

A newsletter of the Autonomous Region of Narcotics Anonymous.

someone in NA who believes in me

and wants to help me in my recovery

The Autonomous Region of Narcotics Anonymous is comprised of groups & individual members who have come together to support each other in carrying the message in their local communities. Regardless of literature preferences, location or meeting formats.

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Our members speak

A Tale of Two Groups—The Importance of Autonomy

I've been involved with some intense in-depth study of the 12 steps and the 12 traditions over the past year and a half. I began this work when I was 6 months shy of my 40th anniversary clean, and have been doing it continuously ever since. I've worked these steps and traditions with my sponsor, writing and meeting twice a week to go over what I've written, and with 8 other addicts that I am now sponsoring. I meet with each one once a week for an hour to go over the work they've done on the steps and traditions. This work has brought to light a good number of pretty amazing insights, both from my early years in recovery, and from my life as I live it, today.

I would highly recommend this activity. I've used two guides – *Back to the Basic* has been my guide working through our Basic Text. *Back to the Grey Book* has been my guide working through the steps and traditions using the first draft of our Basic Text, the *Memphis Review Form*, more widely known as the *Gray Book* (I prefer the English spelling of *grey*, myself).

My preference is the latter, as this has elicited many more insights, all of which seem to spring straight from this addict's heart and from his soul, or my spirit. That is one power-

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This is our Fourth issue of this monthly newsletter. Our intention is for this newsletter to serve as a vehicle to communicate experience, strength and hope in recovery among the members and groups of ARNA. We welcome your input into this newsletter. Please contact us at newsletter@arna.world.

Please send anything you would like to share with other members and groups of ARNA, including - personal experience, strength and hope in recovery; what becoming a part of ARNA has meant for you and your group; challenges and successes you have experienced in becoming a member of ARNA; anything else you would like to communicate with other members and groups of ARNA.

This is your newsletter. We will do our best to serve you by delivering an updated issue regularly, editing your input into an easily readable format, to facilitate effective communication between the groups and members of ARNA. We will also welcome any ideas you may have to improve the quality and effectiveness of this newsletter.

Our members speak

Tradition One

Not many people have had the honor of starting a meeting in a city that had a very small presence of Narcotics Anonymous. I was born and brought up in a suburb of Washington DC. I am a first generation Indian American. My clean date is January 7th, 2018. Prior to staying clean I was exposed to many NA meetings and chose to attend our sister fellowship, because I did not identify as an addict. I unfortunately was not able to stay clean, because I was not ready. Frankly, coming from a conservative Hindu background, I had a hard time adjusting to the language used in the program.

Luckily for me, I moved to Hyderabad, India in 2018 and found recovery there. I mainly attended AA meetings at first. The only NA meeting was on the other corner of the city and the recovery house I was living in advised against going there. They hinted that the recovery was not as strong there. It came to a point where we started getting younger members in the AA fellowship, and these guys were not alcoholics. They weren't able to relate to that program. So a few of us got together, and one individual in particular pushed for us to start an NA meeting on our side of town.

In the beginning it was just a handful of us. I was central to the meeting - I started it and often chaired meetings. I felt this meeting was an extension of myself. It was my baby. Once at a business meeting, there was a horrible disagreement between myself and another member. He wanted to change things at my meeting. I was had a full blown temper tantrum, verbally abusing this member and anyone that wanted to go against my will. It took me some time to realize that this thing works when we work together. I don't even remember what the argument was about, but I can't forget how it made me feel. It left a lasting impact on me. I needed to get out of this self-obsessed mindset. I brought my disease with me to the service position that I held. I am sure I'm not the first nor will I be the last. The group as a whole has to come before what I want.

We received a lot of support- literature, key tags, and pamphlets - from the other NA group. We soon formed an Area Service Committee. What I am still learning to do, because I am early in my recovery, is focus on us instead of I. I am such a self-obsessive human being, I make everything about me. But what the program has taught me is, it's not about any one addict. It is about us as a collective. I can't survive without you and you can't survive without me. I've finally found a place where I've found unconditional love. The members in the room wouldn't leave me no matter what. This is what attracted me to the fellowship, and what has led me to start applying the program to my life.

There's two parts to the program as I understand it- there is the fellowship portion (calling a member, going to a meeting, hanging out with members, etc.) and there is the action portion (working the steps and following the traditions). I believe that both are required in order to thrive in recovery. We've heard the saying over and over in the rooms, "NA doesn't need me, I need NA". I hope to keep coming back so that I can continue to experience unity with the fellowship.



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ful book, despite its many misspellings and typos (a number of which I may be directly responsible for – really sorry about that! We were in a hurry, and recovery couldn't wait!)

The work I've been doing on the traditions has brought some insights about the two groups that played a significant role in my recovery journey. Here's what I have learned.

In early 1980, when I was getting clean for good, my first home group had a step meeting on Sunday nights, the *Hulmeville Steppers*. As had many N.A. groups for 27 years up to that point, we used the *AA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions* (aka the "12 & 12") in our step meeting. NA only had the *Little White Book* and about 6 Informational Pamphlets (IP) at the time. Unbeknownst to us, a 1st World Literature Conference had recently taken place in Wichita, Kansas, where serious work on an "NA Big Book" had already begun.

Concurrent with this work beginning, NA had begun to look at the use of AA literature in its meetings, while a common practice up until then, as a violation of traditions. This practice endorsed an outside enterprise, Alcoholics Anonymous. However, as NA was then guided by those 12 traditions, they did not issue an edict declaring all AA literature be removed from the rooms. That's not how the traditions work. Each group is autonomous. Word was passed down to the groups, through regional and area service committee meetings, that this practice was now considered to be in violation of traditions. It was up to each group to decide, through its conscience, whether to stop using AA literature or to continue, until NA had a suitable alternative to help guide addicts wanting to experience the 12 Steps of recovery.

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When word about this reached the *Hulmeville Steppers*, through our GSR, we held a group conscience meeting to discuss the issue under consideration.

Do we continue to violate the tradition, so we could continue to learn more about the 12 steps from the only known source at that time with information about them? Or, Do we cease being a Step Meeting and change our format to a discussion or speaker meeting format, and forget about learning more about the steps until the N.A. book came out?

As often happens in a group conscience meeting, if done properly, allowing the conscience of the group to reveal itself, a third alternative sprung out of that group’s conscience. This was allowed to emerge by the group’s open-minded consideration of the issues, and the creative power of that collective conscience.

A question was asked, “What is NA Literature?” The answer given by a World-level committee chair was, “Anything written by an NA member, for NA members, that is recovery-related.” Then, a second question was asked – “Why don’t we write our own ‘12 and 12?’” Again, recovery couldn’t wait. We didn’t want to deny newcomers to our group the same benefit we’d found there – vital information about the thing that would save their lives, the 12 Steps. Those newcomers were our primary purpose. So, through our group conscience, we decided to write our own version of the 12 and 12.

For the next 3 months we met in Kenny and Phil’s apartment, discussing each step and tradition as a group, sharing our individual experience, strength and hope with each, and recording these discussions on a tape recorder. As the group’s secretary, I would then transcribe those tapes at home, type them up, and edit them into a format we could use in our step meeting.

We always tried to keep a step or two ahead of whatever step or tradition the group would be on the following Sunday. By the time we went to the First East Coast Convention at Bucknell University that June, I had about 80 pages of transcribed and edited NA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions that we were using in our meetings, and had begun to share with other groups throughout Pennsylvania who were hungry for NA literature on the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. It was an exciting thing to be a part of! But, the excitement was just beginning.

At ECNA-1, we ran into the people working on the NA Big Book. Our work on the book began in earnest then, though we’d already been working on it before we even met them. We formalized our committee into the Bristol Literature Committee, which eventually did the final edits of Chapter 8, We Do Recover, for the Gray Book. Another literature committee sprung up in Northeast Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Literature Committee, which my housemate George also chaired, and I typed and edited for. They produced the final edit of Chapter 10, More Will Be Revealed.

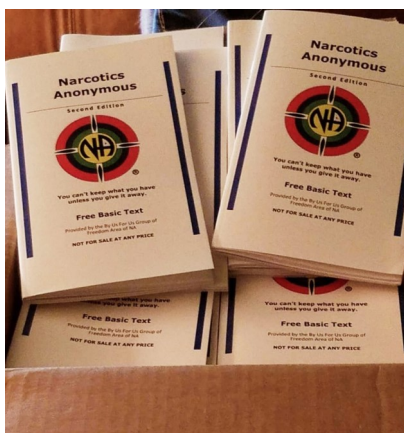
This is what can happen when group autonomy is honored, and a group follows its own consciousness. It can help write a book that can save thousands, maybe eventually millions, of addicts seeking recovery. This is how God works through our group conscience.

Now I will tell the tale of the second group that had a significant impact on my recovery. This is the sad part of this tale, not personally, but for NA and many addicts who died as a result of what happened. Without the first group mentioned above, I never would have gotten clean. Without this second group, I never would have experienced 12 step recovery. It was now 1984, and I was coming up on 4 years clean.

My work on the Basic Text had culminated with the 7th World Literature Conference, which had been held at the house I shared with George R. and Al R two years earlier, in January, 1982. We’d edited and selected the stories that went into the first edition of the Basic Text there. I had also been elected Vice Chair of the World Literature Committee at that conference. Heady stuff for an addict still two months shy of picking up his 2-year key tag. **Too heady!** It definitely went to my head, and began the process of my isolating myself from other addicts as I began in earnest the task I’d been given with that title – assembling the history of N.A.

Needless to say, the next two years found me working my ass off on that history, while

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sinking deeper and deeper into personal isolation and the hell of obsession without using. I obsessed over every other thing but drugs – I was in the *No-Matter-What Club*, and this other thing called *Anonymi*, so using was out of the question. *Anonymi* was essentially a group of addicts so heavily involved in NA service, they needed to be in close association with other service junkies like themselves – their issues couldn't be addressed by normal meeting attendance or by just any sponsor. I look at it now, and I think *"Elitists"*. Just another way to separate myself from you. But then, it was a big deal. I was one of *them*.

As I got sicker, and more isolated, despite my heavy involvement in service, I eventually imploded internally, while I exploded my life up, at the time. I went completely off the reservation, took off for a week with a newcomer girl I was supposed to be sponsoring, and did everything but use. I'm not proud of this. As far as I know, the newcomer girl came out of it okay, but I could no longer face the people that were in my life at the time. I crawled back to Maryland with my tale between my legs, and simply could not explain what had just happened. I felt deep shame, but there was nothing I could do to fix it.

I went up to north Jersey to help out a friend in need there whose girlfriend was in the hospital dying of AIDS. While I went there to comfort him, he wound up having to comfort me. He put me on a train back to DC, telling me I really needed to take care of myself. I had no idea how to do that! Nearly 4 years clean, my whole world seemed to be crashing in on me.

That train ride was the beginning of my journey to true recovery. I had a moment on that train that my sponsor would later describe as my true surrender. Instead of DC, I got off at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station. I can't tell you why. While looking for a decent cup of coffee, a guy I had sponsored in Maryland called out to me. He was there with his girlfriend, who lived in South Philly and had just picked him up at the station. They took me to her mom's for dinner, then to the South Philly group of N.A. My sponsor-to-be met me at the door.

That group had 12 Step recovery. Many members had been all the way through the 12 Steps and were sponsoring others. I was ready to walk away from NA, feeling like I had failed there, but kept being drawn back to that group. That's where I found the miracle of 12 Step recovery. The guy who started that group had gotten clean in AA in Cleveland, where the AA was old-school. They got newcomers right into the steps, got



them sponsors, and used the AA Big Book as a guide. It told you how to go through the steps. He'd been involved in the N.A. Literature work on the Basic Text, but had been disappointed when the book didn't include instructions for going through the steps, like the AA Big Book did. So, he'd continued using what he knew worked. Recovery couldn't wait. That group tended to get the newcomers that were really bad, the ones that needed to work the steps, or die. Meetings and service wouldn't be enough for these really bad ones. I was one of them. I knew I was dying without the steps, despite my time. I went through the 12 steps that spring and summer, and was sponsoring others by that fall.

Then, havoc struck. While that group complied with not bringing the AA Big Book into its

meetings, the Philadelphia Area Service Committee decided it was time to bring that group in line with the pure NA message. It demanded that group stop using the AA Big Book to take addicts through the steps, and to edit our shares when we described how we experienced our recovery in meetings. The group members at that meeting said, we can't deny our newcomers the same 12 step recovery that we found. The 12 steps are the 12 steps. When N.A. comes out with a 12 step guide, we'll use it. Until then, recovery can't

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wait. We'll use what we know works.

The Phila ASC said, “Cease or desist.” They interfered with that group’s conscience. When the group tried to hold a group conscience, its members were divided. Some wanted to keep doing what we do, but just say that we were no longer using the AA Big Book. Others, myself included, could not comply with that deceit, but could also not abide being dictated to by a service committee. So, we left NA, and formed Addicts Anonymous.

That group never stood a chance. Group Unity had been shattered by the outside force of the Area Service Committee. A once-thriving group slowly became a parody of itself. While they continued to say the words, and do the actions they previously had done, it had lost its essence. It was no longer a dynamic recovery group. It devolved into what many would term a *Cult*. I could only handle it for 7 more years, then I had to stop being a part of it. But I was one of the lucky ones. I’d had good sponsors who instilled in me the belief that my relationship with my higher power was the most important one I had, and that daily practice of the 12 steps was the way to maintain and grow that relationship.

That sustained me and my wife, Kathy, through many years of not knowing where, or if, we belonged in any 12 Step Fellowship. We found many other spiritual fellowships to be a part of, other mentors to help us grow spiritually and personally. We were always there whenever someone in need reached out to us, and we mentored many others in along our respective paths. We practiced what we’d learned in recovery, knowing that in order to keep what we had, we had to give it away. We just didn’t limit our practice to 12 Step programs – we practiced these principles in all our affairs. For both of us, personal recovery continued unabated as we thrived, living life on life’s terms. The 12 Steps work, regardless of where or how you work them. We do (and did) recover!

Countless others were not so fortunate. Many died, who might otherwise have found recovery in that once-thriving South Philly group of Narcotics Anonymous. It pains me to even write this, but I feel that those addicts who might have found recovery there, but died instead, deserve my witness of what happened there. So that others might not die, because of a group not following its own conscience, and an area violating that group’s most sacred right, its autonomy. What a damn shame that was!

Lessons I’ve learned from this:

Never let an outside force, be it a service committee, board, or well-meaning addicts that are not a part of your group, tell your group what it should or shouldn’t do. That is between your group and God as he expresses himself in your Group’s Conscience.

If you are about to go “straighten a group out” and give it the word “from on high” or from your own considerable experience, about how it should be running – don’t. It’s not your place. You might pray for that group, inform group members about a question or concern, or even make a suggestion for how they might achieve the primary purpose of carrying the message more effectively to the addict that still suffers. But, please, don’t presume to know more than that group, who are there week in and week out, and see the kinds of newcomers that are coming through the doors, and who know that group’s strengths and weaknesses much better than you, an outsider, can possibly know. That’s why the tradition says, “The only authority is God as he expresses himself in our group conscience.” If you’re not God, don’t play God. You are not qualified.

