Joy, Entry 1 of 2

*As addicts, we know the pain of addiction but we also know the joy of recovery we have found in Narcotics Anonymous.*

—Basic Text, Preface to the First Edition

Many of us related very well the first time we heard the line, “We could not live and enjoy life as other people do.” Enjoyment and joy become rare when we’re caught up in the disease. “Addiction was like putting tons of salt on all my food,” an addict shared. “Quitting salt makes the food seem bland for a while… but then I can start to taste the actual flavors. Early on in recovery, I thought everything was boring and dull—but it turns out, it was just me!”

Being in recovery and working a program allows us to rediscover or redefine joy for ourselves. “My home group members go bowling together nearly every week,” a member shared. “I think bowling is just about the lamest possible activity... and yet I won't miss it for the world. We bowl badly, make a big ruckus, and laugh nonstop.” We experience life in a new way, and different life experiences shape our perspectives on joy.

Developing a taste for the more subtle flavors life has to offer takes time. We learn a lot by listening to other members. Joy is contagious. A member shared, “A home group member who is a parent always shares so seriously about silly things like potty training, then laughs about it. I don’t even like kids, but those stories make me laugh, too. It’s helping me not take myself too seriously.”

The Steps offer a path out of self-centeredness toward contentment. *It Works: How and Why* describes it this way: “We’ve begun to see that God’s will for us is the ability to live with dignity, to love ourselves and others, to laugh, and to find great joy and beauty in our surroundings.” Getting to this place—living and enjoying life “as other people do”—takes a little bit of patience, and the willingness not to take ourselves seriously all the time.

*Life is good when I let it be. I will find something to laugh at today—even if it’s just myself!*
Joy, Entry 2 of 2

We come to understand that happiness is an inside job, a spiritual experience that can get stronger with recovery. We find that no matter what happens on the outside, joy can still live within us.

—Living Clean, Chapter 7, “Love”

As far as spiritual principles go, joy is uncomplicated. But it can be elusive. In active addiction, joy was an abstract concept often far removed from our reality. How can we position ourselves to experience it now? One addict wrote: “Recovery from addiction is our path toward joy. I invite it in by removing barriers to that path, like anxiety, fear, and self-obsession.” Another wrote: “Joy is the result of my commitment to gratitude, service, and simplicity. I never thought I could appreciate ordinary things.” A third wrote: “The greatest joy is bittersweet, because I have experienced moments of it during my darkest hours. I can’t have joy without hope, and no amount of pain can take it away from me.”

Experiencing pain is part of our human condition, even when we do everything right. We can get clean, own our part in our past mistakes, make amends, learn to live by spiritual principles, be of magnificent service in the rooms, at home, and out in the community—yet pain will visit us again. We’ll lose people and relationships. Material gains come and go. Our health may decline. But can joy be taken from us? Is joy—like pain—an inevitable part of our experience?

Most of us would say that joy, like recovery, is available to us all. Despite our struggles, when we infuse our situation with gratitude, we find hope for our future—and create a place for joy at the table. We can choose to look at our troubles with a sense of humor and maybe even benefit from some laughter through our tears of anger or sorrow. None of this is easy. But through the inside job that is recovery, acceptance of this very moment is within reach. Serenity is possible. We can endure loss and reclaim joy over and over.

Regardless of my current burdens, I will shine the light of gratitude on what’s right in my life today and experience joy. Recovery has taught me that I can embrace multiple experiences at once.