

# The New/Old

# NAWay

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[Visit our website www.anonymi.info](http://www.anonymi.info)

Welcome to our special edition New/Old NA Way. We have gathered several articles from addicts within Narcotics Anonymous, and from previous issues of the NA Way to bring you an entire collection of experience, strength and hope on “Total Abstinence”. Remember, these are experiences of our members and do not reflect the opinion of NA as a whole nor the New/Old NA Way.

We had many submissions for this issue, so we will be doing a December issue which will include the balance of the material you all sent in. We will also be featuring a “Historical Reference” section in the New/Old NA Way, which will start in the next issue. Thank you so much for taking time to care and to write!—*Ed*

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## *Mission*

### *Alternate Service Information Structure*

*for Narcotics Anonymous is a point of collection for the informed group conscience of N.A. While we believe an attempt to reform N.A. service from within the existing structure might be beneficial, what we believe to be a more effective strategy is to provide a steady, reliable, non-political, and non-combative alternative for directly responsible service.*

## A Simple Life

I never had a chance to live a simple life until I got to Narcotics Anonymous. I was an addict at a very young age, dosed to handle defiant behavior. Clean time has not changed the disgust I have for people who drug their kids rather than deal with their behavior in the home.

We moved from New Jersey to Long Island when I was 8 years old. My prescription was not renewed, and I experienced withdrawal for the first time, mostly by running away from home and getting picked up by the police. One time I walked to the “el” in Jamaica and ended up in Brooklyn, where I tried to join the Dodgers. Strange fantasy for a little girl, but easy to understand when I did my first NA 4th Step.

By the time I got to high school, I had learned how to get my own drugs, and pretty soon I didn’t have to run away any more. The drugs worked—I could “tough it out” under any circumstances. My drug of choice “fixed” the attention deficit disorder, and I graduated high school with honors.

Supplying my habit made all other decisions thoughtless. I moved to Baltimore because to me Massachusetts law made staying there impossible. I worked in hospitals and research laboratories that didn’t learn to lock their drug cabinets until after I was gone. I had a couple of useful medical conditions that I could manipulate to make insurance companies pay for pharmaceuticals. My first husband had some good sources too; and my second husband was a police lieutenant, my insurance against arrest. These decisions had consequences—a living hell instead of a life.

I tried to quit on my own and ended up in a psych ward, dosed with anti-depressants. They worked, unless I forgot to take them properly, in which case I ended up on the street fixing the symptoms of withdrawal the usual way. The psychiatrist was convinced that I lied about my use of drugs and that the courtroom dramas I appeared in happened because of my relationship with my mother; after all, I had a respectable job. An emotional religious conversion with a fundamental Christian didn’t work either.

NA members I met while working in a court referral program asked me if I had ever tried abstinence. Say what? It sounded too easy for my complicated life, but I was ready to try anything. People passed me around like an overgrown baby for the first week or 2; after 90 days, my decision was final—abstinence was the key to life.

I claim abstinence as an absolute right, not a concept that can be negotiated depending on circumstances. My right to abstinence has been challenged by a number of doctors, and I struggled with my decision in the beginning. I still thank God that I had strong examples of the power of genuine recovery early on. After my first rebellion against taking a prescription drug that I had abused in active addiction, my sponsor suggested that I find someone in my life whose energy I admired and ask them for a referral. That was the beginning of a medical adventure that has lasted for 28 years.

Now that I’ve become almost as decrepit as I was when I was while using, and the pharmaceutical companies have cures for diseases that didn’t exist until they ‘found the cure’, the medical adventure has become a struggle once again. But the nastiest challenge is well-meaning but ill-informed NA members who believe that abstinence can be negotiated by making some doctor responsible for my recovery. This option was never discussed by the people who led me through the Steps. The direction was always toward open-mindedness and the need for more investigation. They called it “doing the footwork”.

The Steps have worked on my physical condition as effectively as they have worked on my emotional (mental) and spiritual condition. When I had back surgery, the prescribed painkiller set off hallucinations; surrender allowed aspirin and chamomile tea to work for me. Suffering from PTSD has been arrested by working Steps 4 – 11; a recent recurrence means it’s time for another 4th Step. When it was time to quit smoking, Steps 1 – 7 worked just fine. I was

treated for liver disease and the resulting nerve damage by a naturopath who used vegetable extracts. Blood clots in one leg, the recommended treatment being amputation, led to a week's mountaintop meditation; a physical therapist crossed my path shortly thereafter. Arthritis has set into both knees (broken years ago by a possessive lover); fortunately, prescribed drugs didn't work, but a harmless herbal preparation does. Breathing problems mean treatment with an oxygen concentrator. The medical conditions are boring to talk about; the 12-Step solution has been the adventure.



I do not have the right to tell anyone what to do; I have an obligation to share what I do to stay clean. Abstinence remains my treatment of choice. I can't "take what I want and leave the rest" from the NA program as I learned it. For every ailment or pain or surgery, an alternative to drugs has worked; I've just had to keep an open mind, trust God, and stay away from the prescription enthusiasts in the Fellowship. I don't want what everyone in the Fellowship has, I want more of what I have; and NA is where I found it.

*In loving service*

## We are not Doctor's

This is the reaction we hear most of the time in meetings when we share about total abstinence from mood changing substances and mind altering chemicals. If we are not doctors than what are we? We are addicts seeking recovery who have found a successful program of recovery from addiction. When we talk about addiction many of us are talking about first being addicted to drugs. Our recovery program is one of total abstinence from all drugs. We are a spiritual not religious program that provides recovery by following the twelve steps of NA. Then, what is this controversy that we are facing in the NA fellowship when it comes to abstinence and clean time?

First we need to take a look at what the program states when it comes to how we recover from addiction. The Basic Text talks about recovery through the twelve steps of NA. If you pick up our book (the Basic Text) and think you are an addict, you are told to read it and give yourself a chance, it may be what saves your life. Recover from what? Addiction (usually to drugs) is what we recover from. Some of our long time members' share that before the first step that drugs were the tip of the ice-berg, we do not recover from drugs instead we recover from what would take us back out there time and time again: addiction ...a physical, mental, and spiritual sickness.

Addiction tells us that we do not have it, but may tell us we have every other problem instead of addiction. Addiction would rather have us believe that we have emotional/mental problems; we may have been misdiagnosed by medical professionals: {"...Often doctors didn't understand us; they tried to help by giving us by giving us medication..."} **Basic Text, Why Are We Here** Doctors sometimes have misdiagnosed our disease, what can we expect after being evaluated even before we have fully detoxed. Doctors' answer at times has been to medicate us. Often today we are put on replacement drugs to help ease the pain of withdrawal and we are then told that we will need medication for the rest of our lives to live a normal life. We come into NA from treatment centers, detoxes, prisons, halfway homes, and referral agencies that have diagnosed us and perhaps have given us drugs to treat our disease and now we hear that this is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs: what are we to do? We hear the rationalization that we are not doctors, however, we are told that the NA program can help us recover from addiction and that we should not use, just for today. We are told NA does not have an opinion on outside issues; however NA does have an opinion on inside issues including total abstinence from all mood changing substances and mind altering chemicals. If you have used today and yet are not abstinent from all mood changing substances and mind altering chemicals please listen and get with the group members after the meeting. Please listen and see if you identify with what is being shared, you will

be able to make an informed decision if you are an addict and after a few meetings, decide you need our help . Read the Basic Text and the literature and see if you can identify with what is being read, remember we are not for everyone, only addicts seeking recovery from addiction. If this is you, give yourself a chance. Don't leave before the miracle happens.

*For review and input Historical Perspective Group of NA Allentown, PA Group of A.S.I.S. for NA Permission Granted for reprint not for sale. This piece of Literature is not approved but in draft form Please send input to [BillAlln2@aol.com](mailto:BillAlln2@aol.com) in care of Historical Perspective Group of NA 8/07/2010*

**{old Original white book and Basic Text}** *Most of us realized that in our addictions, we were slowly committing suicide, but such cunning enemies of life are narcotics and Sedation that we had lost the power to do anything about it. Jail did not **help us at all.** "Medicine, religion and psychiatry seemed to have no answers for us that we could use. All these methods having failed for us,"* in desperation, we sought help from each other in Narcotics Anonymous.

**{Gray Book}** The mental aspect of addiction comes with our inability to deal with life on its own terms. We tried drugs and combinations of drugs in an effort to cope with a seemingly hostile world. **We dreamed of finding the right medication or fix, the magic elixir that would solve our ultimate problem: Ourselves.** This reliance on drugs had harmed us emotionally. **The fact is that we cannot successfully handle any mind-changing or mood-altering substance.** The only way we keep from continuing a habit is not to take that first fix, pill, drink or toke. People like us know that one is too many and a thousand are never enough. We put great emphasis on this for we know that when we use drugs in any form, we release our addiction all over again.

**Total Abstinence is the basis of our program. Any mood or mind-altering chemical, prescription or not, is poison to our bodies.....**

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 N.A. who believes in me and wants to help me in my recovery.  
Just for Today I will have a program. I will try to follow it to the best of my ability.  
Just for Today through N.A. 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.

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## Abstinence and Pain

I'm sitting Here Now in nearly intolerable Pain I think my Pancreas is screaming Today. All I know is that my body doesn't know the difference between Prescribed or Illegal drugs, plus it would be insane to go back to the source of my Allergy.

Addiction I have read in our literature is "...chronic, progressive and fatal. The deadly cycle can be broken by not taking that first fix, pill, drink, or toke. Like other incurable diseases, addiction can be arrested. We agree that there is nothing shameful about being an addict provided we accept our dilemma and honestly take action. We are willing to admit with-

out reservation that we are "allergic" to drugs. Common sense tells us that it would be insane to go back to the source of our "allergy." We, as recovering addicts, can tell you that medicine cannot "cure" our illness. We regained good physical health many times only to relapse. Our past records show that it is impossible for us, as addicts, to use with control, no matter how well we may appear to be in control of our feelings..."

"Many of us sought answers but failed to find any we could use until we found each other. Most of us have become grateful in the course of our recovery. We have a disease that we can recover from. Our lives can return to being useful, in the course of our abstinence and through the working of the Twelve Steps of N.A.", explained in this book. **"...The use of any sort of medication may lead us back to active addiction. We must be careful when seeking treatment from any doctor not totally acquainted with our disease."**

We strongly suggest to one another that we share about our addiction and commitment to abstinence to the doctor administering drugs to us and trust that our medical records will be kept confidential. **One of the danger zones in our recovery is that when we get ill and are prescribed legitimate medication, it may lead us back to our drug of choice.** We call this relapse.

**All too many times, doctors who meant well, but did not know of our disease and enabled our addiction.** We cannot recover overnight and we cannot expect sincere physicians to review their options or methods of treatment overnight. Our place is to help the addict who still suffers, particularly those who are seeking help.

Many drugs require no extended period of use to trigger allergic reactions, although physical and mental tolerance can play a role it is not how much we use that makes us addicts, but what it does to us. This too shall Pass.

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## Total Abstinence...

When I first came to N.A., I heard the words total abstinence. With my addictive mind, I thought that meant it was OK to take pills from doctors. That sounded great to me.

I checked into treatment and reviewed total abstinence for myself after nine months around the program. I had been unable to get over ninety days clean and had just finished a five day "run". In treatment I made a commitment to my God and myself not to use drugs even if my rear end fell off; which is very close to what really happened.

My years of running and using had left me with the problem of hemorrhoids. They became so bad fourteen months after I got clean that I had to see a doctor. He said I needed surgery. I had always felt if something so physically serious ever happened to me requiring medical use of drugs, then I would have to be in the hospital. So my mind immediately flashed "free high". I had heard of only two people who had surgery without any drugs, but I had no idea it could really be possible for me.

Two weeks before surgery, I was in a hospital waiting room with a friend and found this in an article: "Because general anesthetics depress the system and slow circulation and the rate and depth of breathing, many doctors prefer to use local anesthetics wherever possible (the patient remains awake) in certain operations."

I had already told my doctor I was an addict, but I was not sure he knew what that meant. I called him and said I wanted it done with a local anesthetic and no mind altering drugs at all. No pre-operation shots, no pain shots, no pain pills, fully intending that if he refused, I would find another doctor to work with. He agreed, but let me know general anesthetics would be there if I needed them.

I'd like to say I had no doubt or fear but I'd be lying. My prayers began to get real intense and I was turning my life and will over to my God with an intensity I had never felt before. Two days before surgery there was a really unusual calm and peace that came over me. Since I believe in total abstinence, I talk a lot about it and now the time

had come for me to walk my talk. I checked in at 7:00 a.m. and had surgery at 1:00 p.m. and needed to share many times that I'm a drug addict and don't use drugs. I felt that if I could make it through the first thirteen hours after surgery clean, I could make it all the way. I had heard of others making it six to eight or twelve hours, but none thirteen.

My first night was the toughest. Thank God for the program and the people there who helped me stay in the now and out of my head. The night nurse was also a recovering person. She worked with me using ice bags, aspirins, love and humor to help me make it through drug free.

It was painful, but the two times I cried in the hospital, they were tears of gratitude. I knew and know with no doubt in my mind that if I let go of my fear long enough to have faith in my God and abandon myself completely that my God would do for me what I could not do for myself. I found it's not whether my God loves me, He does, it's whether I love Him enough to trust Him to work in my life. I do and He does!

*Reprinted with permission from NA Way Feb. 83*

## Attaining Total Abstinence

In the last few months, I've had an experience which strengthened my Faith. When I was very young and had been using for a while, my parents took me to a psychiatrist. They didn't understand the disease of addiction and wanted to "fix me". I think they thought I was crazy and I knew something was wrong with me. I didn't feel "normal" like I thought other people must feel. I wasn't happy with my life and hadn't been for a long time even before I started using.

The doctor diagnosed me as manic depressive and prescribed antidepressants. I continued to use other drugs and failed to mention this to my doctor, When I came into this Fellowship, I didn't know what to do about my prescribed medication, I went to different doctors who knew about the disease of addiction, and got several different opinions about my "need" for the prescribed medication. Although I used the drugs as prescribed, I felt guilty and questioned my use of them.

I looked for reassurance from doctors, my parents, friends, and other recovering addicts, I wanted them to tell me it was okay for me to use this prescribed medication, No one condemned me for using medication, but some suggested I might want to "check it out" to try not using while under a doctor's care and see what happens.

At first, I only listened to the people who told me it was okay to take the medicine. I could accept giving up my street drugs, but not my prescribed medication. I thought they were, so essential to my functioning, that I would kill myself or someone else if I did not use them, I rationalized that my doctor knew what he was doing because he was a doctor

As I went to more meetings and heard of other members' experiences, my doubts and confusion became unbearable. My fear of being without medication wasn't as bad as my growing discomfort and doubt.

With the love, understanding and support offered by fellow members, I decided to turn this problem over to my Higher Power and took the necessary steps to get completely clean. I wasn't sure what would happen, but I finally had enough faith in my God to let go. I'd been on medication for years and although I'd been told that I felt stronger, more free and more capable. my medications were not "physically addicting", I know now that I was addicted to them. For the first few weeks of my detox off the medications, I looked for signs of abnormality or depression. I soon found that I did fine without the medicines. In fact, without them, I felt stronger, more free and more capable. The terrible breakdown I expected just never occurred.

I'm so grateful for those who suggested I just try. Their love, care and concern has helped free me from feeling guilty or unique. They helped me do the footwork to release my medical denial.

*Reprinted with permission from NA Way May 83*

## Letter to a Doctor

Dear Doctor:

I wish today to share with you my story of “legal” drug addiction. When I came to you I was a young woman, struggling with marriage and career. I was depressed over difficulties in my life. I shared them with you and you sought to help me with anti-depressants. My intake of these increased, as did my complaints to you of tension and worry. You prescribed a mild tranquilizer. These worked for a time, then I asked for stronger ones. I now complained of headaches, and you prescribed pain pills.

My weight increased, and without a word to you, I sought out another doctor. I complained of my weight gain, and asked for diet pills. I rationalized my uneasiness by assuring myself if it really mattered, doctor number two would have asked about other medication.

I soon developed a pattern. Diet pills in the morning, tranquilizers in the afternoon. Pain pills and muscle relaxers became norms for me. My tension increased with my tolerance. Doctors one and two wouldn't increase my dosage. I convinced myself they didn't understand, and sought out doctors three and four.

I functioned in society. Sick days and doctors slips were now a fact of life. No one, including my employer and husband, even considered the possibility of a drug problem. Not me. After all, I accurately handled large amounts of money on my job, and ran my household.

I developed an ulcer, and sought out another doctor to medicate me. This newest doctor asked about my alcohol intake, but not about other drugs. I didn't volunteer any information I found a P.D.R., and “developed” new symptoms. I actually believed I'd be okay if I could only get enough of the right drugs. Rationalization, denial and obsession with drugs were my constant companions. Deceit and manipulation became part of my character, yet most who came into contact with me saw me as a good, although troubled person.

I found N.A. literature in a clinic waiting room, and began to realize I suffered from the disease of addiction. This literature contained a phone number, and I used it. I was directed to an N.A. meeting, and found others like me. Some shared my drug pattern, some used different drugs, in varied amounts. Most however, shared patterns of inadequacy, fear, self—will and denial. I found the identification necessary to change my life. I no longer need to con doctors and abuse insurance companies to obtain drugs I no longer need mood—changing, mind altering drugs. I've learned to reach out to receive recovery, and reach out again to share it. Time has now shown me the need to reach in new directions.

Addiction becomes more of a problem daily. Social acceptance of more drugs, and our economic situation encourages more frequent use. What starts as an escape can turn into a prison. Freeing addicts from their self—imposed sentences as I was freed becomes more important with time. The enclosed literature could find its way to a suffering addict with your help. Your waiting room is an excellent place to find our written recovery message. I'm grateful for your time, I hope this helps in some way.

Respectfully yours,  
a clean addict

### **Dear Doctor,**

The attached letter from a clean addict shows the need for awareness of addiction by both doctor and patient.

If you agree that our printed message could be of value to you and your patients, please consider purchasing N.A. literature for your waiting area. The cost is comparable to that of the magazines now found there, and the message it contains is priceless.

As our literature explains, we are self—supporting through members’ contributions. Our funds are very limited, but we desire to spread the message of recovery from addiction through N.A. If you are unable to purchase our literature, yet wish to have it available in your office, please contact us. Our service committee will do its’ best to supply you.

If you have patients in your practice that you feel medicine has no answer for, N.A. may be able to help; please contact one of us. N.A. has members who are willing to share with anyone who feels they may have a drug problem, and are willing to seek help for it. These names and numbers are for your use only.

***Editorial Comment:***

We feel that this letter is an excellent Public Information vehicle. The author gives permission for all or parts of it to be utilized in making contact with physicians. We urge you all to take advantage of this fine piece of literary work.

*Reprinted with permission from NA Way November 82’*

## My Experience with Sponsorship and Prescribed Meds

A few years ago I resided in a very desolate area of the country where NA meetings were few and far in between, very hard to come by. I relied heavily on on-line meetings and phone conversations as a source of shared recovery.

Note: the state I lived in prescribed “marijuana” as a legal medication.

While living in that remote area I found myself in a predicament that is becoming all too common. I was asked to sponsor a woman who wanted what I had. She was very upfront and honest with me about her prescribed medications. I was waiting for her to share with me the long list of anti-depressants and anxiety meds that many of our newcomers are on. However, she told me she was able to get off all of them with the help of ‘Marijuana’. I was shocked, and speechless for a short time.

I took time to pray and talk with my sponsor before I spoke with her about the vital principle of NA, *total abstinence from all mood or mind altering chemicals*. I phoned her back to let her know that I would be glad to sponsor her. I told her that I would work with her, and, that she could work with her doctor and through her HP and the NA first Step, she could get clean from all drugs. She wasn’t so sure that she could get off the prescribed marijuana; however, I encouraged her and told her we would work on her first Step until she was abstinent. I never condemned her.

## On Literature and Total Abstinence

Not only do I dislike some of the ambiguous NA literature that’s been published in the last 12 years or so, I dislike intensely the need to defend my choice of total abstinence in an NA meeting. When I tell my story, I often refer to the fact that I probably never had a choice in becoming an addict, since my parents took the easy way and fed me (prescription) personality-changing drugs as a child. Clean time has not changed the disgust I have for people who drug their kids rather than deal with their personalities, behavior and even their violence in the home.

So I was “set up” to be an addict from the start. I learned this doing Step 4, because when we moved from New Jersey to New York, the prescription was not renewed; and I started my runaway phase (withdrawal) into extreme fantasy, took the “el” to Ebbets Field, and tried to join the Dodgers (I was 8 at the time). Finding out how to get my own drugs cured my runaway phase for a while.

Thirty years later, I tried to quit on my own ... I ended-up in a psych ward and dosed with anti-depressants. They sort-of worked, unless I forgot to take them properly, in which case I ended up on the street fixing the symptoms of withdrawal the usual way.

# Total Abstinence

The cornerstone of the Narcotics Anonymous program is total abstinence from all mood and mind altering drugs. We must get clean before we can stay clean and learn a new way of life. The process of surrender is a result of utter desperation and pain. It is the result of working double overtime to find a solution that does not require giving drugs up completely. It is difficult to accept that drugs are the problem when we have not been able to find peace and serenity by any other means. Certainly we can see where drugs have been the root cause of our biggest problems. However we also associate our drug use to the best times we have had in our lives too. We rationalize that if had we acted just a little differently we would not have suffered the consequences we've faced. We still believe sometimes that successful drug use is possible if we simply don't allow ourselves to use too much or if we stay away from certain substances that seem to cause us the most problems. We sometimes blame others for our problems and convince ourselves that we have been a victim of those who seek to destroy us. We are certain that police, judges and other authority figures are just out to get us and they if they only understood us they would see the light. When all other justifications fail, we are sure that we are simply just experiencing a period of really bad luck.

## Religion

Many of us have looked to religion as a solution. We become willing to change *parts* of our lives asking God, out of desperation, to change us and help us better manage the disaster that our lives have become. These religious experiences are often very real and the spiritual excitement may be so intense that we find a sense of fulfillment and joy great enough to bring order to our lives. We have seen some addicts find a permanent solution in the church but for us addressing the spiritual part of our disease without a complete surrender (abstaining from all drugs) was only a temporary fix.

## Professional Help

Many problem drug users have sought help in the medical community. We arrive in a professionals office in a variety of ways. Friends and family may recommend professional help and even be willing to finance our getting help. Many of us end up seeking counseling as a result of legal consequences or spend a weekend in classes to avoid jail. Many of us are evaluated by mental health professionals and receive an "official" diagnosis for our problem. We may receive medication for our diagnosis and have hope that we have finally identified the problem and have a solution. Many addicts may have a legitimate mental health diagnosis but will rarely get better until the disease of addiction is faced. This becomes the most clear when drug replacement is used as a cure for our drug problem. Thousands of addicts are receiving a daily dose of methadone or Suboxone in hopes that they will not commit crimes to buy "street drugs."

## Our Solution

Once we determine that none of these methods seemed to have any answers for us that we could use. All these methods having failed for us, now what do we do? We must first come to a place where we have no more options. We become so desperate and hopeless that we are willing to try anything even if that means no more drugs. We may be in a place where we have lost our integrity, our morals, and our self respect. The fear of continuing to use drugs becomes greater than the fear of trying to live without them. Our minds manufacture hundreds of reasons why we need to use drugs one more time but we are terrified of what will happen when we do. This is the beginning of surrender.

We surrender to a program of total abstinence when we absolutely cannot continue using. There is simply no fight left in us. We become willing to follow some simple suggestions that we hear in meetings. We may not believe that these suggestions are going to help but we do them anyway because we don't know what else to do. We may think we don't need a sponsor but we get one anyway because we are too afraid not to. We become willing to do anything to stay clean. Our first step says "We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction that our lives had become unmanageable. If we still believe that limited drug use is possible then we have not surrendered, we have not really taken step one, and we will use again. Step one for many of us is more than an admission of powerlessness, it must be followed by a change of actions. We must stay away from people that are using even if that means we must avoid family members, friends, and co-workers. We might have to break free completely of everything and everyone we know. There is no substitute for surrender. This may be very uncomfortable but we do it because we know in our "heart of hearts" that it is the only way.

We are full of fear and we are not sure of what the future will bring. We don't know if we will enjoy being clean or if we can even stay clean at all. We may still living with the obsession to use drugs and we don't know if the obsession will ever go away. The second step says "We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." We find others that have found the program of total abstinence called Narcotics Anonymous to be their solu-

tion. They share with us what it was like for them and we begin to experience a crazy little thing called hope. Other clean members of NA tell us that the obsession has left them and they have found freedom. We cannot deny what we are seeing. We are witnessing real addicts, just like us, staying clean and living happy productive lives. We may not understand what a higher power is but we can feel an energy that helps us maintain our total abstinence. Insanity is believing that we cannot achieve and maintain total abstinence. Once we believe that some power can remove our obsession, we have a grasp on step two.

Based on our life of desperation and this glimmer of hope we make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to God, *as we understood him*. To sum step three of in a nutshell it is simply a commitment to take the rest of the steps and to understand that they are the solution to maintaining total abstinence. Faith for some of us comes after this way of life becomes a reality.

This way of life comes to some very fast and to others very slow but it doesn't come at all if we are still clinging to the idea that we can have it while still using. Remember these 3 things:

The cornerstone of the NA program is total abstinence.

There is no substitute for surrender.

Recovery is a complete change of everything we think and do

NA people were the first to even suggest abstinence (the psychiatrist didn't believe I used drugs the way I had told him I had been using). The 90-day abstinence "test" convinced me that total abstinence was the only way that would work for me.

Finding doctors who will treat me without mood-altering drugs 28 years later has been a big challenge. I've aged and perhaps become almost as decrepit as I was when I was using. But the nastiest challenge is well-meaning but ill-informed NA members who believe that abstinence can be negotiated by making some doctor responsible for their recovery. This option was never discussed by the people who led me through the Steps.

Even with all the medical conditions I've encountered as I got older, total abstinence remains my treatment of choice. I can't "take what I want and leave the rest" from the NA program as I learned it. I've relied heavily on alternative medicine: some medical professionals don't fall for the "pharma" hype the way that NAWS has. For every ailment or pain or surgery, an alternative to drugs has worked; I've just had to keep an open mind, trust my higher power, and stay away from the NAWS-sanctioned prescription enthusiasts in the Fellowship.

## Total Abstinence

When I first came into the program of Narcotics Anonymous, I was told in order to stay clean I had to have total abstinence, change my old playmates, playgrounds and playthings, and work my program "Just For Today." Clean, it was explained to me, meant drug free. Recovery was explained as working the steps of NA in order to change and move toward a new way of living. Although as a newcomer, I did not understand *how* to stop using, I followed suggestions from my sponsor and others in the program. I was told that the disease of addiction does not differentiate between one drug or another, if it is legal or illegal, prescribed or from the streets. The disease of addiction is like a thirst that cannot be quenched with any drug, and substitution of drugs only leads addicts back to their drug of choice, or on that downward spiral towards another that is worse.

Many newcomers have been told by the medical community that their drug of choice is difficult or dangerous to come off and instead offer a "drug replacement" such as methadone, Suboxone, or some other. Many of our members have been in recovery from these so-called difficult and harder drugs, and most have done so without the use of "drug replacement therapy." While the medical community may have good intentions, most recovering addicts realize that those "drug replacements" also offer an opportunity to get high because they too are mood and mind altering. This simply perpetuates our disease and reliance on drugs to live our daily lives. It also puts off and delays the inevitable withdrawal that will now come from the "drug replacement" instead of the original drug of choice.

Another problem that "drug replacement" creates is the inability to surrender completely. How can we be honest,

which is necessary to recovery, if we are still using mind and mood altering drugs? We are cheating ourselves of the potential spiritual awakening necessary for each recovering addict to understand the process of recovery, and to then pass on the message of hope “that no addict need die from the horrors of addiction.”

Total abstinence is the first thing we are told when we arrive to Narcotics Anonymous. Our clean time, and our recovery from the disease of addiction begins with that and continues with the first step. “Drug replacement therapy” has not worked to clean up any addicts successfully we have met. It is only with honesty and surrender that we can begin our new way of life. Trusting other addicts who have walked the same path, gone through withdrawal from the same or similar drugs, and who have found a new way to live is something that we can also believe will happen to each of us as well. Total abstinence gives us the ability to think clearly enough to examine our lives and decide if our lives have become unmanageable. It enables clear-headed thinking for that self-examination required by our first step. It also allows us to pay attention to other recovering addicts who’s lives are slowly changing, putting the chaos and insanity aside and instead committing to a new way of live. This process is usually the first three steps. A process hindered and even prevented by “drug replacement therapy.”

Our disease is physical, mental/(emotional) and spiritual. Our weapon to keep our disease at bay is our daily program that we work; trying to move toward a new way of living and being in the world. Total abstinence is our first line of defense in that daily program. It is our ‘line-in-the-sand’ that any recovering addict dare not cross for fear of stirring that painful thirst that cannot be quenched once again. Total abstinence is the beginning, middle and end of our recovery. Without it, we are not clean and we are not recovering from addiction.

So, to the newcomer who has been put on “drug replacement therapy,” please keep coming back. Although recovering addicts are not responsible for having this disease, as members of NA we have been given the choice of recovery and are now responsible for that choice. We are not victims of this disease or helpless to do anything. There is a solution and it can be found in the 12 steps if we are willing to get clean and make that commitment. Being responsible for our recovery also means that we can be assertive with those well-meaning medical professionals. We can tell our doctors that we want to be clean in order to begin our recovery. We ask our doctor to help us to aggressively decrease our dependency on “drug replacements.” We can ask for help from the doctors and people in the program who have gone down that same path that lay before us. How did they stay clean? How did they come down? One addict helping another is the basis of this program, and we can ask for and count on that help now. Who better understands the horrors of addiction than another who has been in the same depths of the disease, and knows that unquenchable thirst? Each of us in the rooms of NA has learned that we never have to use again, and that we are home.

Visit our website at [www.anonymi.info](http://www.anonymi.info)

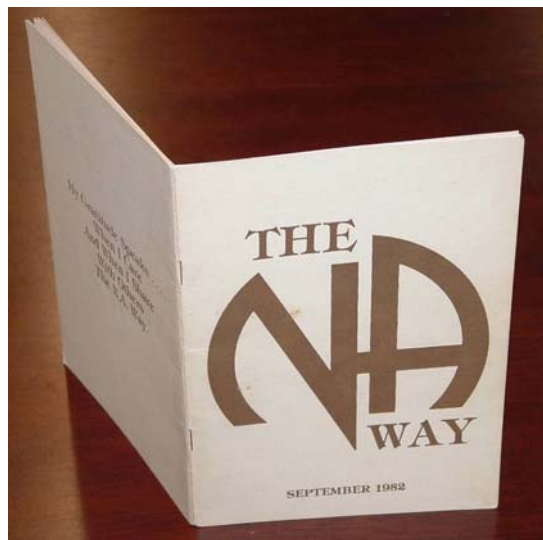
Dedicated to [true trusted service](#) for the NA Member, Group or committee who wants to effectively carry the NA message of total abstinence from all drugs and Recovery from Addiction to the addict who still suffers. We will be will be steady, reliable, non-political, and non-combative. We are guided by the [12 Traditions](#) of NA and [Directly responsible](#) to those NA Groups we serve.

*Your Fellowship Magazine*

*Share...  
and be shared with...*

*Like it was when NA was new and young and  
life-or-death intense:*

*You matter to us so we will tell you the truth as we know it  
with nothing held back.*



*“...so that no addict seeking recovery need ever die...”*

*Dear readers—we will begin a “Historical Reference” section  
with the next issue you may enjoy*

*We publish your input—the opinions presented are not necessarily those of the  
New/Old NA Way or Anonymi Foundation.*