

“To me, the voice of NA is like a huge choir of thousands of voices singing the same song. It reflects and celebrates our diversity while focusing us all on our primary purpose: to find, and help others find, recovery through Narcotics Anonymous.”

*Anonymous*

# The Voice of NA

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**IN THIS ISSUE**

Most would agree that NA as a whole does indeed have a collective voice—made up of all our members’ individual voices. We speak as one in many ways: in our public information efforts, in our literature, in the decisions we make as a fellowship, in our efforts to live by our program’s principles.

Most would also agree that finding our collective voice is sometimes difficult. Leading up to every occasion on which we do speak with one voice are lengthy discussions, followed by thoughtful reflection, followed by more lengthy discussions, and often an abortive attempt or two to arrive at a decision or implement a plan of action before a group conscience is clear.

In this issue of *The NA Way Magazine*, we have articles that address some of the issues surrounding decision making in NA, as well as articles that question how effectively our “voice” is reaching some of our members. In the “Sharing” section, several members have written about being moved or touched by the various voices that speak to our members around NA: the voice of a sponsor, the voice of a Higher Power, the voice of welcome and unconditional love. We also have another terrific collection of meeting place photos that speak loudly and clearly of recovery.

Perhaps *what* we say isn’t as important as *how* we say it. No matter what we’re striving to say as individual members or as a unified fellowship, it’s clear that our gratitude motivates it. Like it says in *It Works: How and Why*, “Our gratitude becomes the underlying force in all we do, weaving its way through our lives and the lives of those around us.” The voice of our gratitude may be joyous, as heard at the opening meeting of a convention, or it may be reflective, as heard in the suggestions of our sponsor, or it may be energetic and determined, as heard in our service meetings where we work together to create a common understanding. No matter where we hear the voice of NA, no matter how it sounds, it’s most important that we listen. ❖



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## From the Editor

As our readers know, each issue of *The NA Way Magazine* has a particular theme or focus. We select broad-based themes that can encompass a variety of articles and personal sharing. Of course we welcome any manuscript submission that fits within our overall guidelines, but we do like to give our readers the opportunity to contribute articles that fit upcoming magazine themes. On page 21? you will find the themes for the next year's worth of magazines as well as the deadlines for anything you may wish to contribute for a particular issue. We've also included some questions for each theme that we hope will provoke thought on the theme.

Nothing pleases us more than hearing your reactions to the magazine, no matter what those reactions are. We welcome criticism as much as we do kudos—sometimes even more so. *The NA Way Magazine* is, and always will be, the international journal of the NA Fellowship; that is, it's *your* magazine. The more we hear from you, the more we are able to put together a magazine that reflects your interests and serves your needs. So drop us a line. We'd love to hear from you.

Cindy T, Editor

## Our readers write

### Editorial reply

I just finished reading "A Tale of Two Fellowships" (Jan. 2000 *NA Way*), and I think it is a terrific piece of writing. It accurately pinpoints some of the most important issues facing NA today, particularly the comments about why so many oldtimers don't remain active in the fellowship. I know they mirror some of my own experiences.

There's something else that occurred to me as I read the article: Self-righteous dogmatism about recovery and NA-style spirituality does not serve our fellowship well, and—in truth—we probably don't have much to be self-righteous about. We cite as evidence of our success all those who have found recovery here, but what about those who aren't here? The reality is that most addicts don't find NA, and most of those who do find NA don't stay. We can and frequently do say that the fact that so many relapse and fail to return only demonstrates the power of addiction. Unfortunately, that response tends to shut the door on any open-minded self-examination about what we as a fellowship are doing and how we do it. It's just possible that our program itself may have some responsibility for addicts not staying clean and finding recovery.

Ben G, California

*The NA Way Magazine* welcomes letters from all readers. Letters to the editor can respond to any article that has appeared in *The NA Way*, or can simply be a viewpoint about an issue of concern in the NA Fellowship. Letters should be no more than 250 words, and we reserve the right to edit. All letters must include a signature, valid address, and phone number. First name and last initial will be used as the signature line unless the writer requests anonymity.

*The NA Way Magazine, published in English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish, belongs to the members of Narcotics Anonymous. Its mission, therefore, is to provide each member with recovery and service information, as well as recovery-related entertainment, which speaks to current issues and events relevant to each of our members worldwide. In keeping with this mission, the editorial staff is dedicated to providing a magazine which is open to articles and features written by members from around the world, as well as current service and convention information. Foremost, the journal is dedicated to the celebration of our message of recovery—"that an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live."*



# Hearing the call

I first heard the voice of NA in 1980. Two members called from another world. They told me I was like them, wanting a way out of having to use drugs. They said, “Come with us if you want to, and you can find the peace and freedom we have found.”

I went, and listened to 20 voices that spoke as I felt and also of a life I had only dreamed of before. They were strong, loving, wise, and consistent voices.

Some of the voices in the room that night would later turn out to be three members of NA’s World Service Board of Trustees, another serene mid-pacific voice, a member of the committee who was working on *It Works: How and Why*, and a beautiful woman who, at the world convention in Anaheim, spoke of “love or lust” (I married her!). I have always partly credited the strength and knowledge and depth of those voices for my recovery in those early years.

One of the strongest of all voices was the voice of sponsorship. That night I also began to hear the voice of a God of my understanding. I made a commitment to myself that night, the first I had ever made in life. If these really are the voices of freedom, I prayed, God, please grant that I always stay within their range and perhaps one day add my own voice to the chorus.

Over the years, other voices have called to me as well:

**I heard the call of friendship, love, guidance, and support**  
—all part of the voice of the fellowship.

**I heard the call of education, work, and money**  
—all part of the voice of self-support.

**I heard the hollow call of fame and success**  
—and surrendered instead to the voice of anonymity.

**I heard the call of self-importance**  
—and surrendered instead to the voice of our primary purpose.

**I heard the call of leadership**  
—and I heard it balanced by the voice of our common welfare.

**I heard the cacophony of personalities**  
—and I heard it silenced by the voice of principles.

**I heard the call to be of service to any and all**  
—and I trusted the voice of God for guidance in choosing.

**I heard the calls of fear and loneliness when I was in need of a liver transplant**  
—and I was comforted by the voices of sponsorship and fellowship,  
and the silent whisper of God’s grace and assurance.

Now, the voice of NA is as one with my world and God’s whispers. It calls me in the night, reminding me that my voice is also needed, that I need to come back and share it.

*Johnny B, Connecticut*

# Finding peace and developing conscience

Do you remember what it was like to get clean and have to start participating in your life? Some of my worst fears became reality for me—those things about which I said, “If this happens, I just can’t do it.” I needed to make decisions about things so painful that it seemed worse than anything I had ever known. Professionals who were trying to help me just told me to trust my gut instincts. I tried to tell them that I didn’t have any instincts; the only thing in my gut was a really sick feeling and a lump of fear.

I would go to meetings and talk to other recovering addicts about what was going on with me, and they would ask if I had prayed and tell me to just keep coming back. I was very angry. I didn’t want to hear about surrender and faith. I thought no one understood, because they wouldn’t make my decisions for me. I didn’t believe God would help me because of who I was and what I had become. Everything I thought was filtered through my anxiety about the past or the future.

I had a sponsor, and I thought she was the meanest person I had ever known. When I wrote my Fourth Step at six months clean, her name was the first on the list. I had run out of options and couldn’t seem to find any solutions. So I just kept coming and took the suggestions given to me even though I believed they wouldn’t work. I would call my sponsor with all of my problems, and she would tell me to hang up, make a gratitude list, and call her back.

Slowly, things began to change. I began to realize that other people really did think I could recover. I remembered a line from our literature that promised I could use the fellowship’s strength until I had some of my own. I held onto that with all I had. I began to work the steps and replace negativity and despair with hope. I became open to a relationship with a Higher Power. I started to use that Power as a source of strength, doing the footwork as people

suggested, and letting the rest go. I learned that reality, for me, is about what’s happening on the inside. I started to take the time each day to sit quietly and listen. I came to value the person I was becoming through prayer and meditation. I was able to feel the loving presence of a Power I hadn’t felt before. I started to understand what people meant when they shared about living in the moment, something I was totally unable to comprehend at first.

To be at peace with myself was something I had lost all hope of attaining. Now that I have that hope, I try very hard not to take it for granted. My relationships with people changed dramatically. I had always thought I would go through life unable to feel love for other people, even my children. Learning to care about myself came from and is in direct proportion to my contact with my Higher Power.

Being of service to NA gives me another opportunity to grow and maintain my spiritual well-being. Often in pain in my early recovery, I would show up at service meetings compelled by my need to be a part of something. Group conscience was a total mystery to me. I would show up, pray, and be off and running on my character defects. I learned that listening is a vital part of group conscience, as well as a vital spiritual principle to practice in my recovery. I was amazed by the diversity of the perspectives. I found out that, like all our other spiritual principles, developing conscience is a process. As my relationship with God grew, my need to control diminished, and I was able to become part of the process. I came to understand humility as recognizing my assets and my liabilities. I have limits, but I also have something to offer. I do my best to seek God’s will for me and the power to carry it out by consistently asking for help when I know I need help the most. It also helps me not to use service as a way to deal with my personal issues.

I am far more grateful to NA than I could ever put into words. I have a relationship with a Power that is far greater than I ever imagined. And I have a spiritual path that has taught me to be “a part of” by being of service to NA, my friends, my family, and society.

*Susan S, Massachusetts*

# A silent voice, heard loud and clear

A member of NA, who previously had been attending meetings regularly, stopped going.

After a few weeks, her sponsor decided to visit her. It was a chilly evening and the sponsor found the sponsee at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire.

Guessing the reason for her sponsor’s visit, the sponsee welcomed her, led her to a big chair near the fireplace, and waited.

Her sponsor made herself comfortable, but said nothing. In the long silence, she contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the sponsor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember, and placed it to one side of the hearth, all alone. Then she sat back in her chair, still silent.

The sponsee watched all this in quiet fascination. As the one lone ember’s flame diminished, there was a momentary glow, and then its fire was no more.

Soon it was cold and dead.

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. Just before the sponsor was ready to leave, she picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire.

Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it. As the sponsor got up to leave, the sponsee said, “Thank you so much for your visit, and especially for the ‘fiery’ sermon.”

“I’ll meet you at the meeting in the morning.”

*Author unknown*

# Time travel

Last summer, I spent two weeks in the wilderness with my father on a vacation. We went to a canoeing park in Canada, north of Minnesota. The area consists of about 3,000 square miles with no roads, houses, or stores and barely any people. What trails and campsites there are were created and have been maintained by people like my dad and me. It is possible to spend two weeks there and see only one or two other people. If you get hurt on the trail, it can be days or weeks before you are found and help arrives.

On our first day out, there was a windstorm that had three-foot waves crashing over the bow of our canoe. As a result, we went ashore to wait out the wind or, if necessary, spend the night. We were fortunate to find a campsite where we'd come ashore. (We frequently have to clear and create a campsite in situations like this.) After unloading and getting the canoe on shore, my dad took off down the shoreline while I stayed at our campsite to read, fish, and just lounge around.

An hour or two later, I opened a new pack of cigarettes and took the cellophane to the fire pit to throw it out. This is when things got crazy. I found, stashed in the fire pit under a rock, a bag of weed and three packs of rolling papers—all dry and ready to roll.

Time travel. I was transported back through thirty months of clean time, through nine months of trying to get clean and failing miserably, through six years of using and living in hell, to a time when using was fun and exciting. I looked at the weed. I smelled it, felt it, and judged it with all the skills that twenty years of using had given me. It was very expensive, extremely potent weed. Trust me, I know.

My first instinct was to roll a joint. My dad was an hour and a half away. (I could see him across the bay.) I had no sponsor or friends within reach. It was just my Higher Power and I. I could use and nobody would know—except my Higher Power and me. How long was I in this state? I'm not sure, but eventually I was restored to sanity. I started to think about the consequences of using, and as time passed, I could see that I

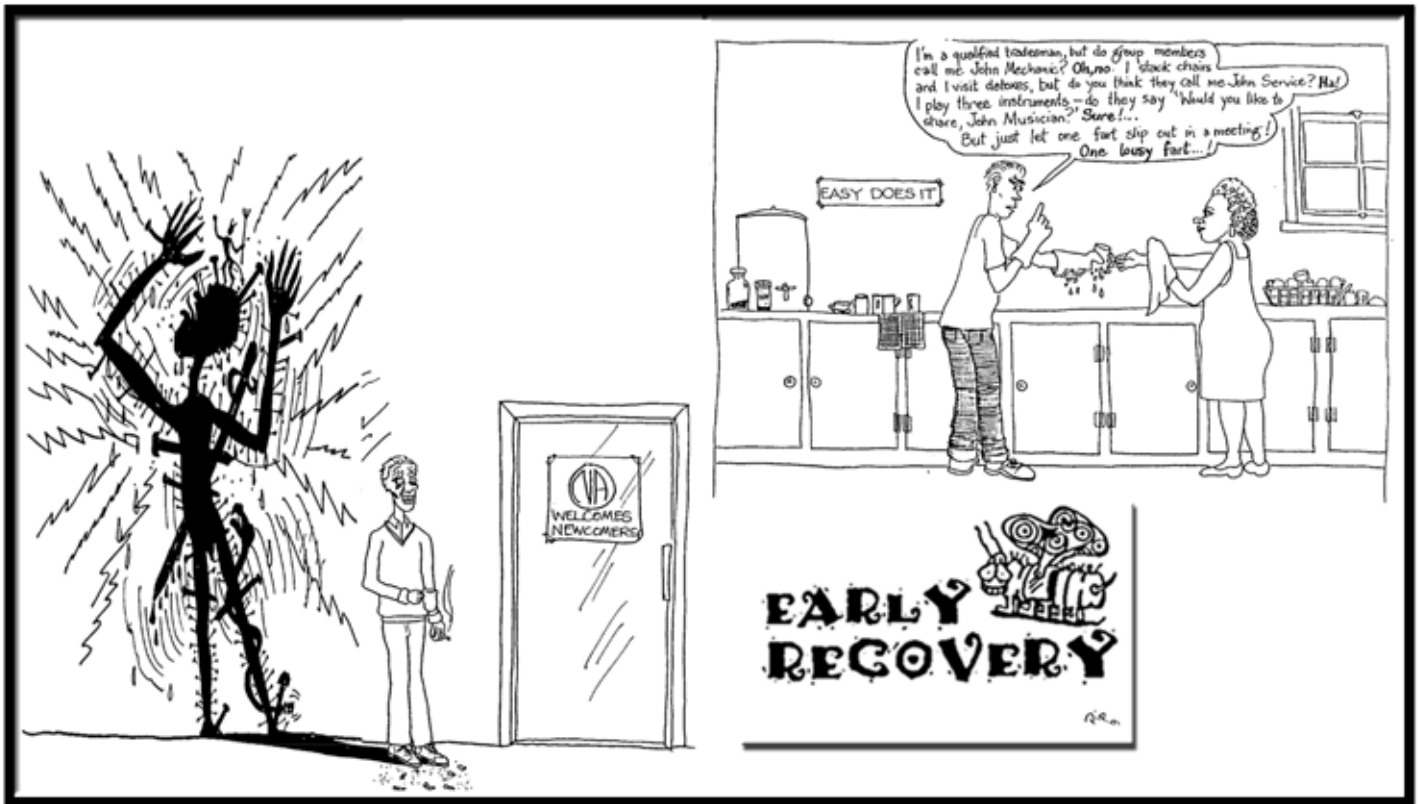
did have a choice. I could use and return to active addiction and all that entails, or I could refrain and continue with a life that has become enjoyable and worth living.

I chose life. The power of the fellowship is not to be denied. I started thinking about you people, both those I know personally and those I have yet to meet. I like you and what you represent. I want to have what you have. My Higher Power gave me time to reflect on the truths of the program, and thoughts of the fellowship gave me the strength to act against my first instinct and stay clean.

It wasn't easy. I really did want to use. However, because I've been working a program, I withstood that test of my recovery. I threw the weed into the woods and burned the papers.

This "test" destroyed any reservations I may have had about being an addict. I know without a shadow of a doubt that I am an addict, and that if I don't work a program, I will use again. Any illusions I had of being "normal" are gone. I'm an addict named Kirk, and I am clean today by the grace of a Higher Power and Narcotics Anonymous.

*Kirk B, Kansas*



## Those useless steps

My first understanding of Steps Six and Seven was very simple—if I worked them, I would become a different person. With the self-loathing I had during my early recovery, it's no wonder that I wanted more than anything to be someone else. So I worked hard at those steps, especially the Seventh Step. While I was praying to have my defects removed, subconsciously, I was praying to have God remove me—since I was one big defect. I say subconsciously because it was several more years before I realized that was really what I was hoping for. The emotional, explosive, angry, loud, mean, distrustful, tactless me was going to be replaced with a loving, calm, patient, tactful, soft-spoken, self-possessed, ethereal being who would be so in touch with God that people might get us confused.

Well, guess what? After years of praying, begging, and groveling, I came to the conclusion that Steps Six and Seven didn't work. In fact, the entire program was a crock of you-know-what!

Even feeling this way, I didn't leave NA. I just went on to try to further interpret those useless steps and find their true esoteric meaning. During that same period, I was sure that it was a question of self-control. God or I (same thing, right?) could not remove my defects, so I just had to figure out how to control them. I spent a few more years trying to make myself into someone else, with as little success as the first approach.

Don't get me wrong. It wasn't that I never heard anybody else talk about these steps. I heard plenty of good stuff: The Sixth and Seventh Steps were about letting go of control and accepting oneself on a daily basis. They were about trusting a Higher Power to do for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. I heard it all, and I nodded my head in agreement, but I still held on to the belief that one day I would become someone else.

After a while, trying to control my defects got tiresome and I came to another conclusion: Steps Six and Seven were only meant as encouragement. I

decided that when we get to a certain stage of recovery, we need to realize that only one thing will ever be removed—the desire to use. I decided that I just had to live with the rest—emotional, explosive, tactless, distrustful me. So I settled into a fatalistic state of mind. I decided that I might as well accept the fact that I was not going to become another person, and . . . it slowly dawned on me that maybe, just maybe, I was on to something. It was true that I wouldn't ever become a different person, but knowing that wasn't so painful anymore because I began to see that I wasn't so bad after all.

I was okay. I had some quirks, but I was basically okay. I just hadn't been able to see it before because I was so busy criticizing myself. I was no worse, and no better than the majority of addicts—of human beings, for that matter. It was an uncomfortable thing for me to realize that spiritual pride can come from thinking of oneself as worse than others as well as better than others.

So I was wrong. The steps do work. I just had a “little” pride in my way of seeing that (and what a coincidence that pride had never been on my Sixth Step list of defects before!). I had acknowledged, of course, that pride was sometimes the root of some of my difficulties, but I never saw it as a “real” problem. It was just something I thought I could get to later when I was finished dealing with the “big” defects.

It took me fifteen years to become entirely ready to stop believing that I am God and start asking the real God for help. You may think it took a long time, but I had to work down from thinking of myself as huge to thinking of myself as normal-sized. You know what? I like the normal-sized me. I'm nice, funny, loving, caring, and tender. I'm sarcastic, cynical even, tactless, emotional, and I fly off the handle easily. But I forgive easily, too. I'm willing to move along on the road to recovery and be just like everybody else.

*Andree L, Quebec*

## Aamchi Mumbai

Where would you find, at an NA meeting, a Sikh, a Parsi, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Catholic, a Hindu, a Jew, and an atheist?

Where would you find, at an NA meeting, a Maharashtrian, a Bengali, a Punjabi, a Keralite, a Tamilian, a Sindhi, a Goan, a Gujarati, and an Englishwoman?

Where would you find, at an NA meeting, members who speak Marathi, Hindu, Urdu, Tamil, Bengali, Malayalam, Konkani, and Gujarathi?

Where would you find, at an NA meeting, a Hindi and a Muslim protecting each other, while outside Hindus are killing Muslims and Muslims are killing Hindus?

Where would you find an NA meeting where the phrase “regardless of sex” would have three possible meanings: male, female, and eunuch?

Where would you find, at the same NA meeting, both a member who walks seven miles to the meeting because he doesn't have bus fare and a member who globe-hops in a plane?

Where would you find, at an NA meeting, members whose toilet is the railway tracks and members who have bathrooms big enough for a family of twelve to live in?

Where would you find, at an NA meeting, a member who reads IP #1 aloud at the beginning, not because it's part of the group's format but for members who are illiterate?

Where would you find a member writing a group report for the group's GSR, not because the GSR is illiterate but because he has lost both of his arms from using?

Where would you find an area so chaotic that you can't believe it could host a convention, yet so moving that you just have to keep coming back?

Only in the Aamchi Mumbai (which means “my Bombay”) fellowship, where diversity is a reality and unity is sometimes a difficulty. Yet the voice of NA in Mumbai says: “Whatever our differences, you are welcome here. Keep coming back!”

*Ivan, India*

## Beyond words

Sometimes pictures say more than words—you might even say that the voice of recovery is seen as much as it is heard. We're hearing the voice of recovery when we come to our first meeting and notice that the people in the room look—well, different, much different from the people we've been hanging out with. We hear the voice of recovery when we go to a large convention and see 5,000 recovering addicts standing in a circle to close the meeting. Especially at meetings, whether it's the home group we attend regularly or a meeting we've never been to before, we recognize the recovery the minute we walk in. In this issue, we'd like to share with you another collection of meeting places that speak—no, shout—of recovery.



**This is where the It Works Group of Columbia, South Carolina, meets. It had its first meeting 18 June 1997 and has a rotating format that alternates a Basic Text study, an *It Works: How and Why* study, a Steps One to Three study, and a newcomers meeting. Don't worry—the “HH” on the lectern stands for the Hendley Homes Community Center where the group meets, not some other fellowship.**



**The Los Gatos Home Group is one of the original home group meetings in the San Jose, California, area. Its first meeting was on Mother's Day (in May), 1989. It now has 15 meetings, including one that meets every night at 6:00. It even attracts members from surrounding cities because of its honest, friendly, and welcoming atmosphere.**

**There's been a meeting of the First Step to Recovery Group every Wednesday at 5:30 pm since 27 July 1994 at this location— 1512 Webster Avenue in the Bronx, New York. We're assuming the balloons and crepe paper aren't part of the regular meeting décor, but maybe they should be. Recovery is a celebration, after all.**



**This is where the Sólo por hoy (Just for Today) Group meets in Medellin, Colombia. Its members are looking forward to meeting addicts from all over the world at the world convention in Cartagena at the end of August.**





**Roswell, New Mexico, may be famous for extraterrestrials to outsiders, but the Survivors Group is famous to local recovering addicts. This photo was taken at the 5:30 pm meeting on Sunday. The Survivors Group also meets here on Thursdays and Fridays and at another location in Roswell on Tuesdays. The last Friday of the month, the group has a speaker meeting and celebrates recovery anniversaries.**

**The Living Proof Group (originally the “Jonesing for Life” Group) meets two times a week in this church basement in Winnemucca, Nevada. The Wednesday meeting is a topic discussion and the Sunday meeting is a Basic Text study. The group’s first meeting was held here on 22 January 1998.**



NA communities are invited to send us photos of their meeting places. We especially welcome photos that include meeting formats, recovery literature, posters, dirty coffee cups, etc.—anything that makes the meeting place look “lived in.” Sorry, we cannot use photos that identify NA members. Along with your photo, please tell us about your group or meeting: its name, the location and city, how long it has been in existence, and what your format consists of (speaker, participation, etc.). We’d also love to hear what makes your group and your meeting place special.



For those of you who haven't had the pleasure of meeting him, H&I Slim is the ultimate "H&I kinda guy." He hangs out in hospitals and jails all over the world. You might say he's always in the know and always on the go. Got a question about H&I? Need some help? Write H&I Slim in care of the WSO.

## **Dear H&I Slim,**

I am the coordinator for the H&I committee in Costa Rica. Since I have been in service, I have been in doubt about how to apply the Twelve Traditions to H&I work.

Is it practical and effective to talk about them at an H&I meeting, or is it better to wait until incarcerated members are released and come to a regular meeting?

A couple of years ago, another NA member involved with H&I service told me that in H&I our purpose is to carry the message of recovery and that the message is in the Twelve Steps.

The traditions protect us from the internal and external forces that could destroy an NA group, but does this mean NA groups in an institution? Isn't an H&I meeting different from a regular NA meeting? What should trusted servants in H&I do with the traditions?

*Marianela C, Costa Rica*

## **Dear Marianela,**

While it is true that H&I meetings are not the same as regularly scheduled NA meetings, our Twelve Traditions guide us in our behavior and attitudes when we carry the message into facilities. For example, our Fifth Tradition guides us in choosing a meeting format. We remember that our relationship with the facility is one of cooperation, not affiliation, as defined by our Sixth Tradition. When asked about medication, we practice our Eighth Tradition; we are nonprofessional NA members, and we refrain from giving medical advice. We practice our Tenth Tradition by refraining from expressing opinions on outside issues.

So, you see, H&I committees can enhance our message by taking the time to cultivate our understanding and application of the traditions in H&I service. We can do this in committee meetings, or, better yet, at learning days and workshops. In that way, we can take advantage of one another's experience, strength, and hope.

*In service,  
H&I Slim*

# The voice of the groups

by Brian L, ASC Chair  
Rock River Area, Illinois

I am honored and grateful to let you all know that today (9 March 2000) I am celebrating twelve years clean in Narcotics Anonymous. I would like to thank God for NA and thank NA for putting a loving God in my life.

I have had the opportunity to be of service to NA since I had 90 days clean. I was one of those folks who were looking for more than meetings to help me change my lifestyle, and my first sponsor told me there was a place where addicts from other groups met to discuss what to do with the money from the Seventh Tradition basket. I had no idea it was called an area service committee. I went, and listened to people discuss topics that were completely foreign to me. I did notice two things: The people in the room had significant clean time, and everyone was given the opportunity to voice his or her questions, concerns, and opinions. After the meeting, I told my sponsor that I wanted to go back and really find out what those addicts were doing and for what purpose. I haven't left NA service since that meeting.

This was my first experience with hearing the voice of NA. I have come to understand that the voice of NA is our primary purpose—to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. We carry out our primary purpose in both recovery and service meetings. We need both of these components to be productive and to provide services to our fellowship. I was taught early in my recovery that every addict who has the desire to stop using and is a member of NA is given the opportunity to be heard. We can be heard in various forums in our fellowship: group business meetings, area service committees and their subcommittees, regional service meetings, at the World Service Conference through our participation in *Conference Agenda Report* discussions, and at zonal forums.

These various levels of service all have ways of making sure the individual voices that participate are heard, as well as making sure that their collective voices are heard. Most of the service committees in which I've participated have used making motions and voting as means for making decisions and measuring the service body's support for any given issue. I have, however, attended some service meetings where the group was using a consensus-based decision-making process. What a concept! Addicts humbling themselves to allow the conscience of the body, with the help of a loving God, to decide what is best for NA!

# Our gratitude speaks

**“Even in silence, the voice of our gratitude does not go unheard. It speaks most clearly as we walk the path of recovery, selflessly giving to those we meet along the way. We venture forth on our spiritual journey, our lives enriched, our spirits awakened, and our horizons ever-expanding. The quintessential spirit that lies inside each one of us, the spark of life that was almost extinguished by our disease, has been renewed through working the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. It is on the path paved with these steps that our future journey begins.”**

*It Works: How and Why*  
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My own decision-making process and capabilities have changed over the years. Where I was impulsive before, I now carefully consider things. I know that I need to keep NA's primary purpose in mind *whenever* I am being of service. I cannot make proposals for any reason (ego gratification, personal gain, to try to gain favor with others, etc.) other than our primary purpose. To do so would not only compromise the principles of my own program, but would hinder us in carrying out our primary purpose. I'm sure we can all agree that our recovery principles are of critical importance. Reading, writing, working, and living the steps make us capable of being of service to others.

It has been said that NA groups and meetings are the most important places our message is heard. We suggest throughout our literature that the groups are *the* voice of Narcotics Anonymous. If that is so, then contact with NA World Services should take place at the group level.

At this point, I could quote the traditions and concepts that apply to these ideas and are in line with the voice of NA. I believe in the traditions and concepts, but anyone can read this literature and draw his own conclusions. That's how this fellowship has operated for years. The words of our Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts haven't changed, but I could get a variety of different (and sometimes conflicting) interpretations of just what those words mean.

We need to keep the mission of NA uppermost in our minds; it is our top priority. I have learned through my recovery and service encounters that keeping our priorities straight benefits every member of NA. If I have a passion for such a large organization, and I stay involved at any level, I benefit from the decisions that are made at any level.

I have participated in developing our "voice" about the *Conference Agenda Report*. Though lacking in many ways, it is what we have today to involve as much of our fellowship as possible in NA's collective decision making. I can understand why some people want nothing to do with discussing the *CAR*. We say our groups are NA's voice and then allow individuals to change, modify,

amend, and rationalize it by saying the "groups" wanted it this way. This is not proper and weakens the point of member involvement. I was naïve at first and thought that my vote counted on the outcome of the motions in the *CAR*. Then I went to a regional meeting and heard about what happens to motions from the *CAR* at the WSC, how they may be changed. I was hurt! I wanted to know who gave these people the right to change our voice.

I'm sure that many of you reading this are thinking that we call them trusted servants because we should trust them to make these types of decisions for us, but I can honestly say that not all of our so-called trusted servants should be trusted. They sometimes use service for personal gain rather than the good of the fellowship. I really gave this issue some thought when I was a regional delegate to the WSC and saw this type of behavior in action. I would like to think that all of us really have NA's best interests at heart, but that's not reality. If we truly all did have NA's best interests at heart, our decisions would all be based on consensus. We would all have the chance to speak and express our concerns, listen to others, put aside attachments to specifics, let go of our fears and mistrust, and care enough about NA to keep focused on what's best for it.

We all understand that pain is part of the growth process. If we are not allowing the groups to make the decisions for the fellowship, then let's not deceive them. The people we select as our trusted servants need to listen to the groups that select them. Regional delegates need to accept responsibility for their own behavior and not try to blame everything on the World Board. We need to apply the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts when choosing people to represent us. I believe that a region is only as strong and as informed as its regional delegate. Group assemblies are the wave of the future if we want the voice of NA to be what it was intended to be. If we are going to say in our Twelve Concepts that the groups have the final responsibility and authority for NA service, then we need to make that a reality, not some ideal we cannot achieve.

❖

# What about the unseen voice?

A little more than 18 months ago, on a cold evening in January, I asked my mother if she would watch my kids while I went to a meeting. For the first time since I had moved home when I got clean, my mother said “no.” However, it was what she said next that really shocked me.

“I’d really rather go with you,” she told me. “I want to know why you come home feeling better than when you left.”

Like I said, I was shocked. It had never crossed my mind that my mother might be interested in Narcotics Anonymous. The thought that my mother might be a drug addict had never occurred to me. I just thought she was really self-disciplined about taking her medication on time. I didn’t know that she was not only taking it on time, she was tripling her prescribed dose.

So off we went. My husband (who was then my fiancé), my kids (since we had no babysitter), my mother, and I headed out to a nearby meeting. I was having the weirdest set of feelings I’d ever experienced in recovery. They fluctuated between elation that my mother was going to do something for herself and outrage that she was invading my territory. The inevitable self-centeredness was present as well: “Oh, brother! How am I ever going to get to meetings if I lose my mother as a babysitter?”

The feelings passed, as they always do. Soon enough, I was trying to balance my codependence in taking my mom to meetings with working on my own recovery. But stepping back from being my mother’s chauffeur wasn’t as easy as you might think.

You see, my mother is blind.

Being blind in recovery takes the usual challenges to getting clean into a whole new dimension. Though many of us have come into recovery without a car or license to drive, we usually get those things back with some effort. But for our recovering brothers and sisters without sight, that’s a level of independence they will never experience. How’s that for powerlessness?

Just for a minute, take a step back from your gold-plated problems and try to see things from the sightless point of view. First of all, I don’t think any area in NA offers a meeting schedule in Braille. I live in a large region with a lot of meetings, and I’ve never seen one. A blind person would have a hard time finding meetings to go to, and if they didn’t have someone seek them out specifically, how would they ever even hear the message of recovery?

Getting to NA may be half the battle for some of us, but for my mother getting to a meeting is more than a battle. If the meeting isn’t within walking distance of a bus line, she’s out of luck. Even when it is, the buses in our area stop running before the nightly meeting is over. She depends on, and will always have to depend on, the kindness of others to get home safely. We all have to ask ourselves when we last offered a ride home to a newcomer. If all we remember is cringing when someone asked us for a ride because we thought it would interfere with our going out to coffee with our clique, we need to get our priorities straight.

For the first few months of my mother’s recovery, I personally took her to at least three meetings a week. Then I was able to move my family into our own house, and I had some decisions to make. I made a commitment to get her to at least one meeting a week; I felt I owed her that much. Faithfully, for more than three years, I picked her up every Friday night for a meeting, and took her home afterwards.

Then I needed to take some continuing education classes, and one that I needed was offered only on Friday nights. My mother started taking the bus to our Friday night meeting and had to depend on people at the meeting to take her home. The whole situation was iffy at best. She told me about one Friday night when she asked five different people and none would give her a ride. They all had plans. By the grace of God, my husband got to the meeting late and was able to take her home. My Higher Power always provides a way.

How often are you letting your Higher Power make a way through you? When we make our gratitude lists, do we remember

to thank God for the full use of our senses? Are we grateful for the touch of a welcoming hug? That we can smell the body odor of a newcomer who hasn’t bathed in weeks? That we can see other recovering addicts, even the ones we resent?

The silent voice of NA is heard loud and clear in how compassionate we are to our brothers and sisters. It practically screams in our ability to ignore those who need just a little more help, a little more attention, a little more support. The quiet voice of NA sings sweetly in the person who takes aside another addict and patiently shares about the First Step.

Where is your voice? Speak up.

*Gayle D, Michigan*

## Special interest meetings don’t speak to me

NA’s “voice” has changed since I’ve been around, and the one I often hear doesn’t speak to me.

It seems like special interest meetings are here to stay. There’s one for everybody: men, women, gay and lesbian. For me, the only requirements for membership are spelled out in Chapter Two of the Basic Text, “What Is the NA Program?” and in our Third Tradition. We are reminded that “the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using,” and that “anyone may join us, regardless of age, race, sexual identity, religion, or lack of religion.”

I hear the voice of NA through all our members, not just the ones of the same gender, sexual identity, or whatever. All that matters is the program they work and the recovery they have to share.

It is a shame to exclude addicts from the places where NA’s voice is heard: our meetings. I pray and hope for recovery for all addicts, and I hope that we won’t continue to build walls that keep anyone from hearing the message of recovery.

*Daniel J, Minnesota*

# ***NA Way Magazine Themes and Deadlines***

## **October 2000 – July 2001**

### **October 2000 NA Way**

**Deadline: 1 July 2000** (manuscripts in to WSO)

#### **Theme: Communication**

- What is good communication?
- How does good communication promote NA unity?
- What does listening have to do with communication?
- How does good communication help NA grow?
- Communication between NA groups and their ASC; communication between groups and their trusted servants—how does ensuring that this communication is effective help the groups and the addicts who are yet to arrive in NA?
- How does the worldwide, multicultural nature of our fellowship affect our efforts to communicate throughout the fellowship?
- What kinds of communication would you like more of, especially from NA World Services?
- Group conscience and communication.
- Personal growth and communication.
- Communication services: H&I, PI, websites, etc.
- Sponsorship and communication, therapeutic value, empathy.
- What kind of communication has really helped you in your recovery? Just the right reading at a meeting? Just the right words from another recovering addict? Etc.

### **January 2001 NA Way**

**Deadline: 1 October 2000** (manuscripts in to WSO)

#### **Theme: Celebrating Our Recovery**

- How does your area/region/country celebrate recovery? Conventions? Participation in World Unity Day?
- How do individual members celebrate recovery anniversaries in your NA community?
- How do you, as an individual, celebrate your recovery every day?
- NA's promise of freedom—celebrating it.
- How do celebrations of recovery transcend language and culture?
- Gratitude and celebration: When you do your Tenth Step at the end of the day, do you find things that are worth celebrating? What are they?
- Fear of celebrating: Do some members in your NA community seem to dislike NA events? What's your opinion on that?
- What do our celebrations of recovery say to the general public?

### **April 2001 NA Way**

**Deadline: 1 January 2001** (manuscripts in to WSO)

#### **Theme: A Recovery Odyssey**

- Why do people speak of recovery as a journey? How has your recovery been a journey?
- Infinite potential for recovery.
- Developing increasing faith, hope, and courage; deepening surrender.
- Changes and challenges.
- Fellow travelers on the journey: sponsors, sponsees, friends, other people who have taught you.
- Recovery as its own reward.
- Close encounters with a Higher Power.
- Loneliness—when you've gone where no one else in your NA community has gone before. Where do you find support, identification, motivation to continue spiritual growth?
- Journeys in service.

### **July 2001 NA Way**

**Deadline: 1 April 2001** (manuscripts in to WSO)

#### **Theme: Carrying the Message**

- Tradition Eleven—issues of attraction and promotion in carrying the message.
- Carrying the message, not the addict.
- Why is carrying the message our most important (primary) purpose?
- Personal service and general service; places to carry the message—recovery meetings, service meetings, H&I, PI/public relations.
- Hearing the message.
- How does NA unity help us carry the message?
- Sponsorship and selflessness, humility, accepting limitations.
- What does carrying the message have to do with our common welfare?

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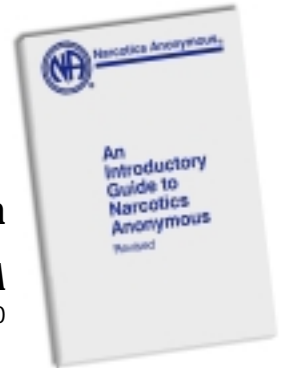
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