



**Narcotics Anonymous®**

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## Foreword

This booklet is an introduction to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. It is written for those men and women who, like ourselves, suffer from a seemingly hopeless addiction to drugs. There is no cure for addiction, but recovery is possible by a programme of simple spiritual principles. This booklet is not meant to be comprehensive, but it contains the essentials that in our personal and group experience we know to be necessary for recovery.

## Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

## Who is an addict?

Most of us do not have to think twice about this question. *We know!* Our whole life and thinking was centred in drugs in one form or another – the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more. We lived to use and used to live. Very simply, an addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs. We are people in the grip of a continuing and progressive illness whose ends are always the same: jails, institutions, and death.

## **What is the Narcotics Anonymous programme?**

NA is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean. This is a programme of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only one requirement for membership, the desire to stop using. We suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our programme is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that they work.

There are no strings attached to NA. We are not affiliated with any other organisations, we have no initiation fees or dues, no pledges to sign, no promises to make to anyone. We are not connected with any political, religious or law enforcement groups, and are under no surveillance at any time. Anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion or lack of religion.

We are not interested in what or how much you used or who your connections were, what you have done in the past, how much or how little you have, but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help. The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away. We have learned from our group experience that those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean.

## **Why are we here?**

Before coming to the Fellowship of NA, we could not manage our own lives. We could not live and enjoy life as other people do. We had to have something different and we thought we had found it in drugs. We placed their use ahead of the welfare of our families, our wives, husbands, and our children. We had to have drugs at all costs. We did many people great harm, but most of all we harmed ourselves. Through our inability to accept personal responsibilities we were actually creating our own problems. We seemed to be incapable of facing life on its own terms.

Most of us realised that in our addiction we were slowly committing suicide, but addiction is such a cunning enemy of life that we had lost the power to do anything about it. Many of us ended up in jail, or sought help through medicine, religion and psychiatry. None of these methods was sufficient for us. Our disease always resurfaced or continued to progress until in desperation we sought help from each other in Narcotics Anonymous.

After coming to NA we realised we were sick people. We suffered from a disease from which there is no known cure. It can, however, be arrested at some point, and recovery is then possible.

## **How it works**

If you want what we have to offer, and are willing to make the effort to get it, then you are ready to take

certain steps. These are the principles that made our recovery possible:

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we*

*understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

This sounds like a big order, and we can't do it all at once. We didn't become addicted in one day, so remember – *easy does it*.

There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat us in our recovery; this is an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles. Three of these that are indispensable are honesty, open-mindedness and willingness. With these we are well on our way.

We feel that our approach to the disease of addiction is completely realistic, for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel. We feel that our way is practical, for one addict can best understand and help another addict. We believe that the sooner we face our problems within our society, in everyday living, just that much faster do we become acceptable, responsible, and productive members of that society.

The only way to keep from returning to active addiction is not to take that first drug. If you are like us you know that one is too many and a thousand never enough. We put great emphasis on this, for we know that when we use drugs in any form, or substitute one for another, we release our addiction all over again.

Thinking of alcohol as different from other drugs has caused a great many addicts to relapse. Before we came to NA, many of us viewed alcohol separately, but we cannot afford to be confused about this. Alcohol is a drug. We are people with the disease of addiction who must abstain from all drugs in order to recover.

### **What can I do?**

Begin your own programme by taking Step One from the previous chapter, "How It Works." When we fully concede to our innermost selves that we are powerless over our addiction, we have taken a big step in our recovery. Many of us have had some reservations at this point, so give yourself a break and be as thorough as possible from the start. Go on to Step Two, and so forth, and as you go on you will come to an understanding of the programme for yourself. If you are in an institution of any kind and have stopped using for the present, you can with a clear mind try this way of life.

Upon release, continue your daily programme and contact a member of NA. Do this by mail, by phone, or in person. Better yet, come to our meetings. Here you will find answers to some of the things that may be disturbing you now.

If you are not in an institution, the same holds true. Stop using for today. Most of us can do for eight or twelve hours what seems impossible for a longer period of time. If the obsession or compulsion becomes too great, put yourself on a five minute basis of not using.

Minutes will grow to hours, and hours to days, so you will break the habit and gain some peace of mind. The real miracle happens when you realise that the need for drugs has in some way been lifted from you. You have stopped using and started to live.

### **The Twelve Traditions of NA**

We keep what we have only with vigilance, and just as freedom for the individual comes from the Twelve Steps, so freedom for the group springs from our traditions.

As long as the ties that bind us together are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on NA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
6. An NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centres may employ special workers.
9. NA, as such, ought never be organised, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

## **Recovery and relapse**

Many people think that recovery is simply a matter of not using drugs. They consider a relapse a sign of complete failure, and long periods of abstinence a sign of complete success. We in the recovery programme of Narcotics Anonymous have found that this perception is too simplistic. After a member has had some involvement in our fellowship, a relapse may be the jarring experience that brings about a more rigorous application of the

programme. By the same token we have observed some members who remain abstinent for long periods of time whose dishonesty and self-deceit still prevent them from enjoying complete recovery and acceptance within society. Complete and continuous abstinence, however, in close association and identification with others in NA groups, is still the best ground for growth.

Although all addicts are basically the same in kind, we do, as individuals, differ in degree of sickness and rate of recovery. There may be times when a relapse lays the groundwork for complete freedom. At other times that freedom can only be achieved by a grim and obstinate willfulness to hang on to abstinence come hell or high water until a crisis passes. An addict, who by any means can lose, even for a time, the need or desire to use, and has free choice over impulsive thinking and compulsive action, has reached a turning point that may be the decisive factor in their recovery. The feeling of true independence and freedom hangs here at times in the balance. To step out alone and run our own lives again draws us, yet we seem to know that what we have has come from dependence on a Power greater than ourselves and from the giving and receiving of help from others in acts of empathy. Many times in our recovery our old demons will haunt us. Life may again become meaningless, monotonous, and boring. We may tire mentally in repeating our new ideas and tire physically in our new activities, yet we know that if we fail to repeat them we will surely take up our old

practices. We suspect that if we do not use what we have, we will lose what we have. These times are often the periods of our greatest growth. Our minds and bodies seem tired of it all, yet the dynamic forces of change or true conversion, deep within, may be working to give us the answers that alter our inner motivations and change our lives.

Recovery as experienced through our Twelve Steps is our goal, not mere physical abstinence. To improve ourselves takes effort, and since there is no way in the world to graft a new idea on a closed mind, an opening must be made somehow. Since we can do this only for ourselves, we need to recognise two of our seemingly inherent enemies, apathy and procrastination. Our resistance to change seems built in, and only a nuclear blast of some kind will bring about any alteration or initiate another course of action. A relapse, if we survive it, may provide the charge for the demolition process. A relapse and sometimes subsequent death of someone close to us can do the job of awakening us to the necessity for vigorous personal action.

## Just for today

Tell yourself:

*Just for today*, my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs.

*Just for today*, I will have faith in someone in NA who believes in me and wants to help me in my recovery.

*Just for today*, I will have a programme. I will try to follow it to the best of my ability.

*Just for today*, through NA, I will try to get a better perspective on my life.

*Just for today*, I will be unafraid. My thoughts will be on my new associations, people who are not using and who have found a new way of life. So long as I follow that way, I have nothing to fear.

## Personal stories

*Narcotics Anonymous has grown a great deal since 1953. The people who started this fellowship and for whom we have a deep and lasting affection have taught us much about addiction and recovery. In the following pages we offer you our beginnings. The first section was written in 1965 by one of our earliest members.*

## We do recover

Although “Politics makes strange bedfellows,” as the old saying goes, addiction makes us one of a kind. Our personal stories may vary in individual pattern but in the end we all have the same thing in common. This common illness or disorder is addiction. We know well the two things that make up true addiction: obsession and compulsion. Obsession – that fixed idea that takes us back time and time again to our particular drug, or some substitute, to recapture the ease and comfort we once knew.

Compulsion – once having started the process with one fix, one pill, or one drink we cannot stop through our own power of will. Because of our physical sensitivity to drugs, we are completely in the grip of a destructive power greater than ourselves.

When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as human beings, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends – jails, institutions, or death – or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man's entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual – not religious – programme, known as Narcotics Anonymous.

When my addiction brought me to the point of complete powerlessness, uselessness, and surrender some fifteen years ago, there was no NA. I found AA, and in that fellowship met addicts who had also found that programme to be the answer to their problem. However, we knew that many were still going down the road of disillusion, degradation, and death, because they were unable to identify with the alcoholic in AA. Their identification was at the level of apparent symptoms and not at the deeper level of emotions or feelings, where empathy becomes a healing therapy for all addicted people. With several other addicts and some members

of AA who had great faith in us and the programme, we formed, in July of 1953, what we now know as Narcotics Anonymous. We felt that now the addict would find from the start as much identification as each needed to convince himself that he could stay clean by the example of others who had recovered for many years.

That this was what was principally needed has proved itself in these passing years. That wordless language of recognition, belief, and faith, which we call empathy, created the atmosphere in which we could feel time, touch reality, and recognise spiritual values long lost to many of us. In our programme of recovery we are growing in numbers and in strength. Never before have so many clean addicts, of their own choice and in free society, been able to meet where they please, to maintain their recovery in complete creative freedom.

Even addicts said it could not be done the way we had it planned. We believed in openly scheduled meetings – no more hiding as other groups had tried. We believed this differed from all other methods tried before by those who advocated long withdrawal from society. We felt that the sooner the addict could face his problem in everyday living, just that much faster would he become a real, productive citizen. We eventually have to stand on our own feet and face life on its own terms, so why not from the start.

Because of this, of course, many relapsed and many were lost completely. However, many stayed and some came back after their setback. The brighter part is the fact that of those who are now our members, many have

long terms of complete abstinence and are better able to help the newcomer. Their attitude, based on the spiritual values of our steps and traditions, is the dynamic force that is bringing increase and unity to our programme. Now we know that the time has come when that tired old lie, "Once an addict, always an addict," will no longer be tolerated by either society or the addict himself. We do recover.

### **Personal stories**

*The following pages are devoted to individual recovery experiences written by members of the NA Fellowship in the UK. Other stories of NA members' recovery can be found in our Basic Text, Narcotics Anonymous.*

### **No longer alone**

I'm an addict, of that much I'm sure. Long before NA reached out to me I knew I was an addict. Long before NA reached me I knew that addiction was progressive, incurable and fatal: the previous nineteen years of my life had been proof of that. What I didn't know, or believe, was that there was a solution. I thought I was destined to continue on my path of despair, degradation and dereliction until I died. In retrospect I think probably the worst thing was the hopelessness of it all, yet here I am, twelve years clean with a life beyond my wildest dreams.

I don't actually believe I was born an addict, merely that as a child I had physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs that were suppressed. I developed the

feeling of not being good enough, of having a hole inside, of being separate and apart from, of being alone.

I started using when I was fifteen. I had run away from home in the search for "freedom". I didn't know what that was, but I knew that what I had didn't feel like it. Desperate, hungry and alone, I found myself selling my body to homosexuals for as little as a bed, a meal or some company. One turned out to be making his living from selling pills. He gave me some to sell, advising me not to take any myself. Of course, I did. That night, I found myself walking down the road "talking" to people I'd never met. I remember thinking "this is it, this is the answer", and being suddenly very spirited. I shared out most of the pills with other desperate and lonely souls so that they could feel good too. At about three in the morning I realised that to get more of these things I was going to have to pay for the last lot, so I robbed a late night garage. Six months later I was shooting speed. By this time I had gone back to live at my parents and I was on probation. On discovering boxes of ampoules and syringes, my parents turned to my probation officer for help. He didn't know what to do, so he sent me to my GP. My GP told me I was a silly boy, that drugs were dangerous and to stop taking them. He just didn't understand that neither could I, nor did I want to. I told my probation officer this only to find that the next day I was arrested and taken to court for breach of probation. In those days, no-one knew much about addiction, the court considered that I was out of control and at the age

of fifteen decided to commit me to an Approved School where I was to stay until I was nineteen.

I was devastated. They took me to a young persons' prison where I spent almost five months in a single cell awaiting transfer to the Approved School. Sometimes I felt so desperate that I would stick nails in my arms. When I eventually got to this school I was terrified. Although some of the staff seemed caring, the other boys were often ruthless in their persecution of others. The first opportunity I got, I ran away. I managed to stay on the run for eleven months. In that time I developed a heroin habit. When eventually I was recaptured and charged additionally with illegal possession. Rather than send me back to the school, they decided to section me into a mental hospital. I was still only sixteen years old. I knew back then I was an addict, but I didn't want to stop using. While in the mental hospital, I carried on using. When I left, I carried on using.

Six months after leaving I found myself checking back in again voluntarily, because my life and body were such a mess. I was willing, and I believe ready, for a new and better way of life. Upon leaving that institution, the pain of being alone was like a magnet that drew me back to my old acquaintances and using again. I couldn't do it on my own. In the next ten years I was to admit myself to another eleven facilities in an attempt to break out of my addiction, but each time I left, the result was the same. I just gave up trying. When you've tried thirteen times and every attempt has failed, you become pretty

sure that you're a hopeless case. So does just about everyone else.

I accumulated over thirty convictions, in the main for drug or drug related offences. I don't know how many times I've been in prison or on remand, but I reckon I've actually spent about five years of my life behind bars. On being paroled after twenty months of my first sentence, I can remember clearly thinking I am not going to end up back here. If I don't shoot dope, I'll be OK. Others, too, told me not to use drugs, just to have a smoke or a drink. None of us knew then that it wasn't the specific drug we were powerless over, but the addiction itself. That alcohol, too, was a drug. The day that I got out, there was a party for me with liberal amounts of booze and dope available. A week later, I was back on heroin again with a physical habit. Five weeks later I was back in prison with my parole revoked and further charges thinking "How did I end up back here?" Today, I know that it was the first drug that did the damage. It wasn't the one a week later or whenever, it was the first one that had set me off again.

When I got out of prison again I started living with a girl. She was seventeen, I was twenty-four. We walked down the street with doe-like eyes. We loved each other, she loved me even though I was using. She was a beautiful, loving and caring person. She didn't use the sort of drugs I used. For a while we were really happy together, but the using always came first. Even back then I was a real wreck. I had hardly any veins left

that I could use. I remember one day trying for twelve or thirteen hours to get a hit and my wife sitting on the bed crying and asking for a hug and I just couldn't break myself away from the obsession to get that hit. I wanted so badly to get up and hug her but I couldn't. Eventually my wife wanted to use the same drugs as me, and inevitably she did. We had a daughter and when she was four years old, my wife, at twenty-two, died of this disease. I remember thinking "why her, and why not me?" I was unable to cry then or at the funeral, all I did was shoot more dope. I'm actually crying as I write this because both her life and mine were so sad and I know today that it's healing for me to cry.

The last six years of my using were an utter nightmare. I spent them either on crutches or in a wheelchair, in and out of hospital because of my desperate physical condition or following suicide attempts. The only relief I could find from the terrible emptiness I had inside and the anguish of the physical pain I was experiencing in my legs was to shoot as much drugs as I could get my hands on. I was a gutter junky, I had nowhere to live, I had holes in my shoes, when it rained my bandaged feet were agony. Sometimes the only food I had came out of dustbins. I just wanted to die.

In 1984 I was sent to prison yet again on drugs charges. I remember being relieved when I was sentenced because I knew I just couldn't cut it any more. In prison I was taken to the hospital where my physical condition gradually improved. I remember that I was just so sick. I remember

one night about three weeks after I got there one of the prison officers watching me vomiting and saying "you never have to go through this again unless you want to". I remember so vividly the feeling of utter desperation as I thought that he just didn't understand, that I didn't have any choice, that despite all my good intentions I would end up back here again. I think that was the worst part of withdrawing, thinking that despite all the stuff I was going through, despite never wanting to go through it again, I was going to use anyway because I was an addict and had no choice but to use.

I was wrong. While in that prison I was introduced to Narcotics Anonymous. I don't know why I went to that first meeting, but I did. I heard a guy tell his story who had been just as hopeless as I was and yet was out there living a drug free life and seemed to be happy. I got some hope from that and kept going back. I've actually been clean since that first meeting in prison. Other addicts, and the NA programme, have given me the strength and the tools to stay clean all these years. I couldn't do it on my own and the really beautiful thing is that I – and you – no longer have to. We have each other.

Through practising the NA principles, more has been revealed in my life. Sometimes recovery has been difficult. Sometimes I have felt overwhelmed with the sadness of where I've come from. Recently, some ten years after my wife's death, I found myself weeping openly over the phone with a friend. At the time, it brought back feelings of guilt and sadness but it was

also a great freedom. Finally, after all these years I was allowing myself to feel this loss – and it was OK.

I've been clean now for twelve years. Since I came to NA I have never relapsed. The message I have got from those who have, and were fortunate enough to make it back, was that the drugs just didn't work any more. It has occurred to me that the drugs served a purpose all those years, that they partly filled that hole in my inner being. All that suffering brought me to the point of surrender that has been the basis of my recovery today. I have finally found my path. Using was a part of my journey, but it no longer is or can be and, as a consequence there is no turning back.

The good news is that I have this programme, we have each other. The difficulties I have experienced have also been my freedom. By allowing my sadness, it has also allowed my joy. I have learnt that the two are inseparable. I am perfectly human, my life is an adventure. I feel a part of, rather than separate and apart from. I am no longer alone.

## **A rude awakening**

I'm an addict and I've been clean since 6th March 1987. This seems like a miracle when I remember how hopeless, useless, and dead I felt before I found NA.

I started using drugs when I was thirteen years old. I had read a few books about teenagers getting involved with drugs. It appealed to me and it soon became my

ambition to be a drug addict. I experimented with dope, acid, speed and downers. I lived in Belgium as a teenager and left home and came to England at sixteen. I felt like I hated my family and any kind of conventional lifestyle. I ended up in Earls Court, where I met a man and lived with him for ten years. He introduced me to barbiturates, squatting, and prostitution. I hadn't enjoyed any of the drugs I had taken before except downers, they were just preferable to reality, but I loved barbs. I didn't care about much else.

The man I lived with was very violent, and beat and tortured me for ten years. I spent a couple of years down the West End, hustling on the streets and at times sleeping in the park. The next ten years were spent running from Glasgow to London and back again as soon as things got too heavy – ripping off the wrong person or jumping bail. My heroin use took off in Glasgow. I thought smack was the answer to my dreams. It felt wonderful. All the rest of the misery in my life felt worthwhile. I didn't mind taking any risks to get the money. The two occasions I was in prison didn't seem too high a price to pay. The beatings from my boyfriend didn't seem to matter, prostituting myself and getting beaten up, ripped off and raped by punters seemed just par for the course.

That was in my first two years with heroin. Then it just didn't seem to work anymore, but still I had to have it to feel normal and I wanted more and more to get the old buzz back. I went through a phase of dealing, when

I felt powerful and important, doing my letterbox deals. Of course that came to an end in the usual way. I was using more than I was selling. I started ripping off all my customers and even my dealer over money. I soon became like my victims again and returned to shop-lifting and prostitution. I was so well known in the shops in Glasgow, I had to go to Paisley and East Kilbride to shop-lift. Working on the streets was hard because the vice squad knew me. Scoring was limited because I'd ripped off so many people, most people wouldn't serve me. The only area I could score in was Possilpark. Here the junkies were desperate. I was terrified to score and shop-lift, but more frightened to go without.

The gear didn't work anymore. It only straightened me out or knocked me out if I had a lot. There was no buzz. I became convinced a change of area would solve all my problems, but it was only supporting my boyfriend's and his sixteen-year-old girlfriend's habit that finally forced me to leave him and come down to England. I spent time in and out of a psychiatric hospital in Epsom, which resulted in a huge script for sodium amytal.

After having hepatitis and septicemia, I finally woke up one morning with my boyfriend of six months dead from an overdose, beside me. I found myself in prison for the third time, full of self-pity, hating myself and life. I was whisked straight from court after six weeks of prison detox into a twelve-step treatment centre in Weston-Super-Mare. But I still wasn't ready for recovery.

I had not been without drugs or alcohol for twelve years and the thought of it was too frightening.

I hated my first NA meeting. I was one day clean, totally disoriented and terrified. It felt like I'd been thrown into some strange religious sect. There were weird slogans plastered all over the wall. People seemed to be chanting and then they were holding hands. I wasn't used to that type of physical contact and it felt wrong. I was horrified to see men hugging one another. I was determined not to fit in. I wanted to get back to using, it was easier and would get rid of the turmoil in my head.

So I got myself thrown out of treatment for using and stayed in Weston, did my rounds of all the doctors getting pills. My relapse lasted six weeks, and it was hell. The turmoil in my head stayed. Nothing blotted it out. I spent more time in the hospital getting my stomach pumped than ever before. I slept around terrified of being alone, and finally picked up the NA Basic Text. In my stoned state I began to realise it could actually work for me. Before I had thought I was a different kind of junkie from all the rest in treatment, and NA was OK for them but not for a real street junkie like me. Everything it said fitted me to a T. I started to dare to hope it could work even for me. I begged for two weeks to get back into detox and have stayed clean ever since.

It has not been easy, but recovery wouldn't be so precious if it had been. I went to ninety meetings in ninety days. I started to enjoy them. I learned some hard facts about myself. I started to risk getting to know

some of the other addicts. A few of them are now close friends, something I never had when I was using. It was suggested I stayed in Weston-Super-Mare. I lived there for two years. I was given a contact number of a woman in NA who became my sponsor.

For a while I tried to continue my old lifestyle. I stole from shops and fiddled the meter in my bedsit, but it didn't feel right anymore and nearly took me back to using. I started asking for help from my sponsor. She taught me a lot. She introduced me to sharing how I feel, trusting others and accepting myself and my past.

When I was about one year clean, I dared to share my darkest and most shameful secrets with her. I had vowed I would never tell anyone about being a prostitute and even that became possible to share. I started to want to change things about myself. I didn't need a lot of my old behaviour anymore. I could get rid of my "hard" fronts and aggressive behaviour.

Things have improved slowly as I've become more honest, open minded and willing. Now I live in Cambridge with my boyfriend. My life is good. I now know there is nothing that can make me use as I have NA meetings and the twelve-step programme.

## **I felt trapped**

I'm a recovering addict. I am no longer a drug addict because I don't use drugs today, I am a recovering addict because I try to work the NA recovery programme. I

will always be an addict because I have a disease, the disease of addiction.

I grew up in a home with alcohol and poverty and from an early age I learned fear and shame. I was afraid of my father's drunken outbursts and was ashamed of our poor furniture and our poor clothes. My mother worked hard at trying to change him, but she had no understanding of powerlessness. I avoided home as much as possible and would spend time alone outside rather than be in my own living-room. Mostly I would day-dream.

One night going to a school disco a gang of us got some alcohol and got drunk. The funny thing was that I didn't feel drunk: however, I was refused entry. I climbed in a window, but was thrown out again. This became a pattern of my using, other people could see I was stoned, but I never felt stoned enough. I always wanted more.

I tried every drug that was available as I searched for an escape from my reality, eventually settling for drugs which would knock me out or leave me lying in a dream world. I stole, lied and manipulated in order to get drugs which caused the police and courts to become involved in my life. By the time I was twenty one I was sick and tired. I had been selling drugs with all the profit going into my arm. I had tried to commit suicide a couple of times. I had been in prison, in hospital, I had even tried going to Europe for three months but I used drugs there. Nothing I did seemed to work, I felt trapped.

At this point I found Narcotics Anonymous, there was a meeting once a week in Edinburgh. I listened to a guy sharing and identified with the three others in the room. They gave me phone numbers so that I could get support during the week. I didn't use the phone, instead I took drugs. I wasn't willing to surrender completely. For the next four years I went in and out of re-habs and hospitals, I spoke to counsellors and religious people, still trapped in my addiction.

Eventually I went back to NA. I had nowhere else to go: softer, easier ways held no solution for me. NA was still very small, so I was encouraged to buy a Basic Text and read it between meetings, I read it daily, it became my life-line. I gained a stronger understanding of a God that was there to help me not punish me. We opened a second meeting and more newcomers started to appear. I had begun to work through the steps and was at last beginning to find the freedom I longed for.

During my using I had been diagnosed HIV positive and through NA I began to understand that the solution to most of the problems I could do nothing about was to live just for today. It helped me with my fear about the future, as it is I have had HIV for ten years and been clean for seven. All the things I heard at the beginning of my recovery still apply today, I have a sponsor, I have a home group commitment and I have a service commitment. I continue to work the steps and practice the principles relying on the God of my understanding

to help me. I feel well both mentally and physically and most important of all, spiritually I feel free.

## **A woman's story**

I was born in Newcastle, of a poor Irish family. I was the only girl and I had three brothers. We lived in a little village until I was about five. Then we moved to London and my Dad died eighteen months later from a heart condition. My mum never got over his death and still hasn't. I was sent off to boarding school three days after his death and I stayed there for ten years – before being asked to leave for subversive activities.

My mum had become a severe depressive and then started to show signs of mania when I was about twelve. She just got worse over the years and it was particularly bad for me as she hated women. We had no contact with relatives or anyone that could help us and of course I couldn't talk about it to the nuns at my school. I used to get beaten while I was there and I got locked in dark rooms and I couldn't sleep.

Now I know that I spent all my life being frightened but I have only found that out because of the gradual lessening of fear during my recovery. I don't believe that my childhood made me an addict; even though we had a history of alcoholism in the family. What I do know is that I have had to work on some things in recovery that other people haven't.

I left home three weeks after I left the convent. I was seventeen and I had already been to the local doctor and

got a prescription for slimming pills. I knew pills worked because the doctor at the convent had prescribed me some tranquilisers when I was about twelve and they had made me feel calm and happy. I was very upset and resentful when I didn't get a repeat prescription!

I never discussed getting the slimming pills with anyone but I was so thrilled to be taking something to make me a better person. I knew I wasn't enough by myself. I continued to take various diet pills religiously for the next fifteen years, and no matter what state I was in or where I was living – I always got to the surgery to get my script once a fortnight. I left home and fairly quickly found the hippies and dope, acid and mandies. They accepted me and I felt wonderful. No one cared where I came from and I didn't have to talk about myself. Drugs were now a religion for me – a way forward to cosmic new thinking and changing the world. I never stayed long in any one place or with any one person as I got all these bad feelings of being trapped.

I met a guy and six weeks later married him in Paris. We were tripping when we decided to get married. I had never even lived with a man or had a steady boyfriend before. We hit trouble from the start with my behaviour and mood swings and it wasn't long before I started using speed and barbiturates to take the edge off my feelings. Also alcohol because by now it wasn't quite so taboo for us hippies as it had been.

Before I was twenty-one I was locked into a pattern of overdoses and hospitalisations which ended with a

really horrific and unplanned overdose where I had to be taken to a special hospital and put on life support. I couldn't eat properly for months or walk properly. I lived in a chaos of using and drifting for the next five years and ended up living in a squat in North London. I was using speed, valium and alcohol and dope and then I got pregnant. It all seemed like a good idea at the time and anyway by the time I had made up my mind about the baby I was six months gone. I really tried not to use during that period but I drank very heavily and as soon as my son was born I re-scripted myself for slimming pills and carried on using. Nothing much changed until C. was nine months old and then I met a boyfriend who was dabbling in narcotic drugs. I had always known about junkies and it was never going to happen to me – lots of friends had already died and I was far too clever and street wise to get into that trap, but he was part of a set who snorted drugs and that seemed very different to me. Not sordid or dangerous. I messed around with smack during my relationship with him and nothing bad happened. I didn't get a habit; I felt good and there were no problems. I thought it was going to be different for me. I then met someone that I really fell in love with and the feelings were mutual. We set up house together and within a short space of time we started using recreationally at weekends. I had found the magic formula for me – my boyfriend, heroin and me.

We went on using in bits and pieces for a couple of years before I realised that the days between using were

getting less and we seemed to be constantly hard up. Then I had my first withdrawal during the xmas and new year – I thought it was flu of course. By the next summer our lives were hanging on by a thread. My husband and I hardly spoke, I rarely got up except to go to work and to get out of the house. We were lying to each other about gear and our using and all the other stuff that happens. The isolation and the not feeling anything became really weird. I had wanted to block out all the bad feelings but now I didn't have any good feelings either. We had some semblance of a routine still but it was all like a bizarre act. Sometimes the smack still worked and that made life just about bearable. By the following summer it was just down to getting up, being sick, being broke and being frightened. I tried to come off (yet again), started having fits and was taken to hospital for a couple of days. I was taking so many pills to take the edge off withdrawing that I now had a valium addiction.

The next six months could have been six days or six years for all I knew. One day my husband had gone and I was left by myself in a squat with my son, a bad drug habit, no money, no friends and no way out.

My husband came back and took my son to stay with some friends in Ireland and I entered a hospital for drug addiction. I couldn't believe this was happening to me – I was so filled with shame about losing everything and having to be a drug addict. It was agony being away

from my son – I had only spent three weeks without him in six years but I felt that he was better off with anyone rather than me. I was there for fourteen out of eighteen months.

I got discharged for using pills after ten months and then readmitted four months later. I did all my relapsing and further “research” on alcohol during this time and I know that the reason I have never needed to relapse in my recovery so far is that I did it all during those months.

In the four months I was out I had started using from the first day despite having sworn that I wouldn't use gear. When I went back in the second time I was desperate. I realised that this was the end of my life if I couldn't get it right. Then a friend I had been in with first time asked me if I would go with her to a meeting of this NA thing. A girl had come through the unit about six months before and had said she was in NA but I wasn't all that keen. I had also seen the word God in one of the pamphlets. This was to be her first meeting also and so we went together.

I can only give my experience and I realise now what a gift I was given. I was just blown away by these people. They were clean and living their lives without using and they were happy. I wanted to belong to NA more that I wanted anything else in the world. I just knew that they KNEW how to stay clean and that this was the way out. I knew I had been shown the solution. I went back to the unit as high as a kite – clean. And I told the

nurses and doctors that they were all wrong and I told the other residents that if they drank in front of me on the unit that I would tell! I was quite unpopular but I didn't care – this was my life and I was going to recover.

I have come such a long way from then and it all reads like a fairy story with a good ending I got my own flat, I got my son back, I took a job that trained me in a profession which I love and I still have all these things today; my husband came in to recovery six months after I did and is still well. I have been able to play in a recovering rock and roll band and to have a circle of friends that I love and trust like a family. I have been able to travel a lot and do things I only dreamed of. And all I did to have all of this is to stop using drugs a day at a time and go to NA meetings.

One of the things that I feel most grateful for is to feel that I belong and that I count. I had always wondered what the point of living was. In the past year or two I have been working on my areas of emotional growth and I am getting more and more comfortable deep inside myself. There is always more to learn and more joy to experience if I just keep coming back to meetings and stay clean a day at a time.

## **Facing the fear**

My story isn't that different from anyone else's. I used drugs for a long time, eventually against my will. I fantasised. I escaped. I lived an insane lifestyle until I could live it no longer. I even thought I had a good time

for a while, but with hindsight that was an illusion. You can't have a good time and be unhappy and afraid. You can't have a good time while you're destroying yourself. But for a while, I believed it.

I was a very quiet kid. I had quiet, insular parents that didn't seem to have friends and I believe they did the best they could. I now see that in many areas that just wasn't very good. I avoided the more boisterous aspects of boyhood, hating most sports, fearing the adventurous spirit I saw in others. The first twelve or so years of my life were spent in pursuit of the quiet comfort of escapist fantasy.

I found myself leading an increasingly fearful existence. It seemed that for most people life was basically a simple matter, they appeared to just get on with it. I was trying, and it wasn't working. I seemed to be different somehow. I started to experience depression. I saw various psychiatrists for a while but I never felt they understood what I was talking about. I thought nobody would ever understand me.

At the age of eighteen I tried drugs and found that although they did some odd things to me, the great advantage was that I could feel okay effortlessly for the first time, and that was good enough for me. I thought I had found the way round my problem. I really believed for a while that I had found the perfect solution; just stay stoned all the time! If I didn't like the picture that reality made in my head, well I'd just mess around with the controls until I got something better and like any delicate

mechanism that is constantly abused, I eventually began to malfunction. Once I had started, I carried on as if I'd always done it. I just took to using drugs naturally. I felt like someone who discovers a talent they didn't know they had. I continued to use, and soon forgot that it had ever been any different.

Within three years my life was in a real mess. I'd married and settled down to a diet of various drugs, including sleeping pills which I would take during the day. I'd stagger around the streets and quite often I would have to crawl home, frequently bruised and sometimes bleeding. My wife was even more screwed up than I was. We would sometimes lie on the bed holding onto each other for dear life, as if some giant tidal wave was going to sweep us away if we let go – two terrified children playing at being grown-ups the only way we knew.

I overdosed occasionally, waking up in hospital. She tried to kill herself on many occasions, and often said that she'd be better off dead. Attempting to gain control of the situation, I blamed her for my predicament. I came to my senses one night in the middle of beating her up. She was already unconscious. I realised I was quite likely to kill her myself and so I packed a few things and left for good. A year later she was dead. I was twenty-one years old and felt responsible.

It was to be ten years before there was NA in this country and fifteen years before I was to find it and get clean. I survived. It wasn't dramatic or glamorous, it

was depressing and mostly boring. For a short while I could recapture the illusion that escape was still possible, and I had the last of the "good times". After that it was a long slow decline.

Another relationship produced a child, and broke up after a year or so. A second marriage, producing another two kids suffered under the strain of my increasingly bizarre behaviour. I was hoarding things obsessively, cluttering up the flat with rubbish. I had various hobbies, which I indulged in an obsessive way, according them priority over household space and finances. I was getting more and more out of touch with reality, and reacted in a paranoid manner when criticised.

I ended up living on my own, amongst several years' worth of methodically collected garbage. Everyone had gone. Sometimes I was vaguely aware of disapproving looks or comments from people I passed on the street – I wore dirty clothes. I was acting strangely, I talked to myself, I took drugs openly. I thought nobody noticed, and if they did, well, it was none of their business. I could no longer tell what was sane behaviour and what wasn't, and I didn't care. My self-image was bad. I knew I had become a pathetic specimen of humanity. I began to identify strongly with certain characters in books, films and on TV – damaged, neurotic individuals who had suffered much at the hands of life. I knew there was something really wrong with me, but I didn't know what it was.

I was living and using in total isolation, constantly seeking oblivion but increasingly aware that the drugs

weren't working properly anymore; my tolerance had begun to fluctuate alarmingly. Sometimes the drugs wouldn't work even in very large doses, sometimes small amounts would knock me out. I felt bad all the time.

I think that in my case it wasn't so much that I wanted to stop, but that I just lost the will to continue. I was tired. It was all getting to be too much trouble, and I just wanted a rest. I tried to stop and found that I couldn't do it. I had endless experiences of using drugs with extremely unpleasant results, and thinking "This is ridiculous!", but knowing I couldn't stop. By the time I found NA I was ready.

By my third meeting it had clicked for me. I knew I had found the answer to my problem. I felt that whatever addiction was, I had it, and whatever it was about NA that worked, I wanted it. I was scared, because I wasn't at all sure I could make it, and relieved, because for the first time in my life I'd found some people just like me. Finally I really fitted in somewhere! People with much worse stories than mine were staying clean, so it obviously worked. I got the general idea by listening to people say: "Get clean any way you can, and keep coming to meetings".

I felt drawn to people in NA who seemed to have a solution to the problem of living without drugs. They identified this with working the Twelve Steps, so I knew that was what I wanted to do. My situation is rather like discovering that I've got diabetes. It's serious, and there is no known cure, but if I follow the appropriate

daily procedure, I can live a good life with the condition. It really helped me to work through the Steps with a Sponsor, in order, to the best of my ability. It wasn't particularly easy, but it seems to work. All I had to believe was that if I did my best with it, it could work for me.

I am very grateful that I now know what my problem is, and what to do about it. I can forgive myself, forgive my parents and forgive the world. I can rebuild my life, starting with a clean slate. What I have been given is life, where I had none before; sanity, where I knew none before, and a meaning and a purpose to my existence that is beyond anything I could have imagined. I have discovered a peace that I never knew existed, by discovering my own true self. Underneath all the fear and negativity and bad experiences is the me that I always really was, the me that I can be.

I spend a few quiet moments each day, to try to get in tune with the creative and guiding force of the universe, which I call the Great Spirit, and to remind myself that I'm a child of the universe, and that I can take a child-like pleasure in my own progress and in this adventure of life.

## **Stop the world, I want to get off**

I'm an addict and I'm grateful to be clean and alive today and to have something to give. When I came to this fellowship of NA I had nothing to offer you – the only things I knew were how to rob and steal, to lie and cheat, to walk over anybody in order to get what I wanted, mainly my drugs.

I had started my career of alternative lifestyles at the tender age of six. I had never felt that I was part of my family or that I belonged. I was different. I was a magpie – anything bright or shiny, I wanted it. I was drawn to the locked cabinet in the locked lounge. The bottles were beautiful colours and shapes and they clinked and made lovely noises when you moved them. I drank a quarter bottle of gin and filled it up again with water so no-one would know. That was the history of my drug using. I'd take something and then ask: "well, what's going to happen?" At the age of twelve I went to the park to smoke a joint with the lads (I was always one of the lads) and my friend was saying to me "Hold it down" and so I was, bending down towards the ground, not knowing what he meant. As I found new and more exciting drugs it was just the same. I'd take three tablets of something and then ask what I should expect.

By fourteen, the drugs no longer filled the emptiness I felt inside, so I decided, in my wisdom, to have a baby. After all, there would be somebody I could love and who would love me in return, without me having to give my body to them (little did I know!). So I started to have babies and affairs and by nineteen I was living on the side of a mountain, completely isolated. I never saw my family and I used to go on silent strikes for days on end with my two children when I just couldn't cope any more. I thought I was OK, I thought I was really well and that everyone should be like me! I was vegetarian, only smoked home-grown grass, and was about to deliver

my third child. In reality, I was very freaked out. I had no husband any more, he had run off to India to smoke 'real' dope. I had next to no friends left and I could no longer look another human being in the eye. I was scared. I went into a three year depression and if I could sum up my feelings in a few words it would be "Stop the world, I want to get off". This feeling was oh so familiar to me and I felt ready to retire from life. I was worn out. I'd done it all – and I was a prime candidate for this fellowship then.

I isolated for three years and then ran away to England and fell in love with my then to be second husband. Within six months I had sought out the sickest people I could find and had a serious drug habit, which just kept on getting worse, like a monkey on my back. I stood absolutely no chance against it. I tried many, many times to get clean from the drugs. I had thought I'd never get caught. Today I know that EVERYTHING has its price and I did get caught. I got caught up in situations I never wanted to be in in the first place. I did things I'd never have imagined in my worst nightmares. I hated my life and I therefore hated myself.

For me, my most intimate relationship became the one with my kitchen floor. My only choice was oblivion. If I was unconscious on my kitchen floor, I was happy, because then I didn't have to communicate with another human being. I could survive in my isolated fish bowl and look out on the world with disdain and distrust.

The only one thing I had to show for my life were my two surviving children and I loved them, but I woke up

one day and I felt so strongly that I was a destructive power in their lives and that God was going to desert me if I didn't do something to help myself.

In 1980 in London, a bunch of addicts started to meet up to help each other to stay clean and started to lead productive and healthier lives. A friend of mine suggested that I go along as he hated to see me get so twisted up and unwell. And so, four years later, I came to my first NA meeting. I was scared and my attitude stank: after all, I'd done it all. I knew it all, I'd been wild and crazy and what could a room full of junkies show me that I didn't already know. I hated you all and I was very hostile. I had never liked women – I had had one good female friend and I dumped on her good and proper, the same way other women had dumped on me! I had done so many things I felt remorse over. When I saw the Twelve Steps of NA on the wall, the ones I liked were eight and nine! Redemption! I identified. I saw HOPE. I started off in my first meeting and I shared and I identified myself as an addict. I have never stopped doing that, no matter what I've been going through I have shared it openly and it has saved my life many times now.

One of the first problems I encountered was being one of very few – if any – “mature” women with family, in the rooms of NA. I was also in a lot of pain and very angry about a lot of the things that had happened to me in my life. I still felt isolated, but I stuck around and kept on sharing everything. These rooms and the people in them

allowed me enough space to do that. Today I have been restored to a very relative sanity, most of the time my thoughts are quite rational and happy, I have followed the suggested Steps to recovery and done many Fourth Steps. I continue to take personal inventory on a daily or hourly basis. I know a little about who I am today and I leave a happy home to go to meetings, where I can share my experience, strength and hope about my recovery. I have the privilege to sponsor other women and people phone me from all over the country to ask how to stay clean and cope with the normal daily pressures of motherhood (often alone). The only thing I know is that I kept going to meetings no matter what and kept on asking for help – that help has always been there when I reached out.

For this addict, it really is a pleasure to have something to give away, for it is in giving that I receive. My life is not particularly easy at times, but it is real, and with the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in my life I am contented and fulfilled. I am very loved and there will always be someone there to hold me when I hurt, as long as I let them know when I am hurting.

## **Rock bottom at thirty**

Whether I was an addict from birth, or whether an addict is something I became, I have simply no idea. What I do know for certain is that whatever you are supposed to learn as a child as part of the socialisation process, I failed to learn. The problems that arose for me

as a result of this manifested themselves in obsessive, addictive behaviour long before I ever picked up a drug or a drink.

I always wanted to be loved and accepted by others, but in reality I was shy and awkward with people. I liked the idea of making and having friends, but making it happen terrified me. I thought that others should make the effort to get to know me; if they didn't I felt hurt, and if they did I thought that they couldn't be worth knowing anyway. The consequence of this was that I was very lonely and had no very close friends. I felt certain that I was different from every one else, and had no real sense of belonging either at home or school. The pain that this caused me was intense, but I denied it at the time. I sought to deaden it with all sorts of outside distractions. I didn't just want one ice-cream, I wanted several. I didn't just watch TV or read books for a few hours; I could do it for days if I was allowed. None of these methods succeeded in killing the feeling of inner emptiness.

I started drinking when I was fourteen. I didn't particularly enjoy it, but I was worried that other boys would think me a wimp. I began taking drugs three years later. That there was that time gap was only due to my inability to locate a supply any sooner. I had resolved long before that I was going to take anything on offer. My adolescent heroes were those pop stars who were notorious for taking a lot of drugs. They seemed to have everything I wanted; a glamorous, creative lifestyle, lots of

women, and lots of money. It never occurred to me, even for a second, that these people might ever be unhappy.

For three years I smoked dope, and took LSD and speed, and at the age of twenty began using heroin. For two further years I believed I had found the ideal way of life. All those feelings, of fear, loneliness, inadequacy, and anger could be submerged by the drugs. For the first time that I could remember I felt confident when meeting people, and that I had some sort of control over my life. I began to start going out with women, and achieved academic success at university. In this period I never became physically dependent on any of the drugs. Since this was the only criterion by which I measured addiction, I was certain that I was not an addict. I believed that only the morally weak and bad became addicts.

At this time, although taking some sort of drug every day, I managed to restrict my use of heroin to weekends. It was not long, though weekends came to include Fridays and Mondays, and before I knew what was happening I was using heroin daily. One morning I woke up feeling sick. When a fellow user pointed out that I had developed a habit I was amazed and felt thoroughly confused. On the one hand I was so angry and ashamed that I had become the one thing that I had always promised myself I would never become – a junky, and on the other I had a sneaking feeling that at last I had a cool, street-credible identity.

For eight more years these two conflicting feelings continued within me, their co-existence becoming ever more painful. From the moment I realised that I was a junky, to the time that I came to NA, my life became a battle to stop using or control the use of what I thought to be my problem – heroin. The more I sought to exert control, the less control I seemed to have. As each year passed I would tell myself that next year I would stop. The next year would find me using just that little bit more and leave me feeling just that little bit more desperate and hopeless. Mentally, I made a list of all the things that I would never do. I was never going to steal for drugs, sell drugs, or use needles. I ended up doing all these things. I tried many different ways to stop using. I would go to doctors for methadone, I would leave town for a while, and I would try to white knuckle it on sheer will power. None of these methods worked. I invented a list of pre-conditions that when fulfilled would enable me to stop. If I got a job that earned a lot of money, and if I met the right woman who loved me and took care of me, everything would be OK. Towards the end of my using I was earning a lot of money – but my life became more and more unmanageable. Instead of having more money for the bills and for holidays, I had a drug habit that had quadrupled. I did find a woman who wasn't an addict who loved me and took care of me. We got married as well, but I still couldn't stop using. I began to lose more and more contact with the real world. When I looked in the mirror I saw a pretty good-looking man;

what every one else saw was someone who was hollow-eyed and three stone underweight. My world became smaller and smaller. Everything revolved around drugs – when I was going to score, when I was going to take them, and where I was going to find the money. I used to get so angry seeing normal people going about their daily lives. I was bewildered that they could get through a day without constantly thinking about drugs, and I was envious of their freedom.

My rock-bottom occurred on my thirtieth birthday. I had a lovely wife, a house, large quantities of drugs, and I just wanted to die. I looked back on my life and was consumed with a feeling of pointlessness and despair. Even so, I still could not stop using. My wife knew that I took drugs, but had no idea I was an addict. I was terrified that if I told her I would lose her, the house, and my job. I was so unhappy that I began to overdose regularly. Eventually, my wife confronted me about my using. Somehow I summoned up the honesty to tell her the truth, and when she suggested a methadone cure I was able to say that I had tried that and it had not worked. Through the help of a friend, I found an institution that would detox me. I stayed for four weeks and, while there, was introduced to the NA programme. Since that time I haven't used.

My early days in recovery were not easy. Although my obsession to use was lifted quite quickly, which was to me nothing short of miraculous since I had never managed to stay off drugs for more than a day, a lot of my other

problems, that I had imagined would disappear when I stopped using, still remained. I still did not know how to make friends, and I still had no idea what to do with my life. However, in the NA meetings I heard other people who had similar feelings and problems with which I could identify. For the first time I had a sense of hope, and felt that if I stayed clean, and kept coming to the meetings, I just might find some of the answers for which I was looking.

Nonetheless, I did not always go to the meetings that willingly, despite the friendliness of most people at the meetings, I was scared stiff of them. I was frightened that I would be ignored, and that no one would talk to me, and I was frightened that someone would talk to me. I was sure that if people did get to know me they would dislike me as much as I did myself. Sometimes if I was invited for a coffee after a meeting I would invent a prior arrangement, and refuse; more importantly, sometimes I faced my fear and accepted. I was also terrified of sharing in meetings; I still am today from time to time. I so desperately wanted people to think that I was alright and doing well in recovery, that I became unable to share what was really going on with me. I began to feel increasingly isolated from the people in the meetings. Sometimes the only thing that kept me going was the thought that I had commitments at two meetings a week, and I couldn't stand the idea of letting down these people who had trusted me. I had a sponsor, but I did not know how to use him. I thought

it was his job to ring me to find out how I was. When he didn't I got angry with him and sacked him. I chose two further sponsors in quick succession, merely on the grounds that they had been quite nice to me. Neither relationship lasted very long.

Gradually things did change. I began to take small risks with people, and began to hint at least to some of the difficulties I was facing. Far from being rejected, I found that others opened up to me too, and I started to feel close to them. I listened harder in meetings, and concluded that those who appeared to have some measure of success in coping with the day to day problems of living were those who tried to apply the principles of the Twelve Steps in their daily lives. I chose a new sponsor whom I did not know well, but whose recovery I respected. I got an inkling that trust and friendship grew slowly, and did not appear as if by magic.

I started to feel comfortable enough to admit, now and again, how frightened, lonely and angry I truly was. I was not in the slightest bit happy to acknowledge these feelings, but I did become less paralysed by them. I found the courage to split up from my wife, and to leave my home – both of which had been unthinkable while I was using. I still could not quite face being on my own, so I quickly started a relationship with someone out of the fellowship. To my surprise, I brought to this new relationship all my old difficulties of getting emotionally intimate with another human being, and the affair ended after a few months.

It became easier for me to spend time on my own, out of a relationship with a woman. This was again something I had never done clean, nor had I imagined it possible for me. After a while, I came to appreciate that my wife and I had something very special between us and that I missed her very much. We decided to try again. With help from people inside and outside the fellowship, it is working out. I have found the answers to many of my difficulties in recovery, though seldom have they been those I had expected. I thought that the Twelve Steps, when practised properly, would eradicate all my angry, fearful feelings. I have come to learn that these feelings are part of my personality, and need to be accepted as such, and that the real damage from these feelings comes when they are acted out in a destructive way. Often I find this incredibly difficult to do, and try to escape my feelings in all sorts of ways from sex to exercise.

Nowadays, I have a much better idea of who I am, and what my limitations are. I still get angry when things don't go the way I want, and I still get scared of meeting new people. I don't like change, and I still want to be liked by everybody. Some days I think my life is pointless and I have no self-worth at all. Thanks to NA these days have become much less frequent, and I am learning to cope with the realities of life, a day at a time, without using drugs. Better still, I am even beginning to enjoy my life – and that really is a miracle.

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