

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.

In this issue:

•Members Speak

•Contempt

•Sponsorship

Our members speak

Contempt

It was a powerful moment when I made the connection between contempt for self and contempt for others. I was taught by a counsellor that contempt is the same in both cases and by losing my contempt for others I would free myself from self-loathing. This new idea rippled through my perceptions of the world like a boulder dropping into a pond. Suddenly all that I knew about everything changed. Fortunately, I had gotten used to these sudden shifts in reality because of my time in recovery. Narcotics Anonymous asks you to change everything, so I was prepared. Knowledge is powerful but experience is master, and I was a master of contempt.

Everything we know is subject to revision, especially what we know about truth.

Grey Book (Line numbered), Step 12, Page 72, Line 3-4)

Change has always been difficult. I learned to take responsibility for my recovery, so change is also necessary. Recovery is a daily process with
(Continued on page Two)

This is our Eleventh 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

Sponsorship

I met my first sponsor in my second N.A. meeting. It was a step meeting. Whenever he shared, it seemed to be coming from personal experience, not theory or opinion. There was also something about his eyes – there was a spark there that just beamed whenever he shared his experience. I wanted what he had, so I asked him to sponsor me. We immediately got to work on the steps. He didn't tell me to do 90-in-90 (though I did), didn't share his opinion about how I was living my life, didn't say to stay out of relationships for a year, didn't fill my head with slogans that I was already getting sick of hearing – he simply shared his experience with the steps, and treated me with more kindness than anyone had in a very long time. He took the time to get to know me, who I was, where I was coming from, and how he could help. It felt really good to be treated that way.

He walked with me through those first five steps, and I could feel myself rejoining the human race. Something inside came alive. I could feel a fire within, a passion, an excitement about simply being alive, and began discovering who I really was. I hadn't thought it possible to feel so alive, without some kind of mind or mood altering substance providing the spark for that. They had long since stopped working for that kind of thing, but now something else was doing it better than they ever had.

After sharing with him some things I knew that I would take to the grave with me, in my fifth step, and feeling an amazing sense of lightness, no longer having to carry the burden

(Continued on page Three)



(Continued from page One) Contempt

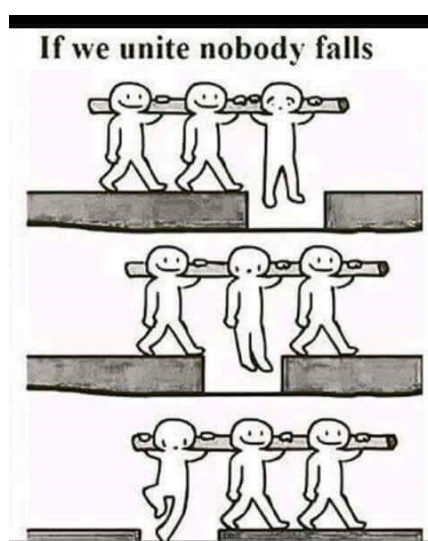
no amount of clean time as insurance against tomorrow. Members share about the gift of recovery, that we are miracles, but the disease of addiction tells me otherwise. It seems natural to want to take some credit for my recovery as I accumulate both experiences and opinions about what works. This has been a breeding ground for my contempt. I repeat these ideas to others and surround myself with like-minded people that can sometimes reinforce my dangerous concepts about recovery. The line between experience and opinion blurs with each passing day. I'm never free from the disease and I find self-obsession can return with a vengeance. I start to justify and rationalize facts and here lies a very real danger in recovery.

(Continued on page Five)

(Continued from page Two) Sponsorship

of those deep, dark secrets, he looked at me, smiled warmly, and said, “that’s all I have to give you, man. That’s as far as I’ve gotten with the steps.” I was so grateful that he’d given me all that he had – but I was an addict, and I needed more! I needed to keep that fire inside burning. His sponsor was also a therapist, and he was in therapy with him. He didn’t suggest this, but I figured, if it worked for him, maybe it will work for me. I booked a couple therapy sessions.

Those two sessions sent me screaming into the night, trying to figure out where the hell that fire went, and why I was thinking that a bullet to the brain might be nice? My best friend in recovery suggested more service work, so I dove in, headfirst. That got the fire going again, and as it turned out, there were myriad service opportunities to get involved in. There was a book being written – I could type. There was a need for a newsletter for the area – I had editing skills. There was a vacancy for the area public information chair – I had a desire to make sure the next addict with an honest desire wouldn’t have to spend 2 ½ years looking for this program when it was right in their own back yard, like I had.



I helped start meetings, then got to be part of forming a new area. I got involved at the area, region, and then world levels over the next few years, with a fire that soon raged out of control.

That became a problem. I now had service-based recovery, and it worked until it didn’t. I had a moment on a train somewhere in the swamps of the New Jersey Barons that felt devastating at the time, but I would later learn was a deeper surrender. Shortly thereafter, I ran into a guy I had sponsored, who took me to the meeting where I met my next sponsor – the one who would take me through all 12 steps.

He said, the first time we talked, “They’re a package deal – there’s 12 of them. We do all 12.” He walked me through them all, sharing his experience strength and hope, and some really great, timely comments. At the third step he

(Continued on page Four)

(Continued from page Three) Sponsorship

warned me, “Now, be careful here, because once you do this, with all the sincerity you can muster, there is no turning back. Once you give yourself completely to this simple program, even you won’t be able to screw it up.” I believed him when he said such things, because he said them with such humble authority. I still believe them to this day, because every word he said in his role as sponsor to me, proved to be true.

For a real long time, I didn’t feel like I was really equipped to be a good sponsor to others. I just didn’t feel very confident in that role. I could not speak with the same authority that Joe had. I didn’t have his humility. I was still a little too full of myself. I thought I really wanted to – but, I honestly think I was still too selfish to truly want to. I muddled through, but often felt like I might have been causing more harm than good, especially when a sponsee struggled. If they couldn’t get it, I was certain it was my fault.

Somewhere along the line, this changed. I can’t tell you when or how it changed, but I remember that first sponsee where I just felt like I had the tools to show him how I recovered, and to trust that my higher power would give me what I needed to help introduce him to his higher power. I knew that that was what was going to keep him growing in recovery – not anything else I did or said. The whole deal was to help him find that relationship with a God that worked in his life. Period.

That happened, and his whole life turned around. I started working with a new sponsor who took me back through all 12 steps, all 12 traditions, using step study guides with both the Basic Text and the Grey Book – Back to the Basic and Back to the Grey Book. A funny thing began to happen, then. Sponsees started finding me. One of the first was a guy from the United Kingdom – and this was a month before the onset of the pandemic. I don’t even remember how he found me, but we began working virtually before the rest of the NA universe went virtual. Before I knew it, I had five sponsees from the UK, and five from all over the states. Before Covid, I wouldn’t have had the time for all these sponsees, but I began working from home, saving 3-4 hours of daily commuting time, and that found time got put to good use working with others.

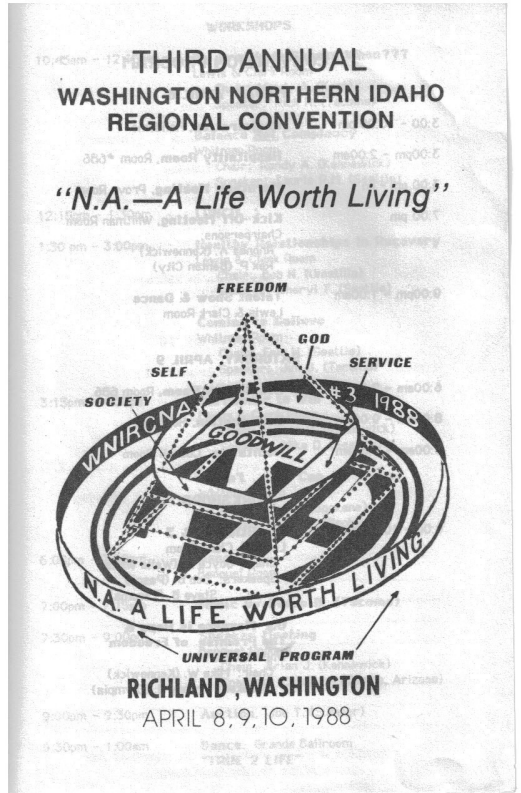
Now I’m actively sponsoring 17 addicts from 6 different countries and 8 different states in the U.S. I’ve never felt more alive, nor had a time that was more fulfilling. The fire

(Continued on page Five)

(Continued from page Four) Sponsorship

inside burns brighter than ever before, but no longer out of control like when I had service-based recovery. It's more like a steady burn, with frequent moments of such deep warmth and gratitude like I've never known before in my life.

It's true what they say – it really does keep getting better. We keep coming back until this thing begins to work in our lives, and then we keep coming back so we can give it away. It doesn't get any better than this – until it does! So, keep coming back. It works.



(Continued from page Two) Contempt

Many ideas are expressed at meetings and often it is a mix of experience, opinion, and facts. “Do the steps or die” is repeated at meetings and contains both elements of experience and opinion, but not much fact. I hear phrases like, “My sponsor does the steps from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous”, “The treatment center I attended took us through the steps”, “My spiritual guide has a process he takes people through”, “I need people to call me on my bullshit.” Each phrase uttered causes opinions to boil up inside of me. My experiences continue to shape my perception but so does opinion. My opinions may be based entirely in fantasy but they hold as much power as experience. Two people can share the same experience and take away unique opinions. I constantly remind myself to take personal responsibility for my recovery and leave other people to find their own recovery. I try to embrace unity while maintaining my own recovery. I have found myself holding on to something for years, unwilling to let go. I can even shape my experiences based on the opinions of others so I have to be careful who I surround myself with. The road to maintaining my recovery has become steeper as the years go by.

Today my struggle continues to be using but has shifted to control and being a part of. It has become increasingly difficult to ignore the facts. I'm no longer surprised by low attendance at business meetings or a lack of support for service structures where I live. There was a time when I would have sold everything to be a part of. We hear at every meeting about how we “meet regularly to help each other”, but the reality is that many of us meet regularly to help ourselves. Using can often continue into recovery. I was guilty of this. I remember driving to visit people, attending a meeting, joining service efforts out of loneliness. I was trying to form relationships because I was so lonely for the company of other ad-

(Continued on page Six)

dicts. A using addict attracts other addicts who are using. I have tried to form relationships for over a decade in recovery. Seeking out unhealthy people became a natural progression in the disease. I had the same behaviors before I found NA. I thought things had changed in recovery. Early in recovery my sponsor warned me that NA was not a social club, but I was unwilling to look at the behaviors. A fellowship emerged to support my recovery as soon as I accepted that I was powerless over the loneliness.

come from the experiences of others in the past so I forge ahead. I must go to meetings regularly and listen carefully. I find listening to newcomers is the most effective method of maintaining my recovery today, particularly when dealing with loneliness. Often, newcomers are the loneliest people at meetings because they have abandoned their old ways and means for a new way of life. Rather than use them for my own selfish needs, I learn from their shared experiences as they develop healthy relationships. Newcomers are often my greatest source of strength and direction.

My issues with using control continue as well. I believe manipulation is the progression in this aspect of my disease. Finding help is difficult for this as well. I am not sure if it is experience, opinion or fact but it seems to me, as a fellowship, we have become dependent on our relationship with the treatment industry. I can spend an entire meeting listening to members share about what they learned in group today, or how this treatment center is better than the last, or that this time in treatment will be different. Many Narcotics Anonymous meetings have become an extension of the local treatment center and bear no resemblances to the fellowship I love. Treatment centers, by design, focus on the individual and not the group. This is a direct conflict with Narcotics Anonymous Twelve Traditions where members meet regularly to help each other. The strength of our Fellowship is in our unity and my personal recovery depends upon the application of Tradition One through Twelve. Service bodies will put all their efforts into carrying the message to the treatment industry and our fellowship becomes exclusive rather than inclusive. Members will pass on their responsibilities to a service structure because that is what they learn in treatment. For every group of addicts that come together, there is a member willing to act upon their disease, using control to provide governance. Finding addicts who are willing to recognize and discard their opinions is difficult. I struggle with that as well. Today, I focus on my service efforts, and avoid the manipulation of others. I print and distribute meeting lists so that no addict, regardless of whether they are in treatment or not, can experience the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I act autonomously while remaining accountable to a home group. Honest and open discussions promote unity and growth for the member and the group.