exists now.

12. Never Compromise; not on abstinence, nor on recovery, nor on group conscience – self-support – or Direct responsibility.

Visit the website: www.Anonymi.info where you will find all of the historical material referenced
and more including commentary and reports on the current status of alternative NA service. **Considerations**

What really does happen to a Spiritual Fellowship that compromises the very most primary Spiritual Principles that define it? The truth is, I do not know, and the odds are you don’t know either. Narcotics Anonymous promises much to the addict who still suffers, and even at its very worst could probably help millions more addicts seeking recovery. But that’s not really the question here, is it? The genuine question is whether or not NA is helping as much as it could if it held true to its principles.

What happens to the newcomer who comes around, gets clean, begins to recover and wants to share, to be of service? At every meeting they attend (hopefully) they hear the 12 Traditions read. Being new and naïve, they believe what they hear. They really think that there is only one ultimate authority, one primary decision maker in NA: group conscience. They really believe the only thing stopping a group from expressing its autonomy is serious negative affect on the fellowship at large. They really believe we do not endorse or finance outside enterprise. They really believe we are self-supporting. They really believe our services are directly responsible.
What sort of horrible disillusionment do you suppose happens to them when they begin attending structural service committee meetings and they discover that none of these are true?

Imagine their disappointment when they attend that service committee meeting. They believed in Narcotics Anonymous, they felt that the principles they learned in recovery meetings would be honored in service meetings. After a short while they learned that area committees get their guidance from the region or district they belong to rather than the groups they are supposed to serve. And that regions or districts take their direction from NAWS rather than their member areas. They find something much more akin to government than service.

Perhaps they see groups and members being chastised or censured because those members and groups are not conducting themselves “correctly” according the ‘party-line’. They hear certain truths discounted and marginalized under the bludgeon of disunity. They find massive and preemptory guidelines surrounding any service projects being considered and perhaps more concern for adherence to the guidelines than effort toward making the message more available.

If they explore finances they find that huge percentages of profits are made on literature and
conventions. These profits are spent on “services” controlled by NAWS. “Services” that have never been offered to NA groups for evaluation. And while some of these efforts may seem worthwhile, they wonder where group conscience exists in all of this. When they explore finances in depth, they find that major book resellers like Hazelton receive substantial discounts, so the reseller can make a profit on the freely given labor and talent of our members. But all that, they find is in the process of change because currently NAWS itself is writing literature from the fellowship’s suggestions, and everyone involved must somehow be “for-hire”.

If they want to help with some project being developed for the fellowship they find they must qualify to be a part of any committee of significance in NA beyond the local level. Perhaps they must even submit a resume. Willingness, spirit and recovery are of limited usefulness, the requirements probably include educational or experiential parameters, even college degrees.

Most will succumb to the “bigger-picture” syndrome and simply compromise their principles at the urging of other members and the instruction of the twelve Concepts of service. Hopefully some who have gone this route are working a tenth step and open to suggestions. Repeated compromise of our Traditions can only eventually lead to death for
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addicts seeking recovery. Hopefully some will be open to change … to a return to our principles.

Be a part of Healthy Change for NA

www.anonymi.info

A Final Note

Perhaps some of the services that are being performed without the consent of the fellowship really are services the fellowship wants performed. Here’s a simple way to find out:

1. Cut the price of all literature back to a break-even point.
2. Pay all the salaries of our special workers and pay all of our legitimate bills.
3. Ask the fellowship which of those services that were being performed with profits the groups are willing to fund through contributions.

That will tell us what services a reformed NAWS is
directly responsible to perform.
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Background And Timeline

Here is a brief overview historical sketch of the development of Narcotics Anonymous.

Before 1953—Several attempts are made to begin a self-help program for addicts similar to and (I assume) based upon AA and the 12 Steps of AA. Although some attempts may have helped people, and perhaps all are well intentioned, none of them lasts any significant length of time nor affects what is now NA in any noteworthy way.

1953 – 1971—In 1953 some folks got together in Southern California to form a Group of Narcotics Anonymous. One member in attendance is Jimmy Kinnon, who makes a serious commitment to NA. Several significant events occur during this 18 year timeframe which is documented elsewhere. Perhaps the best way to understand the philosophy of the time is to carefully study a quote from the “Little White Book”: In the section We do Recover Jimmy K. tells a bit of his story … he confides that he found AA to be the answer to his problem, and states that many others were “…unable to identify with the alcoholic in AA…” (And thereby able to receive) “…healing
therapy for all addicted people…” These original members felt the advent of NA would help addicts find the level of *identification* “…each needed to convince himself he could stay clean…”

A further quote, from *Recovery and Relapse*, should aid your understanding of what NA offered; “Quality, not quantity, is the most important aspect of abstinence. Emotional sobriety in reality is our goal, not mere physical abstinence.”

I have found that most people say what they mean and if you watch their words carefully you can discern “where they are coming from”.

At the end of this era Greg Pierce got clean and made a different sort of commitment to NA than anyone else had made before.

1971 – 1978—Serious responsibility and good common sense was in short supply in the early years of our fellowship. Jimmy was a serious and responsible individual, and he took on the responsibility of maintaining a world service office for NA. Most of those he sponsored got involved including, Greg. Effective outreach came to NA during this time and real, stable NA Groups were formed outside of southern California in Texas, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. With Greg’s help and effort at the office some communication was established, and to answer repetitive questions Greg
assembled the “NA Tree,” a theoretical description of NA Services.

A Literature committee formed itself in Southern California NA, and that committee revised the Tree into the Blue Service manual. I understand that after it was complete and agreed upon by the groups, it was changed by the Office prior to printing (just like the first edition Basic Text). The changes were primarily regarding the interrelationships between the office, the trustees and the fellowship (the WSC).

During this time Bo got clean. Bo became determined to have a book for NA much like the “Big-Book” was for AA. He went to the WSC in Southern California in 1977 and pursued the question of who was working on the book. Bo connected with Greg and was encouraged to actively work on a book for NA. Bo was elected WSC Literature Sub-Committee chairman in 1978 (also in ’79 & ’80).

1979 – 1983—Narcotics Anonymous writes its own Basic Text, Informational Pamphlets, and fellowship-controlled Magazine, and implements a service structure that challenges the Office and the Trustees for control of the fellowship by the NA Groups. Narcotics Anonymous defines itself as THE program of Recovery from Addiction. Powerlessness over addiction becomes the
centerfold of NA philosophy, along with total abstinence from all drugs. Open Participatory Service becomes the method of member involvement and broad grassroots development of NA as a whole. The result is exponential growth. Growing pains include the compromise of Spiritual Principles particularly the violation of Traditions by some of those the fellowship trusts the most.

This book is mainly about the time in NA from 1979 – 1983. It was during that time we, as members of NA, developed the philosophy now known of as the program of Narcotics Anonymous. We, as members of NA, developed this philosophy and this program - elements of it were given to us by our predecessors, but we put it all together – it is ours!

1984 – today—Narcotics Anonymous at the group and local level flourishes by virtue of the efforts of the 79 –’83 era, especially in the beginning. NA still flourishes wherever the local fellowship embraces total abstinence and the Traditions.