Creativity, Entry #1 of 7

Creative action is not a mysterious procedure, although it is an inside job in rebuilding or reintegrating our disordered and fractured personalities (IP#5: Another Look, “4. Addiction is not a way of life”).

Active addiction is a mess—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual disorder in the flesh. There isn’t enough room on this page to list what we lose or risk losing while we’re using: our health and well-being, our loved ones, our freedom, our minds, and...our keys! We’ve all been there.

We also lose ourselves. Which selves?... Exactly. Which, indeed. In the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, we often hear members say, “Out there, I was a chameleon.” While we were using, we changed our behavior, even our personalities, from situation to situation, to meet our self-centered ends, to survive. That’s some masterful creativity for sure.

As with all of our defects, if we flip the coin over, there’s an asset on the other side. We can be as curious and adaptable as we are manipulative and self-seeking. By the same token, just as we used our creativity to survive, we can rely on it now to rebuild our lives from the inside.

When we’re clean, our creative efforts aren’t squandered away on hiding who we are. We don’t have to waste energy developing new strategies to get what we want at the cost of our sanity and everything else we stand to lose. Instead, we take a creative approach to our program of recovery and change it up when we need a reboot.

In working Steps, we learn which parts of ourselves are authentic and which need cultivation. Through sharing and listening to other members, we can figure out what’s broken in us, which parts can realistically be glued back together, and which can be tossed in the bin. As a result, we learn how to express who we are with integrity. We get to be our true selves in relationships with others—and in the ways we dig into work, our interests, and service. Some of us even find creative ways to keep track of those bloody keys.

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*Today, I will look at what’s messy or broken inside me and use my imagination to identify what I could do to create some order and serenity up in here!*
Living fully is a creative expression of love for our Higher Power. To be fully alive, awake, and honest about who we are is a gift to us and from us (Living Clean, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”).

The longer we stay clean, the richer our lives become. We pursue our passions and take them where they lead us. For some of us, that means we go to school, launch careers, and start families. Others fall in love, serve our communities, and finally have time to plant a garden or take a road trip. The journey to unearth these passions—whatever they may be—is like an archeological dig. We excavate our personal creativity, an attribute long lost and forgotten, buried in the wreckage of our active addiction.

Our relationship with a Higher Power gives us the courage to discover and embrace our true selves and to give voice to our dreams. The journey through the Steps shapes our understanding of our Higher Power and of ourselves. We learn who we are and who we’re not and how to put one foot in front of the other to become who we want to be. We let go of old identities that no longer suit us. Our survival no longer depends on pushing people away. We’re free to be our authentic selves and ready to explore all of the quirky weirdness that entails. We often find kindred spirits in the rooms, other members who are just as excited as we are about classic cars, comic books, yarn crafts, independent films, obscure festivals, or virtually any other interest.

We are no longer merely surviving our circumstances. In fact, we are full of life and wide awake to experience all that the world has to offer. One of the greatest gifts in recovery is the ability to embrace ourselves for who we are and open our hearts to those around us.

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I will explore opportunities to share myself in my NA community in creative ways and strengthen my relationship with my Higher Power in the process.
Creativity, Entry #3 of 7

Sharing with others keeps us from feeling isolated and alone. This process is a creative action of the spirit (Basic Text, “Recovery and Relapse”).

Many of us, even with time clean, find ourselves with a problem or a situation we have no idea how to deal with. For example, grateful as we are that we’ve been released from prison, we are petrified by the prospect of rebuilding our lives outside of the structure we’d become used to. Or, having fallen out of love with our spouse—who shares the same homegroup, no less—we want to move on. But how? Or, our teenage son tells us he’s gay. We want to be supportive, but our faith community has very strong opinions. Or, our supervisor at work is in active addiction. We pick up her slack because we don’t want her to get fired. But the stress is killing us.

Shame, indecision, and fear prevent us from talking about our problem with anyone. Or our ego takes over: I can figure this out on my own. We’ve been down this road before and know where it leads: denial, dishonesty, resentments, isolation. But we can make a different choice now, just as we did about our addiction.

If we share what we’re going through—with a trusted NA member, our sponsor, or on a group level—we are acting differently, even creatively. We can rely on someone else’s creativity to take us down a road that we had never considered. We just have to open our minds to their experience and perspective.

Other times it’s the act of sharing that’s the solution. Creative action of the spirit requires us to have the courage to open our hearts to share what has seemed impossible for us to talk about. In these cases, we depend on another’s empathy to get us through a situation that has no resolution but to accept it.

Today, I’ll ask myself: “What am I keeping to myself?” and “Who can I ask to share their creative problem-solving skills with me?” Then, I’ll seek out that person out and be open to what gets revealed in the process.
Creativity, Entry #4 of 7

When we are spiritually connected, creativity flows through us. This doesn’t necessarily mean that we paint or make music (though it can), but that we can see solutions to problems and find satisfaction in doing whatever we do as best we can (Living Clean, Chapter 6, “Work”).

Many of us develop a deeper spiritual connection as we dig into our Step work, especially when we get to Step Eleven. We explore creative ways to meditate or connect to our Higher Power, and we discover multiple avenues for inspiration in our lives. Creative expression takes many forms.

One member shared, “Creativity is not just about art or music; it can be that spontaneous kind gesture we do for another human being.” We learn that it doesn’t cost a thing to carry our passion for living with us everywhere we go.

When we tap into a spiritual connection, it can be like hitting our stride in a marathon. Somehow the world seems quieter, and our purpose in it takes on new clarity. Our path through recovery comes into focus, and it leads us out into the lives filled with meaning. We find joy in being useful to others and enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done.

Our connection to our Higher Power helps us access our creativity and use it to amplify our service. We’re increasingly able to discern the quiet voice of our conscience, a voice many of us identify as a direct connection to our Higher Power. Letting our intuition guide our creative acts of kindness is an art in itself.

Today, I will look for ways to harness my creativity in service to the Fellowship and the rest of humanity. I will cultivate my spiritual connection to allow creativity to flow through me.
Creativity, Entry #5 of 7

Creative action keeps us moving forward (Guiding Principles, “All Will be Well”).

One way for us to examine the power of creative action is to take a clear look at its spiritual polar opposite: destruction. In our active addiction, instead of building up our lives, we knocked them down. We demolished relationships, careers, and property. We self-destructed, harming our bodies, our minds, and our spirits. In many cases, our destructiveness resulted in losing our freedom.

As melodramatic as it may sound, we can rise from the rubble, fumes, and bloodshed of our self-destruction! We destroyed a lot, but we didn’t destroy everything. Because we’re alive and we’re clean, we have the opportunity to rebuild. Most simply, creative action is everything we do to reconstruct our lives and elevate our communities. It includes all the actions we take to build our self-esteem, strengthen our relationships, and bolster our integrity.

It’s important to note that some of us use our creativity to build only our outsides—getting our looks back, doing our time and being released, finishing the degree, or retiring in style—but deny our spiritual needs. That neglect can lead us down a path of destruction. We may not relapse, but we certainly have plenty built that we could destroy. The creative actions we take to stay engaged in our recovery, give of ourselves in service, and nurture a relationship with our Higher Power will sustain our spirits even as we thrive in other ways.

We will make mistakes and may experience massive failures beyond our control. We are bound to take actions that undermine our progress and hurt others. We aren’t perfect. But, again, we can rebuild. Our capacity to engage in creative action during times of adversity is key to our progress. Learning how to be grateful for life’s hard-hitting lessons is the ultimate protection against our destructiveness.

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I’m going to take this moment to examine my destructive tendencies. Today, I’ll find an opportunity to consciously and creatively prevent them from taking over.
Creativity, Entry #6 of 7

When we are engaged in creative action of the spirit, whether in our personal lives or in our service work, we may be surprised by the solutions that present themselves (Guiding Principles, “Introduction”).

Living clean and working the Steps gives us loads of practical experience with applying spiritual principles. Open-mindedness unlocks some doors for us in Step Two, and we learn the benefits of being flexible in our thinking. The trust required to turn our will and lives over in Step Three gives us new confidence in the quiet knowing we might call our faith or intuition. With these and other experiences to draw on, it gets easier to align our actions with spiritual principles. With enough practice, spiritual solutions become second nature. We find ourselves more flexible in our thinking and more ready than ever to engage in creative problem-solving.

We practice listening to our intuition and learn to sift out impulses that are rooted in the disease. We tune into what some call our higher selves, the better angels of our nature, or simply good judgment to find inspiration that’s more closely aligned with our spiritual center. One member shared, “With some time clean and some Steps under my belt, I realized that my head wasn’t always trying to kill me.” Sometimes we’re inspired to help an elder cross the street, to take a panel into a local juvenile detention center, or to go back to school—age be damned!

Creative action of the spirit can lead us in any number of directions. We continue to be amazed by our creative capacity to craft spiritual solutions to the challenge of living life on life’s terms. We stumble upon new career paths, find new ways to serve, and learn new lessons. When we are engaged in living in the world and participating with other humans, our focus shifts from our self-centeredness to a more global perspective. That shift might be just what we need to live in the solution as regular contributors to the greater good.

I will approach life creatively today. I am open to inspiration and the guidance of a loving Higher Power and willing to contribute to our common good.
Creativity, Entry #7 of 7

Some of us discover that we have talents for contributing to the world in other ways, whether through our creativity, our empathy, or our addict ability to focus on one thing and do it ‘til it’s done (Living Clean, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”).

In NA, we often recall how drugs ruined our lives and how our innate talents were ultimately no match for our disease. When we were using, however, many of us believed that the drugs we used were fundamentally responsible for the positive contributions we made to our lives. Drugs allowed us to be confident about expressing ourselves socially, artistically, and sexually. They helped us fall asleep at night and wake up in the morning so that we could be there for our kids after work and before school. Using gave us laser-sharp focus and heightened our productivity at work, which pleased our employers and soothed our insecurities. Still, we eventually came crashing down. As one member put it, “I thought I was high-functioning, but it turns out I was just high.”

When we first get clean, we are terrified that we won’t be able to perform at the level that we and others have become accustomed to. With no drugs, we believe that we are no longer creative beings or that we’re talentless hacks who never were. We doubt we’ll be able to function, let alone complete projects on a deadline. Will our families still love us, because, surely, we’ll be less easygoing and fun? And what about sex?

As we heal, we begin to understand that the deep well of our creativity, our empathy, and our focus comes from developing a more honest relationship with ourselves and a connection to a Higher Power. We learn to acknowledge and release—even a tiny bit—our need for perfection and validation. Our expectations of ourselves become more realistic, and that gives us more integrity in how we contribute to our lives. We refocus the wasted energy we spent comparing ourselves to others toward being of service to fellow addicts and to our loved ones. And we may even discover new talents and abilities we never knew we had.

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I know I have something to offer the world. If I don’t know what it is, I’m willing to ask for help to find out. If I already know, let me seek guidance on how to deliver it with humility and generosity.