

Dear Fellow Member,

We invite you to read and evaluate this, the second part of what we have endeavored to assemble as the basic text of Narcotics Anonymous. These are the Personal Stories of Recovery that have been submitted to the W.S.C. - Literature Subcommittee.

A World Literature Conference was held in Ivyland, PA on the weekend of January 15th through 17th to finish compiling these stories. We have 50 stories that we feel represent a good cross-section of the recovering addict. We regret the fact that we could not include all the stories that we received. Some of them required editing and rewriting which we were not at the liberty of doing, since these are personal stories. In cases such as these, the author was contacted by phone and asked to make the necessary changes. Most of these were technical changes, such as not mentioning brand names of drugs. Other stories lack sufficient details related to recovery. Since this is a program of recovery, and the book we're writing a basic text for recovery, these stories were omitted, as well.

As a committee we did not feel that we should be the ones to decide how many of these stories, or which ones, should be included in the Book. So we submit to you all of the approved stories that we now have. Once again, it's on you! Tell us what to do. Should we print 10, 20, 30 or all 50 of the stories? Which ones should we print? Please indicate your answer to these questions on the included form and return it to us as soon as possible.

There is one more section of the Book that still needs to be compiled, and we need your help with this, also. This section is to be the History of N.A. At this time we have a sketchy history, taken from the Gray Book Review Form. This version of the history of our Fellowship began with the first meeting in 1953 and went all the way up to February of 1981, but we found many gaps and omissions in it that need to be filled in. For instance, the first time that any state outside of California was mentioned was in the year of 1977. Our own experience tells us that N.A. has indeed been in existence in other parts of the country, and the world, before 1977. What we are looking for is any significant events which took place within the Fellowship, between

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THE TWELVE STEPS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of those steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

ALIEN

From a very early age I had intense feelings and beliefs that I WAS DIFFERENT! While other girls my age were trying on Mom's clothes and playing with Barbie Dolls, I was playing football with the guys, smoking pot, and pondering the mysteries of the universe.

I started using somewhere close to the age of 12. My parents were concerned about the drug problem in our neighborhood, so I was enrolled in a semi-private school in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. All this did was introduce me to a more sophisticated drug usage. There are many users in my life that I have no memory of, and some I wish I could forget. Sometimes, periods have come back to me in my recovery, but many have not. I have been a skeptic from a very early age. I questioned everything. Everything BUT using. I used to completely block out any feelings and perceptions that I had towards life. I never was very fond of living, although I wanted to be, and this became evident as the years rolled past and my self-destructive behavior magnified itself.

At one time in my life, I decided that sports was the avenue of personal freedom and acceptance that I desired. And so the addict within me attacked the sports world with vigor and determination. I also felt that if I could succeed at something, and be the best at it, I would surely get somebody's attention. I succeeded in societies eyes and in my parents eyes. I made the papers, was on the All-State team twice, an All-American nomination, team captain, ... I had plaques, trophies, and titles. Regardless of my success in sports, I was feeling empty and the success didn't really matter to me. In fact, it turned out to be more of a hassle than it was worth. I was beginning to hear an endless monologue of, "You have so much potential, why are you messing up your life?" Regardless of the intense physical training I put myself through, I simply could never stop using. In fact, I thought that using drugs enhanced my ability in sports and they also became a reward to myself after a hard workout. I did not attend my senior year in high school. Most of my friends had either quit, been kicked out, or already graduated.

Being born and raised in the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale area, at age 15 I had had enough of geographical stability. My heartbeat was travel, and I diligently pursued this road. I spent one winter in a tent in the High Sierras of California. It was at this time that I was introduced to the drug of all drugs, peyote. The next few years were spent in a desperate attempt to match that particular experience. Still, the main question I addressed to myself was: who I am and where in this universe do I fit? I alienated myself from my family. I did not think that I belonged with them any more than I belonged in this "screwed up society." My main outlet was writing and I retreated farther and farther into the world of isolation.

I did, through the years, try and make things work for myself. I became a Christian, was Baptized, chanted to Khrisha, became a Christian again, stared at Maharishi Yogi, went to Bible College, got kicked out, went back, and got kicked out again. I went to school for training as an Emergency Medical Technician, started nursing school and still felt unfulfilled and like this world just was not doing its job to fulfill my every need. I still never felt like I fit into the plan of the

universe, and my disease of addiction progressed. Thinking back, I think it was why I used as well as how much I used that gave me problems.

I went from California to Florida to get clean, and when that didn't work, I went to North Carolina, and then to Connecticut and on and on. When I became uncomfortable somewhere, I moved elsewhere. The same went for my employment situation. When I didn't like my job, or I was getting close to being caught at ripping an establishment off, I would simply get another job. Geography was not adequate armor to fight the war that was taking place in my mind, body, and spirit. I spent a summer on the Amazon of Brasil. That did not cure my addiction. Even in the Andes of Peru my addiction progressed. I learned that Customs Officials loved to see Bibles in your luggage, and they also loved to hear that your item of business in a particular country was Church and Missionary affiliated.

A few months before I found the Program I was working in retail and found a wonderful supplier for my habit, my manager. Now all I had to do was to make it work. In fact, all of a sudden, working was not all that bad. I began to work 14 hour days. It was my perpetual and ultimate connection, and life became more blurry every day. I found myself doing things with myself for drugs that for years I had never rationalized. But I did anything I had to do to stay high. Using became so much of my routine that, at one point, it was accepted behavior to cut lines of Cocaine on the Restaurant table. I became oblivious to the fact that what I was doing was illegal. I never could figure out why it seemed like people were always staring at me! I remember thinking, "God grant me the power to change the people, places, and things that do not agree with my way of thinking." I could never figure out why this world would not devote itself to making me happy.

Today I realize this is insane thinking, and insane thinking helped qualify me for the Program of Narcotics Anonymous. Insane thinking is one of the obvious characteristics of the disease I suffer from: that of drug addiction. I had an "ideal" of the world as I thought it should be. I often visualized myself as existing on a moon-beam in a utopian state of eternity. I have always been a baby in an adult body. I want what I want when I want it.

Finally, in Atlanta, Georgia, I found a Program of Narcotics Anonymous. Psychiatry was not helpful. Prescribed medication did nothing but make me want more. When I was doing amphetamines, the Doctor would put me on tranquilizers to calm me down, and when I was doing downs, I was put on antidepressant to "help stabilize my mood swings and depression." At one point, I remember being told "Just face it, you will never be able to live without being on some kind of medication."

Depression eventually became my normal state of mind, and spirit. Suicide remained my dominating thought. My favorite pastimes were hanging over an interstate overpass, or seeing how close I could get to moving trains. My social life was non-existent, and my zest for life was so low I even lost the energy it took to get more drugs. My bottom had arrived and somehow I was still alive. My therapist at this point was a lady who understood the disease of addiction. She refused to continue seeing me if I would not attend a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. I went to a few meetings and told her that there was no way the Program could work for me. When she wouldn't buy that excuse, I told her I thought the people were using

because there was no way in my mind that people could look and sound so happy, and have so much freedom, without being loaded. I remember sitting in a survivors meeting one night and asking the guy next to me, "Are these people for real or are they all loaded?" He looked at me rather emphatically, and replied, "They are for real."

Then there was the Higher Power concept. For me, having had two years of Bible College and a lot of therapy in my head, I confused Spirituality with Religion. This was one of my biggest obstacles in developing conscious contact with a Power greater than myself. Again, my struggle became evident when finally at a meeting where a Higher Power was the topic, I told them, "I don't believe in a Power greater than myself, and I am sick of hearing this topic discussed." After about two minutes of silence a guy across the room stood up, walked over to me, and whispered in my ear, "I know where you're coming from, and I want to tell you that this group of people is a Power greater than you." So, that was the foundation of my Higher Power concept. Today I choose to call my Higher Power God, yet there are many times today when the group is used. God, as I understand him today is a gentle, loving, and understanding Spirit. I believe today that my Higher Power kept me alive long enough to find the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. I am grateful to be alive. The day I surrendered to the fact that I was powerless over my addiction, enormous weight was removed from me. The weight of addiction said, "You can handle it" but I know I couldn't.

One of the hardest things I have encountered is change. I have had to change my playgrounds and my playmates. For me, that was one of the easier areas of change. It was at day one, and remains so today, essential for on-going recovery. What has been hardest is changing attitudes, ideas, patterns, and reactions. When I encounter people today who do not agree with me, I need to try and respond to them in a spirit of love. This is quite a change from ignoring them as I did in the past.

As a result of working my Program, going to meetings, changing my attitudes, and relying on my Higher Power instead of people, even my face is changing. When I first came into the Program, one of my fellow addicts nicknamed me "ROCKY", due to my stern facial expression. I showed no emotion, would not smile, (even if I was laughing on the inside) and refused to talk. There were also many times when I simply could not talk, and do nothing but make a meeting and listen. Many times I would shuffle into a meeting, sit in my corner, and hope no one would see me. I sometimes held on to the fantasy that I was a type of Casper the Ghost. The reality was that people really did see me. They tried to talk to me, and they tried to hug me, regardless of my stone face expression. Eventually, love broke through and I began to respond to the people that God was using as instruments of His love, and grace. I went through my share of pain and there are many times today when I still do. What matters is that the Program I have found gives me the tools to live clean, regardless of pain, whether it be emotional, spiritual, or physical. It is OK to hurt and feel pain today. It is not OK to use. In fact, it is growth to feel anything at all. Apathy was my middle name for years. It feels wonderful to care. It is recovery for me to be able to laugh, cry, or simply share some word of encouragement. It wasn't till a year ago that the death of a friend would have brought a tear. Today I can cry over a man disabled in a wheelchair.

I have had to face a bizarre situation or two in recovery. I am learning that there is no problem too small to bring me to a meeting. One night I brought the problem of eating a chocolate éclair to a meeting because I was afraid of using over it and I noticed my thinking changing. The outcome was that in the future I would make sure my favorite bakeries do not saturate their éclairs with alcohol. I do not have to use no matter what.

Sometimes I find that when things start going good, I deliberately try to destroy it. My absolute limit for any relationship used to be 5 months. It became habitual to dump someone before they dumped me! Sometimes I find old thought patterns creeping up, and I find myself being obnoxious and trying to get people mad at me. It sometimes shatters my ego when someone catches my tricks and tells me they won't work. Today I can look in the mirror and laugh at myself, I won't say that I have a good self image today, but it's better than it used to be. When I was using I mastered the art of fight or flee. I would either run from a situation or fight it out, but never face it. Most of the time, it was me I was running from. The words serenity and surrender were foreign to my vocabulary. I am learning that I usually have as much serenity as I have surrendered.

For half of my life I had been careening wildly through the sea of chaos and destruction. The Program of Narcotics Anonymous has shown me serenity and direction. I am growing to realize my experience can benefit those who still suffer. The freedom I have always sought after, I have found in the STEPS of the Program. The loneliness that has been with me for years is alleviated by other recovering addicts in the Fellowship. Today I am not responsible for having a disease, but I am responsible for my own recovery. Today, I can study, keep an apartment, and I can even emotionally commit myself to another human being. Many people are in my life today. When I found the program I was alone. My purpose for being on this planet has been resolved in my mind and spirit. Today I know I must carry the message of recovery. Today I am grateful. I belong in the universe.

ANONYMOUS ADDICT

I am an addict. I am a member of Narcotics Anonymous. I have not had any drugs or mind altering chemicals for over 20 months now; which may not seem like any kind of accomplishment to anyone else, but to me it is a miracle.

For ten years of my life I used drugs on a daily basis in order to survive, for it was the only way I knew how. I sought freedom in the use of chemicals. Freedom from fears, anger, loneliness, rejection, and freedom from self. A way to escape from me. I sought the love, joy, and happiness that I did not feel existed in reality for me. I sought acceptance of self.

For all that I was looking for in the use of drugs, I found nothing. Instead of finding freedom, I became enslaved. I could not escape from self. No matter how hard I tried or how much drugs I took, it became impossible to quiet the turmoil of self within. The pain increased. Instead of finding happiness and love, I found much sadness and hate. I lived in a fantasy world and fantasies exist only for those that are having them. Instead of finding acceptance of self. I found self-hatred, lack of self-respect, and lack of self-worth. Drugs controlled my life and I hated myself

for the things I did and the people I hurt. Yet, I had no control of myself. I could not stop. For years I tried self-will and it didn't work. I had lost all hope. I could not change for I had tried many times and many ways. Nothing worked and I had fully accepted the fact that I would continue using drugs for the rest of my life. That I would continue to go to jails, mental wards, and detoxification centers and that eventually I would die. At that point in my life, death seemed to be the only way out. I had completely given up.

Then I was introduced to the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I saw other people just like myself living good, happy, clean lives. At first, it was hard to believe because these people looked so healthy. They didn't look like addicts, they didn't act like addicts. They had families and homes and friends and jobs and cars. They had a sparkle in their eyes and laughter in their voices. It was hard to believe they had ever been as hopeless as me. But I listened to their stories and they were of a life that only an addict can know. They gave me hope of a better way of life. They told me that will power would never work for me. That I had to depend on a power greater than myself. To me, that was such a relief for I knew I could not stop of my own power, but I had never thought of a power greater than myself. Because of their great belief, I believed.

Today, I have that sparkle in my eyes and laughter in my voice. Sometimes it feels good just to be alive. I have been given the gift of Recovery. I am becoming a productive member of society. Today, I have my own apartment and car. I work and pay bills. I have friends and I have feelings. I am slowly overcoming my fears. They don't cripple me any more. I like myself today and the things I am doing in my life. I have the will to live. I have hope.

Thanks to God and the Program of Narcotics Anonymous, today I have a chance, today I have a way to go and I don't have to do it all alone any more or die trying. I don't have any magic answers or golden keys, there aren't any. I would just like to share with other addicts that the Program of Narcotics Anonymous is working in my life.

DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

I was the happy little housewife, living in a happy little house - sticking a needle in my arm.

I was 26 years old with two children and working on my second marriage with my knight in shining armor, when I started to use drugs as entertainment. After all, most people drank on weekends to have fun. Why not a little dope to liven things up a bit? My weekend using of heroin went on for a few years until, inevitably, heroin began using me. Soon it was all I wanted and it didn't matter what day of the week it was.

My "knight" began to feel our Camelot left something to be desired and started going to institutions and drug programs, although he wasn't having any success.

I started looking for some help, so I went to a 12 Step Program for the families of addicted people because it was obvious that he had a problem with drugs and alcohol. I was 5'-9" tall and weighed 114 pounds when I came to this Program and

thought I was "looking fine!" The miracle of this Program worked even in this Fellowship, because I had to get honest. They told me to "keep coming back" and I did again and again, until I finally went to my first N. A. meeting and knew I was home and safe at last! I was still saying things like, "I don't know what I'm doing here, it's my husband who has the problem, etc., etc.," Naturally, they understood, and again I got the "keep coming back," and I did.

I got some phone numbers, a meeting directory and was doing fine as long as I wasn't home. I stayed in my car and prayed to avoid my knight-turned-drug-addict.

One night, after a meeting, he was waiting for my arrival at home with some dope, saying there was still some left. At that moment, the "left-overs" sounded good and I used. The minute the chemical was in my arm, I went insane. It was cocaine and I never did like coke, for there was never enough. I threw some money at him and demanded he score some more. The next thing I knew we were fighting over the cotton shot. I knew there was nothing in the cotton and so did he, but we fought over it viciously as if our lives depended upon it.

That night in 1975 was the last time I used drugs, even though there were many nights when my husband bought dope and offered it to me. He continued to slip on and off this Program, but I stayed clean. I had to leave my house, my car--all my material possessions. I had to go through a divorce, get a sponsor, go to women's stag meetings, share an inventory, and do many things I really didn't want to do, or that didn't make any sense to me. But I did them all - and I didn't use.

I'm still 5'-9" tall, although I now weigh 160 pounds and other people tell me I'm looking fine. Through the N. A. Program I have acquired a faith that if I stay clean, it may get better. I know if I use, it can ONLY get worse.

EARLY SERVICES

I started using and drinking when I was about ten years old. My stepfather and I would go down to his boat and drink beer and smoke pot. Then, he would force me to engage in homosexual acts with him. I was always very scared that he would beat me up. By age eleven, my drinking had gotten worse and he did start beating me. I finally went to my mother. She told me that we needed him to support us, for me to just do whatever he said, and don't make waves.

By age twelve, I couldn't take it at home any more. I stole \$100.00 from my mom and left home. After being gone for three nights, a man came up to me and asked if I wanted to earn some money. I agreed because I was almost broke by this time. I went to his house to take a shower. After I got dressed and came out, he asked if I took drugs. I said, "I like everything." We snorted some cocaine and he started taking off my pants. The next day, he took me to his friend's house. On the way there he said, "you are going to get good money and all the drugs you want."

When we arrived, movie cameras were set up and I began my career in "porno"films.

There were also two men in the bathroom fixing heroin, and this was my first experience with heroin. By this time, I had no feelings of self-worth and I did not care whom I hurt or what I did to hurt anyone else.

By the time I was 14-1/2, I had my first overdose of heroin. When I got out of intensive care, it was hard for my "sugar daddy" to find me a recovery house. He finally got me into an adult program because he knew some people. At this program, I went to my first N. A. meeting. I was scared, lonely and didn't want anything to do with anyone. At my second meeting, I threw a chair at the leader. I kept coming back for 90 days, and I had to celebrate. I went out and got a fix. I thought it would be easy to get 90 days again. But after I went back out, I couldn't even get one day.

I decided that I couldn't clean up where I was, so I relocated 3,000 miles away. Things got worse. I had to turn tricks to support my habit. One night, I blacked out in a club, got violent and was taken to a mental hospital. The doctors kept me so severely sedated that I wandered around in a shuffle. Because I was only 15, the doctors called my father whom I hadn't seen for two years. He came and got me. When we got into town, he dropped me off and said, "Call me sometime." At that point, I thought I might want to stop using. For the first time since I remember, I cried. I just sat at the airport and cried. I got right back into tricking and using, but I was so tired of lying, hustling, stealing and using that I went to a meeting.

I had just fixed before the meeting, but because I wanted to be accepted, I got up and said that I had six months clean. Then I went outside because I knew I was dying and I didn't know how to scream for help. My stepfather was at the meeting and I didn't even remember what he looked like. He followed me outside and said, "We have to get you in a recovery house." Then he looked me straight in the eye and said, "I love you." For the first time in my life I knew he cared. He then found a recovery house that would accept me.

Before I got to the recovery house, however, I overdosed on barbiturates in a telephone booth while telling someone how to get where I was so they could take me to the house. I stayed in the recovery house for 30 days.

I go to a meeting every day now, and usually make eight or ten a week. Every morning when I get up, I look at myself in the mirror and say, "I'm O.K. for today, God, just for today, keep me clean."

I'm almost four months clean, and I hurt most of the time. But today, I will die. At this point in my recovery, I am actively involved in N. A. service. It keeps me busy and shows me a spiritual part of the program I never knew was there. I am slowly learning to trust my fellow members and know that I never have to be alone again. Today, I know there is hope.

A GIFT CALLED LIFE

I had always said I would never use drugs. Looking back, everything I said I wouldn't do, I ended up doing. The first time I used drugs, I started with pot. I

didn't like it, but I got used to it. If I didn't use it, I wouldn't have felt "cool".

I had a good job at the time; it was "the place" to work when you left high school. I was expelled from school in the tenth grade for starting a riot. For me, just landing that job was fortunate. I was hanging out at the pool hall before work. Around 3 or 4 o'clock, I started to feel tired and someone said, "Try some of this. It will help you stay awake at work tonight." I didn't even ask what it was; I just opened my mouth. Within twenty minutes I felt like a new person, I could talk to people I was normally afraid of; I felt better than them. I started to take about ten diet pills a day. My logic was, "If just two made me feel so good, why not try ten!" It worked! But after six months, I started to miss work. I lost fifty pounds, my hair started to fall out, and my teeth started to hurt.

One day at the pool hall, a close friend said, "Hey, try some of this, you shoot it in your arm." Once again I said, "I'll never do that," but about one hour later, I tried it. From that day on, I was in love with it. I never cheated on it. If it said jump, I would jump. I even quit my job because something like this was too good to miss. I always wanted to forget my problems and with heroin, I could. It always fixed me up. It cost a lot of money, so I did it only when I had the money.

When I started selling heroin, I got ripped off a few times. I can remember saying, "Boy, are those guys in bad shape when they rip off their friends." Well, six months later, I started ripping them off. I always wanted people to come to me for answers. I liked that power. So when I got my Income Tax return check, I bought some heroin, sold all of it, but saved one shot for me. It sold fast; I made a "quick buck" and got a "free high." I felt like a king and I had control. Everyone came to me for heroin because I dropped the price. When all the other people had shot their supply, that left me the only one holding. Then I raised the price, and started using more than I was selling. I didn't want to do that, but I had no choice. I didn't know that at the time, because, I thought I was handling it "OK". I lived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania at the time.

One day, the man I got my drugs from asked if I would be willing to take a chance and go to Puerto Rico with him to purchase some heroin. My answer was, "Sure, why not!" We could have gotten busted getting on the plane to come back home. I had brought some with me and wrapped it in foil. When we went through airline screening procedures, they didn't check me. I got away that time; I was lucky. We came back and my luck ran out. I got busted for a series of crimes consisting of 6 felonies.

This was my first time in jail, and I was afraid of all the things that I heard from the streets. A lot of it was true and some of it wasn't. That didn't make me any less afraid. I stayed for one week and was bailed out. Two months later, I got busted for possession of one ounce of heroin and went back to jail. Again, I stayed for one week and was bailed out. Only two weeks later, I got busted again for breaking into someone's house in broad daylight. I had started to rip off everyone in order to supply my habit, my family, my friends, and strangers. I knew I was going to jail this time, so I just gave up. My sentence was two separate terms, each 11-1/2 - 23 months in jail. I spent 13 months in jail and got out on early parole.

When I got out, I had made a promise to myself to limit my heroin use to the week-ends. I didn't know anything about addiction. Little did I know that it was the very first fix that started me. Everyone I knew either went to jail for 5-10 years, overdosed on drugs, or was an addict themselves. Consequently, I was led right back to the streets. In only 2 weeks, I was worse than I was before. Lenny, the only friend I had, and his sister gave me \$1,000.00 to pay off my parole officer in order to move to Florida. In my heart that's what I wanted to do, but my addiction was too great. I got the money and said to myself, "Buy some drugs, sell them, and have spending money when you get to Florida." I went to New York with the money, bought the heroin, but put it all in my arm. Now what was I going to tell them? The excuse-making and story-telling was over. I was addicted! I came back to Pennsylvania and for the first time in my addiction I felt guilt. Lenny came to see me and didn't want to hear anymore stories or excuses. He said, "You need help when you rip me off, your friend. You're in trouble." I knew he was right.

I accepted his invitation to stay with him and his wife until I got help. I felt like hell in my guts. I called my parole officer and told him I wanted to go away somewhere for help. He sent me to a treatment center in North Central Pennsylvania. I had heard a lot of bad things about this place but I didn't care. My back was against the wall and I was tired of living the way I was living. Even though I didn't really want to stop using heroin, I went to the center. I stayed there for sixty days.

Looking back, this was the best thing that ever happened to me. Before I got there, I believed once an addict, always an addict. I'd never be able to stop. They showed me a new life, a way to cope with being an addict. I decided to move to the area. There were four N. A. (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings each week and I went to all of them. I also got a sponsor and went to a lot of discussion meetings. It helped me to a degree, but the only time I felt strong was at a meeting or after one. Before the meetings, I was always thinking about getting high. This feeling lasted for about six months. Then some good things started to happen to me. They asked me to speak at a meeting. I felt part of the meeting that night. It made me feel good about what I was doing. I started to go to prison N. A. meetings and helped start new N. A. meetings.

Then I fell in love; looking back, I was in heat. This new life and everything in it was a new ball game. Now I not only had to deal with me, but with someone else, too. I was clean for one year and still was not ready for all of these new things that were expected of me. I tried as hard as I could, and so did she. We moved to Western Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, there was no N. A. within 300 miles. So I went to the other 12 Step Programs for that year. They were all older than I, not that that should matter, but I felt alone. Well, I came home from work one day and my wife said, "Get out! I don't love you anymore!" I felt like someone had put a knife into my heart and turned it around a few times. With no possible reconciliation in sight, I leaned on a few people to get me through this adjustment. My sponsor suggested working the 12 Steps, and when your knees knock, kneel. Needless to say, I spent a lot of time on my knees. I also relied on N. A. literature because there were no N. A. meetings around. I asked God to come into my life and take some of the pain. He did. My life became a lot better and easier to bear after that.

Then God used me with the aid of other people in starting our first N. A. meeting in our area. At that time in our tri-state area, there was not one N. A. meeting in West Virginia, Ohio, or Western Pennsylvania. I did the best I could, as we all did. We now have approximately seventy-five meetings in a one-hundred mile radius. We have a hot line, an Area Service Committee, and a Regional Service Committee. I attended the World Service Conference two years ago. When I came back from there, I did some public information in radio, television, and newspaper.

A while later, I started to date the disc jockey from the radio station we broadcasted from. We had a lot of fun together. We went to the first East Coast Convention, where she was the disc jockey. We started to make plans for our marriage. As most normal relationships go, we had a fight on the phone one night. But a real shock came the next day when her mother called to tell me she had been killed in a car accident last night. I felt like killing myself, I knew there was pain coming, pain I didn't want to feel. I didn't want to turn to drugs, either, because I knew that was not the answer. I called my friend and just started crying. He came over to my house and gave me a big hug and said, "Just tell me you didn't get high." Somehow I knew everything would be alright and I guess out of relief I started to laugh. I continued to rely on N. A. even more. I went to more meetings, talked about it and before I knew it the pain was easing and I was handling it without using drugs. I asked God to come into my heart and I thanked Him for putting her briefly into my life. Now I know that everything I have is only borrowed from God.

I met someone very special after that and got married. She is also in N. A. I am working on my seventh clean year. My life is a lot better today than it has ever been. I am happy and I feel good about myself. I still go to five meetings a week. It helps to be in contact with people who have the same problem as I have, addiction. All of my friends are through N. A. N. A. saved my life! N. A. is my life!

HELL-N-BACK

I believe in addictive personalities. I am convinced that in 1944, in a small New England town, I was born, possessing such.

From my earliest childhood memories I was not comfortable with life. Self-conscious with people and feeling inferior, I was forced to form various patterns of behavior to compensate (none of which were, in the least admirable). I have, today, come to know these as "character defects."

At the age of 13, I had an appendectomy and was given pre-op medication. (I am now aware that a potent, synthetic narcotic was the primary ingredient). I so well remember that spontaneous feeling of well-being it produced. Though I did not continue with its use, at that time I liked it and remember the effects in detail. My first encounter with escape through drugs.

I continued through rather uneventful school years, living with two younger brothers, a wonderful mother, and a father, whom I now believe was an alcoholic. Prior to his death in 1970, he was never aware of the possibility of his having this disease. I was unhappy and afraid at home, so I spent much time with my grandparents. I loved them dearly and they fulfilled a very great need in my life. Just prior to my

senior year of high school, I made a decision to enter the convent. I planned to become a nursing nun, thus I joined the convent. Following one year there, I realized the insanity of my thinking. I graduated in 1962 with a high school diploma, and a great deal of guilt.

My father was transferred to Florida this same year, and I moved with them, enrolling at the School of Nursing in Florida. I graduated from there in 1965. Just before graduation, I was the victim of a vicious attack. Hospitalization and emergency abdominal surgery ensued. I was again given Demerol for relief of post-op pain. This time, every four hours for 16 days, long after any real physical pain existed. I found it provided great relief from emotional pain and trauma. I continued its use, progressively, over the next 11 years.

I married in 1965, and we returned to New England. We were blessed with a beautiful little boy in 1966, premature, weighing 2 pounds and 3 ounces. I feel sure this premature delivery was due to my drug addiction. I became pregnant 5 times in the next 3 years, all resulting in early miscarriage. In 1969, I gave birth to a tiny little girl, again premature; she lived only a few hours. Following this delivery, it was discovered that I had a large uterine malignancy. Doctors proceeded with a hysterectomy. I never allowed myself to grieve over any of this. My drugs severed any and all emotional feeling. I functioned as a cold and empty shell.

In 1970 I admitted that narcotics, or other drug of substitution, had control over me. I no longer had a choice whether to use. I had to use to live. I sought psychiatric therapy to no avail. Moving to Georgia in 1974, I called a hospital begging for advice. They suggested a methadone clinic. I remained on a daily dose of methadone for the next 9 months, simply creating a new addiction and never really getting off drugs. I discovered, at this time, that the addiction of alcohol to my daily dose of methadone produced a rather comfortable "high". After 9 months of this, I was terribly frightened and sought to withdraw from methadone. I was hospitalized, and "detoxed" by a physician who, by the Grace of God, was also a member of another 12-step fellowship. He struggled with me through 3 months of alcohol substitution. I would consume over a quart a day, and though this was not my drug of choice, I was physically, if not psychologically, addicted in this very short period of time. This proved to me, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that addiction is addiction. But I was not yet approaching my "bottom". After violent seizures, hospital commitment (no longer voluntary), addiction clinics that failed, suicides that failed, my husband and son turned away. I was forced into total defeat and complete surrender. Finally, that wonderful physician was able to convince me that the only hope lay within the realms of the 12 steps.

I came into this miraculous and divinely inspired Program on the sixth of July 1976, and through the Grace of God, and the honest attempt to actually live the 12 steps one day at a time, I have not found it necessary to take any mood-changing drug, in any form, I am being taught to live a brand new life, a life with spiritual comfort and joy, peace and serenity, and maybe even a wee bit of sanity. I can feel again, I can love, I can laugh, and I can cry, emotions I was unable to portray for many years. I am so truly blessed, for today I have my son and my husband back. (He, too is in this Program now.) I am once again, back in the nursing profession, and with a zeal I never felt before. I am learning to place in the past some of the guilt I was

engulfed with, the harm I brought to many lives during the practice of my addiction. I can try to live today to the best of my ability. All the direct results of working the principles of this Program.

I love N. A.. I know my life depends on it. I have heard quoted, "N. A. may not open the Gates of Heaven and let you in, but it can open the Gates of Hell and let you out." I am so very, very, grateful. There is HOPE, perhaps the only hope, right here in this wonderful Fellowship.

THE GIFT OF A LIFETIME

My father warned me, the day I was caught taking "over the counter" ups, when I was 14, "this is the way it starts," he said. "First these, and someday you'll end on heroin!" I laughed at him.

I was an addict from the day I used my first mind changing chemical, beginning innocently enough, with that handful of "over the counter" ups. This launched me on into a career of addiction spanning every drug I could find, a downhill road taking me through institutions, jail, attempted suicide and insanity. I did not know there was a way to live without drugs until I found the Program at age 25.

In my early recovery I went to meetings and started praying constantly. "Even if I end up in the nuthouse, God," I'd pray, "just let me go cold stone straight." I met some other people who had been strung out and we decided to start an N. A. meeting. We talked to people from other cities who were in the Program and finally started a little group. It was for our benefit more than anyone else's. We had very few members in the beginning, but it didn't matter. We learned how to open up, share, and love each other. It was the first meeting I was ever able to talk in. I felt accepted and understood there. I learned the value of service, too. Since there were so few of us then, we all had to pitch in and help, and that's when I got my first feeling of self-worth. I felt at last that I might have something to contribute after all.

That was six years ago. Since then, the group has grown to six groups in the city. Most of the original members are still clean. Through the grace of my Higher Power and the help of this Program, I have stayed clean also. My life which was once so dark is filled with light and beauty today. The miracle was gradual but complete. Once I got involved with the Program, going to meetings, sharing with others and working the Steps, my life cleared up. I am happier today than I ever dreamed of being. More than that, I belong and my life is of value. I want to live today. I, who was so afraid of closeness, now have a wonderful (clean) husband with whom to share my life. I can face things I once ran from and am slowly conquering the fear that controlled me. I have more peace, self-acceptance and sanity than I ever had.

And most important, I have a Higher Power who loves me and from whom all these gifts come. Without that, I am nothing. But with God and the Program, my life has purpose, direction, beauty and meaning at last. If I continue to give freely of the blessings I have received, they can only multiply and grow stronger.

The Program is more than a way to stay clean, it is a transformation, like that of a caterpillar unfolding into a butterfly. It is a way to become what you would like to be. It is an awakening to the realization of a tremendous Power within you that can overcome anything in your life. You will not necessarily be free from problems, but you will be able to handle them. We, who have survived, have that rarest of chances, a new life to live and freedom in choosing how to live it. What greater gift is there?

I FELT HOPELESS

No one in my family ever used drugs, except as prescribed by a doctor. In fact, no one in my family even drank, and I was taught that drunks and addicts could not solve their own personal and emotional problems and were moral degenerates. That's what I thought.

In high school, I started to use drugs, because they helped me feel good about myself. I was so self conscious and embarrassed about my looks that sometimes I just felt sub-human. I started to get high and became an overachiever to compensate for these feelings.

College was a bore, until I discovered pot. I became a "hippie", and met a girl who liked to party and we were married. After school, I started using speed while traveling in my work. Soon, the constant traveling and using caused my first wife to divorce me. This gave me a good excuse to go wild. I wanted to try every drug I could. A combination of narcotics, stimulants, and hallucinogens became my favorite.

I started to lose the small business I had built up and felt guilty about what I had become--a business and social failure. I had to use something every day to obliterate my feelings of self-hatred, shame and guilt. I decided to get rich and go "big time" dealing between Chicago and New York.

In order to finance the trip East, I set up my fifteen year-old lover selling acid to her schoolmates. I began buying wholesale in the midwest and re-selling to students at a major eastern university. Dealing drugs while traveling for business gave meaning to the words "fear" and "paranoia".

I fell in love with a woman and thought I could change for her. I thought everything would be OK. She helped me control my use and I set out to impress her. My business revived for a while, but then I began to use heavily again; things got worse. My second wife left me. My business failed.

I felt hopeless. I needed to use to feel OK. I tried to stay high and began drinking heavily and daily again. I just did not want to feel anything. I didn't like me. I just wanted to escape from myself. I overdosed on synthetic narcotics and woke up in the hospital. While still in the hospital, I began to feel better and publicly declared my intention to stop using. I was going to enter the mental outpatient clinic, solve all the problems that I thought caused me to use "hard drugs" and never have to use again. Of course, I continued to smoke pot and drink beer, after all, everyone I knew did.

My business gradually fell back together and I had money in my pocket again. That was my downfall--I could now afford that most glamorous, "non-addictive" substance--cocaine.

How wonderful was my new chemical lover. She made me feel so, so good, again and again. I began to lie, steal, and over-charge my clients to get the money for my new habit. I went to several doctors, feigning symptoms appropriate to get prescriptions for large quantities of sleeping pills and sedative hypnotics. I used some of the prescribed drugs, but mostly sold them to get coke. Often, I used too much coke, and was always in fear of a heart attack, but I could shoot some downs to knock me out. Eventually, I overdosed this way.

Again, I wound up in the hospital. Once again, I started to feel better after a few days clean in the hospital. I resolved to stop using again, and agreed to get help from a psychiatrist. I tried. I told him how bad I was, how I felt about myself, and sometimes how good I felt when clean. I stayed away from my old friends for a while. The psychiatrist seemed to want to help me. He suggested I take some mood-balancing pills, so I bought some and tried them.

The mood levelers didn't make me feel any better, so I traded them in for some cocaine. I felt better for a little while, but it soon got worse. I began to fantasize a lot about my suicide. Something inside wanted me to live, so I talked to my doctor and he put me in a mental hospital for evaluation. I was detoxed, sent to a rehab center and attended my first NA meeting. Now I knew there was a way to stop.

Recovery became a real possibility. It took nine months of regular attendance at meetings before I surrendered and came to believe that I, too, could recover. The problems that I felt had caused me to use began to melt away. The Fellowship and a newly discovered Higher Power have helped me to stay clean. My attitudes toward other people and my feelings about myself have begun to change. I understand today that I suffer from a disease, not a moral deficiency.

Honesty is beginning to chip away at my guilt. Slowly but surely all my old excuses are losing validity. My life before NA earned me a jail term that I never received. I qualified for extended psychiatric care. My physical survival baffled the hospital staff and my family doctor. I believe that I'm alive and free today so that I can help someone else like me find the amazing truth: Narcotics Anonymous works!

My recovery today is firmly based in the Twelve Steps and expressed through service. The Steps provide a spiritual resolution to all my problems. Active service work helps insure that there will always be a place for me to go when I need to share. When I am desperate and frightened, I need to share with other addicts who are seeking recovery.

It was suggested to me that I start a NA meeting in my area. I was frightened and didn't think I had enough clean time. My friends told me that I could be miserable as long as I wanted to be. With the help of God and other addicts, that meeting began and continues to thrive.

I want to keep what has been given to me, so I actively share through loving service

to NA wherever and however I am asked. The spirit of this Fellowship is in me today. I have come to know unconditional love.

I'D TRY ANYTHING ONCE

Hi, my name is Cindy and I am an addict. For almost eleven years I was hopelessly addicted to drugs. I felt I couldn't live with or without them. My whole existence during that time was centered around drugs, not realizing that I was actually committing slow, agonizing suicide. I was dying out there in the streets and I had lost all control of my own life. I have gone through hell to get where I am today, but I'm happily recovering and I am clean today. I tried it my way for so long, but it never worked for me. I am thankful to my Higher Power for letting this crazy junkie live long enough to find the N. A. Program and find a loving and understanding Fellowship of other recovering addicts.

I guess I was doomed to be hopelessly addicted way back in 1969, at the age of thirteen, when my family first moved to Atlanta. This is a town where you can find it all and do it all. I was a popular person during my teenage years. I had lots of different type and kinds of friends, but I always chose to go more toward the wild crowd. I loved thrills and excitement. I grew up with three brothers and a father who loved to race cars and build and ride motorcycles. To me, the name of the game was thrills, being daring, bold and trying the things that made me feel good. I'd try anything once and if it felt good I was hooked. I did it again and again, so it was with my drugs. I experimented with all kinds during high school. I learned which ones I liked the best and which ones just weren't for me. It was a lot of fun then, but the drugs really hadn't gotten out of control yet. I went through the turbulent seventies, the rebellions, the drug and hippie cults and for those who also went through those times back then, all that was new. It was alluring and exciting, and it was just plain cool to be doing all those things. It was a major part of our lives and a very major part of mine. I did drugs at school, at concerts, at home and every chance I could. My next big move in life was to marry a rock musician.

This was like seventh heaven to me. I was constantly exposed to drugs when we traveled on the road. We did drugs to stay up late at night. We partied and swapped drugs with other musicians, then we would do drugs to go to sleep. You name it, we did it just to survive in that type of life. After five years of marriage, my husband and I were living like strangers and we divorced. As the initial shock hit me, I became miserable and depressed. My marriage had failed, and I felt like a total failure. I wanted somebody; I needed somebody. Some type of secure relationship, love and companionship. I sought companionship and comfort with my drugs. I stayed in a zombie-like state for quite a while, drifting from sick relationship to sick relationship. This was also the point in my life where my "Lady Jane" symptoms started happening, the ability to attract perverts. I still continued to use heavily as a way to escape my problems, but way in the back of my mind, I knew the main reason for my problems was drugs. The drugs gave me a feeling of power and of being invincible. I developed lots of acquaintances through my jobs and social life; the next few years, we all had one thing in common--drugs.

I had several good jobs during this time, two with the government and one with an insurance company. It's amazing how white collar athletic executives don't look like

drug addicts, but I could sure pick them out of a crowd every time and I sought out their companionship and sickness. By this time, everyone around me could see that I was having some kind of problem, but I don't really think they put two and two together. I became a good liar and manipulator. I was one of the best con artists. I did seek some counseling and therapy at this time in my life, but I gave up after a while. Professionals had never been down the same road as me and none related to my particular problem. It wasn't just the drugs that were my problem; it was also my distorted personality, and all my ways of life that had developed over the years. I tried many times to stop using and associating with the same old crowd, but I was weak and I knew it would take a miracle to get me on the right track. Until that miracle came along, I continued to use hard and heavy. I had various live-in relationships with men and knew all the tricks of the trade. Their personalities were just as sick and warped as mine, but somehow we met each others needs, the getting and using of our drugs. I always picked the ones that I could manipulate easily to get what I wanted. My needs were going to be met, regardless of the price. I was using the needle pretty heavily at this time and it was obvious that my small salary could not support the tremendous habit that I had. I started associating with armed robbers and people with connections in organized crime. This is where the big money and the big dope was. I became paranoid because of the large amounts of illegal drugs I had and because of the large amounts of drugs I was using. Drugs seemed good to me at one time but they were getting way out of control. I stayed high twenty four hours a day. It's like the N.A. Program states, "we lived to use and used to live."

I was addicted, and I was anything but human. I've always been violent to some degree in my life, and during those years of heavy using, my violence raged out of control. I carried guns, knives and weapons, and I know that I would have killed anyone who tried to take my dope.

Whenever my big time associates were dry, there was no dope available for a while. I learned to take care of my habit the way a lot of girls learned, I sold my body. I learned quickly that you could make good money selling your body, but the money never lasted when it all had to go into your arms. I started staying out of work a lot by now; I was too loaded to make it in half of the time. When I did make it in, I had to take my little dope kit in with me, and I'd spend most of the day locked away in the bathroom getting high. Eventually, I lost my job.

Slowly but surely, I was dying and I was beginning to get a taste of what it was like to be sick and tired of being sick and tired. It was then that I decided to try and do something about my problem. I had legal problems out the ears, an uncontrollable addiction, a family that avoided me like the plague, and a lot of mixed and confused feelings. I had thought many times of giving up this way of life and trying to meet new people and maybe try to get myself into a drug program. My ideas were in the right direction, but I never followed through. I was seriously sorting my life out, or trying to at this time. When an old lover and using buddy popped up on my doorstep out of the clear blue, I knew right then where we were headed, and I had a feeling we weren't going to make it alive through this one, this time. He went after what we wanted, and soon the drugs were plentiful and we were back on that same twisted path to hell. Things got way out of hand, the dope started running low; this time I felt more desperate than I ever had before. This, my friends, is where

the party ended. We were arrested. The next few days in jail were living hell. I was sick and hurting, mentally and physically. I wanted to die. My family and attorney urged me to seek help with my problem before it was too late. What did they mean, "too late!" Hell, look at the mess my life was in. There was no hope for me now. I agreed half-heartedly to seek help at a drug clinic and seek drug therapy. What more did I have to lose! At first, I wasn't sincere about giving up drugs, or even putting any effort into the drug program. I didn't even know how to begin living without drugs. I knew I couldn't stop through my own power. It was while I was attending this drug therapy clinic that N. A. was mentioned to me quite often. I knew what the N. A. program was. I had heard about it and had gone to a few meetings, but I had never fully taken the time to understand the program. I thought it was a big joke. But I went to an N. A. meeting that night with some other people from my drug clinic and saw all kinds of people there with the same problem as me. They were drug addicts. I don't remember too much about the first meeting, my mind was still jumbled and the drugs were still not all out of my system. Certain things that were said at that meeting stuck with me and impressed me. There were people there with the same problems, or even worse than mine, yet they were clean. They had learned to live their lives without drugs. I saw then that there had to be hope for me. I couldn't love myself at that time, but oh, how everyone in the program loved me for what I was. I kept going to meetings and I started meeting lots of understanding wonderful people that I felt comfortable around, and I knew they could relate to my problems. I really had a willingness in my heart at this time to try and I wanted to do it for me instead of my family.

I have come a long way, and I've gone through hell to get here, but I know recovery is possible, and I have seen some good things happen to me since I've been in the N. A. Program. I've become a trusted servant of a local N. A. group, which I love. I'm getting in touch with my Higher Power, as I understand Him, and he is working miracles in my life today that I never thought would be possible. I am beginning to love myself, and I have finally found freedom from the bondage of drugs. I have found a new way of life, clean and free, one day at a time. I have stopped using and started to live. What a great feeling! The Narcotics Anonymous Program works, and I love you all.

HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF?

When I first entered the Program of Narcotics Anonymous, I was sixteen years old and full of reservations. After all, I was too young to quit using drugs forever. I thought there was still lots of fun to be had. The only reason I was there was because if I wasn't, I would have been put in prison for two years.

What I failed to remember was that there were no good times for quite a while. Sure, I had a few cheap thrills or maybe a nice rush, but it had been years since I had actually felt good inside. If I looked closely, I could see that I felt miserable. I entered the Program on my knees, so to speak; devoid of all human feelings. I was like the walking dead.

My addiction first started when I was around 11 or 12. I was just cutting school smoking pot or getting drunk. By the time I was 13 I was shooting heroin, living on skid row, 3,000 miles from home, with a man who didn't even speak the same

language as me. When I look back and see this, I can't help but be frightened of how quickly addiction can progress.

My addiction took me to many places that I didn't like. When I was 14, I ended up in a women's maximum security prison for about four months. I lied about my age so that they wouldn't send me back home, they believed me! I look back on this as a prime example of my insanity.

As for my spiritual self, well, that was non-existent. I had an "emergency God" I would pray to when I got locked up or in a tight situation. I figured that God had pretty much checked me off the list and I was on my own.

My self esteem was nothing to write home about. I had ceased to think of myself as a person, much less someone who could love or be loved. I felt as if I was spent and had a wet brain at 16. During the last six months of using, I shot every chemical I could get my hands on, and still couldn't get enough to find relief. I had never in my life felt so lonely and hopeless. I felt as if I were 65 years old, and had experienced everything that was of a hard and ugly nature. I had sold myself totally and completely. I had been raped several times, had an abortion, lived with six different men, been beaten, and was now locked up again. None of this however, was worse than the prison I kept myself in.

In the condition I was in, it was not hard for me to surrender. It was plain for me to see that the people I saw in meetings were just not suffering as much as I was. This was my first incentive to stay clean. I suppose this was all I stayed around for during my first year.

For that first year in the Program, I was also in therapy. This was a great excuse not to work the STEPS. Who needs a sponsor? I had a therapist. Who needs to do a FOURTH STEP? I go to a group to dump all my feelings. As a result of those rationalizations, I stayed a depressed and unhappy, but a clean person. I had yet to find recovery. Then something happened. I started getting involved in service work. This put me in contact with an addict who had experienced recovery. These were the people who talked about a Higher Power, and Turning Over of the Will. They also told me to get a sponsor, and do a FOURTH STEP. Once again, I could see that these people weren't suffering--and I was. So I followed their suggestions.

The first thing I did was to look at myself, and surrender unconditionally. I sincerely believed that a Higher Power could restore my sanity, and that I would stop trying to figure out what God's will is and just accept things for what they were, and to be grateful.

I got a sponsor, took my FOURTH STEP, and shared my FIFTH. It was right about that time that I felt a real and true relief. I call the inner peace "serenity." With such great content, it was easy to continue through the STEPS.

I no longer hated myself for my defects, for I had faith that they would be removed by my Higher Power, in His own time. I am no longer afraid of my past. I know who I have wronged. I have squared with these people, and I am willing to square with those I cannot find.

I practice the TENTH, ELEVENTH, and TWELFTH STEPS on a daily basis, and have experienced a 180° turn-about--which I call RECOVERY.

I really feel good today, and I'm grateful to my Higher Power and Narcotics anonymous for giving me a Recovery that I can enjoy and share with other addicts.

IF I CAN DO IT, SO CAN YOU

My first introduction to drugs was at the age of fifteen. A friend gave me some speed and I fell in love. As I approached my high school, I had the distinct impression that I could jump right over the building. I never forgot that surge of power which I associated with speed and I sought to recapture it for many years.

I think I was predisposed to addiction. Deep inside, I had feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. In my twisted thinking, it seemed logical that if I could stay up twenty-four hours a day, I could catch up with everyone else and be as good as "them". It took a lot of pain and many years of abuse before I realized that no matter how much speed I did, I could never feel that I was O.K.

The next eight years of my life were a nightmare of compulsive achievements coupled with large quantities of speed and other drugs. I graduated from high school, at the age of sixteen, on the Dean's list. That was followed by two different Bachelors degrees, both with honors. Yet, I still felt that it wasn't enough. I was caught in a deadly cycle. I knew that I couldn't go on to graduate school without speed, and I knew the speed was killing me.

In the process of my using, I tried many other drugs. Foolishly, I would boast of all the different drugs I had done. But, I made a distinction between "party drugs," such as hallucinogenics, alcohol, cocaine and marijuana, and "serious drugs" such as heroin and speed. I did speed because I thought I had a real need for it. I didn't know how to function without it. I figured there was something wrong with me--that I wasn't as efficient as other people and I had to constantly prove myself. I flaunted my degrees and my achievements in order to win acceptance. Today I know that those gnawing feelings of inferiority are a part of my addiction.

Drugs were my God and I prostrated myself before them. I lied to myself and to others, used people, conned them and stole from them. Deep down, I loathed myself for these actions, but I didn't know how to identify or express my feelings. My habit had progressed to the level where I would stay up for a week at a time. During these runs, I would become so lethargic that I could not even carry on a conversation. I hallucinated visually and aurally, became extremely forgetful and, needless to say, irritable and grouchy. Then, I would level off, and no matter how much speed I took, I couldn't get any higher. My body would ache for sleep, but my mind would race, and I was caught at a halfway point where I would neither stay up nor sleep. It was at these times when the inordinate paranoia and depression would set in. Sometimes I would try taking barbituates to put me to sleep, but I regularly became ill and vomit them up.

Many people, including my family, tried to convince me to give up drugs. But I was impatient with them, insisting that they just didn't understand. I justified my using,

saying that I never used drugs "just for a good time", but only when I needed them which became all of the time. I developed a passion for drugs. I would steal pills from people's medicine cabinets and look them up in a Physicians Desk Reference to see what they were for. Inevitably, I would develop the exact symptoms that that particular pill alleviated. There were no lengths to which I would not go to rationalize my using.

As with anyone who abuses mind-altering chemicals, my life was chaotic and un-managable. I was well aware of it, but I never dreamed it had anything to do with my addiction. I blamed other people, neighborhoods, jobs and cities for the problems I was having. I tried the geographic cure six times, driving across the country, alone each time. Running scared, I always ran to the same place, Minneapolis, where I was raised, and California, where I went to school. I quit jobs at random and moved frequently. I got arrested, overdosed, and finally suicidal depression set in. But I still wouldn't give up my drugs.

What finally made an impression on me was a series of events which happened in rapid succession. My world started falling apart when my brother killed himself. Three months later, I experienced a sudden and severe hearing loss. The coupe de grace was my boyfriend of three years breaking up with me. Devastated, I felt totally alone and abandoned. I couldn't communicate with anyone, and again, I felt that no one understood. Instinctively, I realized that the speed was the cause of my hearing loss. Terrified of losing my remaining hearing, I resolved never to use speed again. Not understanding my addictive personality, I thought that if I abstained from speed, everything would be fine. But everything only got worse because I then began abusing alcohol, marijuana and food. Because I had no program or knowledge of my condition, only fear and resolution, the time came when I used speed again. This time, things were looking up for me. I had purchased a hearing aid and gone through therapy. I really felt like I had conquered my problems. I had no mental defense what-so-ever. When it was offered, I indulged, without thinking twice about it. After I was high, I remembered--I had quit using drugs! Once again, I resolved never to use drugs again. This time, I allowed myself "organic" drugs, like psilocybin, marijuana and mescaline. Surely they wouldn't harm me like the speed did.

Ignoring my drug problem completely, I became concerned with my increasing weight. I became involved with another twelve step program, but experienced no success. For a year, I continued insanely abusing drugs, alcohol and food, but I kept going back to meetings. The members kept questioning me about my drug usage and suggested I try N.A. Finally, I agreed to go, only so they would stop bothering me about it.

I went to the N.A. meetings stoned and didn't remember anything I heard. I am not sure why I kept going back. Perhaps the love and acceptance in those rooms was what drew me. I continued this way for five months, calling myself clean because I was not using speed. But after a few months, I started sharing with other addicts that I was still using marijuana. To my surprise, they did not make any kind of judgment, but merely shared their own experience and how they had discovered they couldn't recover unless they abstained from all drugs. But I was overly sensitive and distrustful, I argued adamantly that marijuana wasn't a drug,

that it wasn't any worse than cigarettes. They only smiled and asked me to keep coming back. It took those five months of going to meetings, using, and watching them, for me to finally get some hope. Before, I hadn't believed that it was possible to give up drugs entirely, so I maintained I didn't want to just in case I failed. But after five months, I began to believe it really was possible. I saw the same people week after week and they were still clean. I knew from the way they talked that they were true addicts, just like me, and I began to feel that I belonged. Best of all, I began to feel hopeful. I saw a way out of the vicious circle my drugs had got me into.

The miraculous day of my last high came shortly after New Years day. It was cold and raining in California, and I was fed up with everyone. The holidays had been a let-down. I didn't get the gifts or attention I wanted, and a man that I had been dating rejected me. I was furious and threw a tantrum typical of my immature personality. I proceeded to use all of my favorites, drugs, alcohol and food, straight into oblivion. Hours later, it stopped raining. I woke up and went out into the back yard. I wasn't wearing my hearing aids. As I stood looking down, I began to pray. I didn't know to whom or what I was talking, but I was asking. I wanted what those people in N.A. had, "hope." I felt desperate, alone and helpless. When I finished my prayer, I stood quietly alone for a few minutes. Very soon I heard the sweet chimes of the phone ringing. It has never sounded so good as it did that day; I heard the phone ring fifty feet or more away without my hearing aids! I burst into joyful tears at just being able to hear it and ran all the way to answer it. The person on the other end was a N.A. member that I knew well. He asked me if I was going to a meeting that night. I hadn't even considered a meeting that night and I told him how I had gotten high again that day. His reaction was totally unexpected, he was concerned! It had never mattered to anyone before whether I got high or not. And, I must point out that I was not romantically involved with this man. He merely expressed the concern of the N.A. Fellowship. When I went to the meeting that night, and shared what had happened, many people gave me their phone numbers. They made me promise to call before I used again. Miracle that it is, I haven't used since.

Like the addicts who had shared with me, I found that growth began once I abstained from all drugs. I was successful in the other twelve step program immediately, once I got clean. Those addicts encouraged me and assured me through all the ups and downs of my early recovery. They entreated me to get a sponsor, and I did. This woman patiently led me through the steps. My Higher Power, at first, was the N.A. Fellowship. It represented goodness and caring, and I trusted those recovering addicts. But eventually, the time came when I was alone, in the middle of the day, with no meeting, and I wanted to use. I saw that I needed a Higher Power that would be with me twenty-four hours a day, just as my addiction is with me twenty-four hours a day. I began to pray "reveal yourself to me." I didn't know who I was talking to, but I did it for two weeks. What happened was that I began to see evidence of God in the people around me and even in my own life. So many things happened that were too "coincidental", there just had to be a God. It took some time to be able for me to trust my new Friend enough to work the Third Step. I had to get rid of all my old fears and ideas of the God I had grown up with.

Eventually, I made a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand Him. I went on with the steps and I began to change. My self-seeking

dishonesty and other character defects were revealed to me and they caused me pain. I no longer want to live the way I used to. I asked my God to remove my defects of character. But instead of them magically disappearing, as I expected, He shows me where and when I'm doing them, and how to change. I saw that in order to get over my fear of people, I had to go to those I feared the most and make amends for my past behavior. When I stop being dishonest, I can stop hiding and I'm no longer afraid of being found out. I can look people in the eye with some self-respect because I've done my best to set matters straight. I don't live the old way today.

All of my character defects haven't been removed. I'm not always serene and happy. I'm not cured or perfect yet. Every day I see areas where I need to grow. But I know today, that as I continue in the Fellowship of N.A., working the steps, listening to my sponsor and my Higher Power, I will continue to grow emotionally and spiritually. I pray on a daily basis, asking my Higher Power to help me stay clean one more day. I ask Him to run my life, and to give me the power to carry out his will.

I like the person I'm becoming as a result of working the Steps. I've learned that as an addict, my natural disposition is to be high. In order for me to abstain from drugs, I've got to change. The Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous are the only things that have ever changed me for the better. I can't possibly express in words the gratitude I feel for my recovery in N.A. For the first time, my life is precious to me! The Fellowship is very dear to me also, and I share the gift of recovery through service. I have had several jobs in the service structure of N.A. and I find them rewarding as well as helpful. It helps me to stay clean. There have been many times when I have wanted to mope over my own problems, and I have received a phone call from another member needing something. Inevitably, in trying to help them, I forget about myself and my "horrible" problems and stayed clean another day.

My story is not unique. Hundreds of addicts have told their stories and I see how we are similar in some ways. If we can recover in the N.A. Fellowship, so can you! If you are an addict, why not give yourself a chance and try N.A.? It costs nothing to join, and at least for me, I didn't have much left to lose.

I FOUND THE ONLY N.A. MEETING IN THE WORLD

My name is Bob B. from Los Angeles. Getting to the subject of people, places and things, my story is not much different from the executive--just the opposite end of the stick.

I grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, poor, deprived, during the depression, in a broken home. The words of love were never spoken in my household. There was a lot of kids at my house.

Most of the things I remember about my life are in retrospect. While they were happening, I didn't know anything about it. I just remember going through life feeling different, feeling deprived. I never felt quite comfortable wherever I was, with whatever I had at any given time. I grew up in a fantasy world. Things on the

other side of the fence always looked better. My grass was never green enough. My head was always out to lunch. I learned all the short cuts in order to make it through school

I always had a dream of leaving home. It was not the place to be. My great fantasy was that there was going to be good out there somewhere.

I started using drugs fairly late in life. I say "late" in comparison with what they are doing today.

My mother ruled her house with a big stick. That was her method. The constant way I gained attention was getting my butt whipped on a daily basis. I found another way of getting attention was to get sick. When I "got sick", I got the things I felt were necessary; love and attention.

I blamed my mother because she didn't make a better choice in choosing the people to take care of me. I carried that long after I left home.

I went into the Military because it was a place to run to. I stayed in the Military for a long time because they afforded me the same opportunities I had at home; three hots and a cot, and no responsibility. I can say I was a responsible person because I had rank and did this or that, but it was only because they gave me advance directions of what to do and when to do it, and how much.

This was one of my first bouts as far as drugs were concerned. My first drug at the time was alcohol. I found there were two personalities; that when under the influence of alcohol and, later, other narcotics, there was a personality change.

I found out later, however, that this personality change went back even farther. I was two people before I ever started using. I had learned how to steal early; I had learned how to lie early; I had learned how to cheat early. I used these processes "successfully". I was addicted to stealing long before I was addicted to drugs; because it made me feel good. If I had some of your "goodies" to spread around, I felt good. I had a thing about stealing. I couldn't go into a place unless I took something.

I started using drugs late in life, but still fairly early. I say "late in life", because when you get to be 18 years old today, they figure you've already done all these things.

Talk about being naive, I knew nothing about drugs. Drugs were not something that was talked about in the 30's and 40's. It is not that drugs have changed, they just didn't talk about them. They didn't talk about sex, or drugs, or religion; at least as far as discussing them. It just wasn't one of those things that was talked about.

I first experienced my drug of choice, heroin, in the Far East. I heard about opium and tried that. I found you could cook up heroin and put it in a spike. There was a great variety of drugs in other countries that you could get just by walking into a drug store and asking for them. So I stayed out of the country for nine years. That way, I wasn't confronted with the attitudes here in the United States.

I knew nothing about the progression of my disease. I knew nothing about addiction. I ran around in the "ignorance of addiction" for a lot of years--not knowing. Just not knowing.

No one explained to me that when you use drugs over a year's time you can get hooked. No one told me about withdrawal from drugs. The only thing anyone told me was, "Don't get sick," and the way to do that was to keep on using.

One of the problems I found in the Military was that they give you orders, ship you out, and they don't send your connection with you. You get sick. You try to back that up the next time by trying to get a big enough supply, and your month's supply lasts a week, or two or three days.

I knew nothing about progression of the disease nor the consequences of my actions. The progression of my disease caught up with me, as far as the Military was concerned, when I started transporting and smuggling. Also, when you use drugs to the extent that you can't be there for duty, they frown on it. The next thing they do is take you away and lock you up. Then the Military did a cruel thing, they put me out on the streets.

I was ill-equipped to take care of myself. I had gone from mama to another mother. They had taken care of me, then I found myself on the street with no one to take care of me. I knew nothing of paying rent, working or being responsible. So I had to give that responsibility to whomever I could give it to. I ran through a lot of "mothers." I had to learn about how to hustle on the street. You have to realize the Military has a lot of equipment they can sell, and I used to sell it, because I liked to steal. You see, I had the habit of taking things that weren't nailed down. I had to learn other processes, like running through stores swinging steaks and cigarettes under my arm, jumping from second story windows, and running from policemen,...

I think there is a certain excitement that goes along with drug addiction. It was a lot like childhood games of cops and robbers. I found out they have more policemen than drug addicts, it seemed. They were standing around watching you. I never could understand how they could go into a crowd of people and pick me out, and say, "Let's get in the car, let's go." Nine times out of ten they had me dirty.

During the process of finding mothers, one mother found me. I thought I should hem this one up and get papers on her, then she couldn't run away.

I chose correctly by choosing someone who wasn't using. I knew about the ones that were using. They were never there when I got locked up. They never had bail money. They could never visit because they were too busy taking care of their own habits.

So I found one of those unsuspecting ones. She was in school, working, had a place to stay. She had one shortcoming: she didn't know she needed someone to take care of. I was a prime candidate. I wanted to be taken care of. She was going to help me get my act together. She proposed to me in jail, and I said, "Yes, I do. Just go down and pay the bail."

For the next three years I ran her crazy trying to keep up with me. Then she went out and found the Only Narcotics Anonymous Meeting in the World. How she did that, I don't know. At that time, there was only one meeting in the whole world, and she went out and found it, and I sent her off to go to the meeting. I had her go check it out.

You have to realize that in those days, drug addicts were very unpopular. To just intimate that two drug addicts were going to congregate anywhere would constitute a police stake-out. That's the way they treated drug addicts at the time. There was very little understanding about addiction. I was very leary about anything to do about helping drug addicts. I knew what they did with drug addicts; they locked them up. Period! There was no Program to go to, except Ft. Worth and Lexington.

I always had a sad story to justify my using. One day after one of those six month trips to go get a loaf of bread at the corner grocery, I came home and my bags were sitting by the door. She had told me fifty times or a thousand times, "You got to go." This time was different. There was something in her voice this time. So I took my bags and went to the only place there was to go; the streets.

I had become accustomed to living in the streets. I knew how to live in the back of old cars, old laundry rooms, any old empty building, your house or my house. Of course, I never had "my house." I couldn't pay rent. I never knew how to pay rent. If I had \$3.00 in my pocket that \$3.00 was going for drugs before a place to stay. It was that simple. I think I paid rent one time while I was using drugs and living on the streets, that was just to move in. It was called, "catch me if you can" from then on. It usually didn't make any difference, because I was a ward of the state much of the time anyway. I just ran in the streets until they locked me up. Then I had a place to stay. I could rest up and get my health back in order to go back out and do it again.

I came to Narcotics Anonymous nearly 21 years ago. But I didn't come for me. I came just to keep her mouth shut. I went to meetings loaded. They talked all that funny stuff out of books, like "rarely have we seen a person fail," and "this is how it works." I just couldn't understand how that applied to my problem of addiction.

I didn't have a driver's license. I was unemployable. I had no place to stay. I was the wrong color. I had no money. I didn't have a car. I didn't have no old lady, or I needed a new one. I took all these problems and they would tell me, "keep coming back." And they said, "Work the Steps." I used to read the steps and thought that was working them. I found out years later that even though I read the steps, I didn't know what I had read. I did not understand what I read.

They told me in many places that I was an addict. I had been labeled, "addict." From the Military to the jails right on down the line, I had been labeled. I accepted that, but I didn't understand. I had to go out and do some more experimenting, before I got back to the Program.

One of the things I had to learn to do was to understand what the Program was all about. I had to become willing to find out what the Program was about. Only after standing at the "Gates of Death" did I want to understand. I think "Death" is the "Counsel Permanent." I had O.D. 'd a number of times, but that was kind of like the place where I always wanted to be. It was just before going over the brink and everything seemed okay. Coming out of it, I could say, "Wow, give me some more." That's insanity!

The final case for me was that I was about to be shot off of a fence, and not by my own doing. That, I didn't like. Playing cops and robbers is dangerous, "out there." They have the guns, and I don't like being used for target practice. There were more and more cases of policemen sticking guns in my mouth and upside my head, and telling me to lay upside a wall.

My last day of use of narcotics, drugs of any type, I had just fixed and two policemen got me spread-eagled on a chainlink fence I was trying to get over. I became immediately sober and clean. Everything became very clear, and I didn't want to die that way. Something clicked on in my mind, "It doesn't have to be this way."

After that last "rest and recuperation," I found out I could work these Steps. The sum total of my life has changed, as a direct result. I got involved in working The Steps, trying to understand what they were talking about; to really understand what they were talking about. I found there is a certain amount of action that goes with every Step. I had to get into action about how the Steps applied to me. I always thought the Steps applied to you, not me.

It got down to talking about God and spirituality! I had canned that a long time ago. I put that in church, and I didn't have anything to do with churching. I found out that God and spirituality have nothing to do with church.

I had to learn to get involved. It has been one hell of an adventure. My life has changed to such an extent that it is almost unbelievable that I was ever there. However, I know from where I came. I have constant reminders. I need that constant reminder of newcomers and talking with others.

This Program has become a part of me. It has become a part of life and living for me. I understand more clearly the things that are happening in my life today. I no longer fight the process.

I came to meetings of Narcotics Anonymous in order to take care of the responsibilities that have been given to me. Today, I crave, I am addicted to the love and caring and sharing that goes on in N.A. I look forward to more of these things in my life.

My problem is addiction; it has nothing to do with drugs. It has something to do with that within, that compulsion and that obsession within. I now have the tools to do something about it, the Twelve Steps of Recovery.

I FOUND A HOME

From the time I was a little girl I can remember feeling like I didn't quite belong. I thought I must be an alien from another planet. It seemed I always said and did the wrong things at the wrong time. I felt like there was a big empty hole inside of me, and I spent the next twenty years trying to fill it.

I always wanted desperately to fit in somewhere. I always seemed to feel better being one of the guys, so I usually just stayed around men. I didn't really understand or trust girls.

I had a very low self-image, I realize now, in fact I hated myself. I wished I could be somebody, anybody, other than me. I felt like a loser and, looking back on it now, that's probably why everybody treated me like one. I was a victim by choice, but I didn't know it.

The first drug I ever used was vodka, after which I blacked out, and then passed out. The first time I smoked marijuana was the same way. I had heard marijuana didn't do much, so I smoked four joints in a row just to make sure. It worked!

It didn't take long for me to find harder drugs and start using them. I was afraid of a lot of things, but trying out new drugs wasn't one of them.

More and more I now started to depend heavily on drugs to make me feel better, or at least different. I guess I wanted to get loaded and stay that way forever.

What I thought I needed to get free of them was money, so I went to work. I was fifteen and was determined to make enough money so I wouldn't need anybody, ever. I could just get loaded and stay that way with no one to hassle me.

During the time I was getting loaded, I tried a lot of different life styles hoping to fit in somewhere. I went to San Francisco to become an intellectual, sipping expresso and reading poetry. I've tried to be a hippie, an earth mama, a river rat and a desert bunny. I spent a while driving around in Cadillacs with lawyers and stockbrokers. But, wherever I went or whomever I was with, I was loaded, and I was still me. Nothing seemed to fit and I always ended up alone.

I drank, dropped, snorted, smoked, and sniffed my way through the next seven years, until something terrifying began to happen. I could take more and more and more drugs, but I would pass out before I ever got that good feeling. I guess the feelings I had always run away from could not be pushed down any longer. They were eating me alive. I tried and tried to use more to get that good feeling back, but all I got was more and more afraid. I didn't know what was happening to me. I couldn't turn my head off. I became more and more afraid of people until I was just living like a hermit.

I felt a lot of humiliation and degradation during my addiction. I did a lot of things, loaded I am grateful I don't have to do today.

In the last few years, before I got to Narcotics Anonymous, I really believed I was

going insane. I was intent on self-destruction. I tried suicide many times.

In desperation, I went to a psychiatrist. Usually they can be of little help to addicts, but this man, thank God, knew about this Program. He said, "I can't help you, you're an addict."

I was shocked. I had always thought drugs were the answer, not the problem. Didn't everybody take drugs? Drugs were my life. I didn't know how to give them up.

He told me about a hospital where I could get help. I could no longer work or care for myself. I knew I was crazy. I was physically, emotionally, and spiritually empty, and I was very, very scared.

At my first Narcotics Anonymous meeting, I knew I had come home. I had finally found people who were just like myself. I was still scared of everyone, but somehow I knew this was my last chance at life. If I couldn't make it here, it would be the end for me.

Three times I got 89 days clean, only to use again. My disease was more powerful than I had ever imagined. What scared me is that now I really wanted to stop, but found I could not.

Finally, I realized I was still trying to do it alone. I could not stay clean without these people. They had something I desperately wanted. I had heard that if I put as much into the Program as I did into using I could make it.

I got closer to the Program and got a sponsor and called her every day. I went to meetings every night, started trying to work the steps, and just hung on.

Through the Grace of God I have not taken a fix, pill or drink for almost five years.

Desperation drove me to Narcotics Anonymous, and desperation is what has kept me coming back. I am grateful for the bottom I finally hit because that has given me the willingness to work the Steps, go to meetings, and just LIVE, A DAY AT A TIME.

The things I have learned since coming here would fill this book. I never knew how to live, and the Program is teaching me for the first time. I am finally facing that old enemy, me. I am learning to accept myself, and even to like myself, a day at a time. I know today I need the people in Narcotics Anonymous, the ones who were here before me, and those who have come in after me.

I don't feel I can ever fully repay what this program has given me, because it gave me my life. Thank you N. A. for being there!

IF YOU WANT WHAT WE HAVE

My name is -----, and I'm a junkie and a juicer. For many years of my life I felt the world had dealt me a cruel hand which left me with many inadequate feelings. Fear ate a hole in me that I was never able to fill up with drugs and alcohol.

I was born in Alabama in 1933. My father's job required constant moving which always produced new schools and faces. I was small and sickly and the insecurities and inadequacies around people increased. I fought these feelings verbally and with my fists. Punishment in some fashion followed me everywhere.

My father died when I was seven and I remember the hate I felt because he had left an only child to fend for himself. A grandmother, aunt and mother spoiled me rotten. Every time the church door was open, I was there. At the age of ten, everyone in the family thought baptism was in order. I didn't feel any different when I got up than when I knelt down. Control was the name of the game. I tried to control everyone in our little family compound, and outside; including the nun who caught me stealing cold drinks in a convent where I was taking music.

Another form of punishment I felt was, rejection. My mother married a man who later proved to be an addict. We moved to another city and the war within me intensified. Continuous fighting at home created more fear and insecurities. When I was away I hated my home and resented the people in it. Drawing upon different concepts, I began another way of living. It did not matter to me what lengths I had to go in order to gain love and approval from everyone. Up went the false front; more dishonesty and deceptions. I was to spend many years of my life trying to be something that I was not.

Relief came at the ripe old age of sixteen in the form of alcohol, at a dance. Immediately my fear of girls was gone. My two left feet disappeared and I knew exactly when and where to lay my new found wisdom of people. The effect left, and I was back at war with me.

I believed rules were made to be broken. Society's laws were not for me. They hampered my way of living, and I began to deal with reality the only way I knew, and that was using the drug alcohol. This is the only drug I was aware of in the late forties, and I used it to ease the pain. At this time, this was the best way to cope with them. Anyone could punch my buttons if I thought it was needed for their approval of me.

After a small skirmish with school officials and City authorities, private school was necessary to finish high school. Two years of college proved even further that this world and everything in it was full of it.

I cared for no one at this stage of the game. However, I met a young lady who met all of my requirements. She was from an old family, very regal in appearance and possessed all of the social graces. We ran off and got married and I entered into a new relationship that I was not mature enough to handle. I fancied myself in the future as the old southern gentlemen, broad brim hat, bow string tie, overlooking his vast domain with a mint julep in one hand and a gold cane in the other. Material

things were the basis for happiness in my life at this time. I looked either up to people or down, depending on their seemingly net worth. After attaining a lot of these things, happiness and peace of mind did not come. My salary as purchasing agent at a large hospital was not enough. Stealing to support my materialistic ambitions was necessary. The salesmen soon found my vulnerable spot, wine, women and song. They began to supply my demand. Drinking and partying every night soon made a physical wreck out of me. In the later part of 1954 I was introduced to a little goodie called codeine by a salesman to relieve the shakes. From that moment on for over 21 years I was never to draw a clean breath. Something was cruising in me every moment of every day.

I was 21 years old and a full blown addict. Routine encounters of addicts and alcoholics treated at the hospital convinced me that I was unique. I would never become like they were.

The standards and expectations I set for myself and others were too high to be met. Negative thinking and escapism became my total personality. Greediness compelled me to study drugs and experiment. This may have saved my life while I was using. I feared certain combinations in trying to get off.

The sixties came along and I decided I needed a change. I left the hospital for what I thought were greener pastures and began to travel. Life was still hell. That old nest of negativism followed me everywhere I went. Jobs came and went, then they came no more. The jails and hospital stays were more frequent and longer.

In 1973 I came into a mental ward chained like an animal. My psychiatrists, who I had constantly conned over the years, knew of my alcohol problem, but not of my other addictions. It was suggested that I try a 12 Step Program. My family was willing to try anything, so off I went for all the wrong reasons. People there were kind and helpful to me, so I began to use them as I had others all my life. They had never seen me clean and dry, so how were they to know if I was using. I was very careful not to talk about too much of anything lest they become suspicions. Deception and denial were the name of the games that I played and they almost killed me. At this time I had gotten off the hard stuff on to downers, uppers and mood elevators. People there seemed happy and sober and I wondered what they were using. I do not believe there was a fragment of honesty in me at the time. Willingness to change never crossed my mind. Gambling, women and continuing to use were my bag. For over three years I lived in hopelessness and despair going back to using, and going back to the Program.

After hearing the Higher Power concept and about a spiritual way of life, I knew drugs were not for me. I had at one time a God graciously given to me by my environment, whom I did not understand. I knew this God did not want anything to do with something like me.

There were times when I tried to relate, but there seemed to be something missing. I sincerely think that even though the feelings seemed the same there seemed a lack of deeper understanding that I needed. God bless them they tried. There were no recovered addicts in the area and no NA. I looked for people with other drug dependencies and finally found one lady in the group. She had spent ten years in

and out, without any success.

Things did get a little better. There were no arrests and no stays in the hospitals for a period of two years. Then in the fall of 1975 everything went to pieces. Back to the hospital I went. Exchanging the alcohol for pills, I was back in the old paradox again. Then a series of events began that changed my life. There was talk of committing me to the state institution. My family no longer wanted me like I was. Two Program members came one afternoon to see me and they both told me the same thing; that I wasn't crazy, to come back, don't use, and ask for help.

My sponsor, who had fired herself several times from my case picked me up and took me to a meeting. The girl that rode with us spoke that night, she talked about God of her understanding. Sitting next to my wife that night I began to see where I had missed the boat. I went back to that dark room and thanked God for those people, because somehow I knew they cared. Even though they did not understand many things about me, they gave me time out of their lives and asked for nothing back. I remembered the 11th Step in the Program and I thought maybe, just maybe if I asked for knowledge of his will for me and the power to carry it out, He might help. I got a little brave, knowing I wasn't honest, I added a P.S., "Please help me get honest." It would have been great to say that I left that hospital and never have used again, but it didn't happen that way. It was almost like all the other confinements I had experienced. I came out of that hospital with exactly what I went in with; "me."

Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years passed just like a wink, blink and a nod, and I was still praying. Everything got worse. My family kicked me out the day after New Years and I knew it was hopeless, but I was still asking for honesty and on or around the fifth of January, I began to ease off the pills I was using. It wasn't any fun, but I know today that all the suffering was necessary. Praying and tapering off had become my obsessions. I felt that this was my last chance.

I took my last pill, shot, etc., in March. By God's grace I was clean! People began to tell me, look what you have done, and I began to believe them. I got to looking so good to me I just invited me out for a drink. What a rude awakening. I came off that drunk cold turkey, no pills, nothing, for the first time in over 21 years. For five days I shook and I mean shook, and on the fifth day I wanted no more. I sat down in my little V.W., bowed my head and told God, "If this was all in life for me, I wanted life, no longer. Death would be far more merciful. It doesn't make any difference any longer." I felt a peace come into me that I had never felt before. I don't know how long this lasted and it doesn't matter. It happened and that is the important part. Since then, I have experienced the same feeling from time to time. It was like being brought from darkness to light. God doesn't let me stay in the sun light too long, but he will help me if I choose to stay in the twilight. I walked away from that car a free man. I did not realize this for a long time. Since that day I have not had a desire to use.

A God of my understanding had sent me enough honesty to get started down the right path. I went back to the Program and again I made another mistake. I kept my mouth shut with the intention of letting the winners teach me how to become

clean. Today I know for me I walked a different path through addictions and I had to walk a different path through this Program. I had to learn about me. For almost two years in the program I saw people come and go with addictions other than alcohol. One night in Birmingham, I was sharing with a group and also talking about drugs when a man approached me with tears in his eyes. He told me of his son and daughter somewhere hooked on drugs. He said, surely God must have some program for people like them. All the way back home that night I thought about what that man had told me. The next day I talked to a girl using drugs; a schoolmate of my wife's. The telephone gave us the answer through some new friends from Georgia and Tennessee in Narcotics Anonymous. A visit to share in Chattanooga proved to be a blessing. Several people came up from Atlanta, and one guy from Marietta who kept telling people that he loved them. I was 44 years of age at the time and that was the first time a man had ever told me he loved me. For some reason unexplainable, I also felt this love. A couple of months later we went to Atlanta and found a repetition of our first trip. I wanted so much to give and feel as these people did. At the close of the dance that night, I overheard something that went like this, "If you want what we have, you have got to take the Steps."

I came back to Alabama and began to take the Steps. I learned about me and found God of my understanding. Trust God; Clean House; Help Others; explains it as simply as I can. I spent many years looking for something around the corner, or someone coming down the street who would give me happiness and peace of mind. Today through the Steps and the people in N. A., I have found a solution. I have to stay honest with me, stay open minded enough to change and be willing to expect God's love for me through the members of N. A.

I am very grateful to our brothers and sisters in Georgia for their tolerance and support during our first year or so in our Program in Alabama. They more or less sponsored me in those early days. Just knowing they were there was very comforting. Many times I called my friend in Marietta, despondent over the way things were going. He always seemed to have the answer. Keep the doors open and God will do the rest.

N. A. groups now have sprung up in several cities and now those people are sponsoring me through their growth in N. A. and God's grace. I finally got it all together, but without God's help I forget where I put it.

There is one thing I feel I can give to every addict to use. I love each and every one of you, and most important, God loves you too! This I found in the wonderful Program of N. A., through God's grace and you people. Come join us it works!!!

AN INDIAN WITHOUT A TRIBE

Loneliness is something I've lived with for years. From the time I was a child, people always let me know I was different. This was fun for a while. In later years, my feeling of being different was one of the things that brought me to the Program of Narcotics Anonymous.

I grew up in Texas town. I was one of those kids from the "other side of the tracks." I was the middle child, with a brother eight years older. I always wanted to be like him, so I would tag along with him and his friends. They used to get me loaded. I always got high to a point of not remembering what had happened the night before. This phase lasted about four years. My brother got busted, and that ended that.

I came down with hepatitis, and ended up in the hospital. This was the first of many institutions to come. The doctor told me to quit using drugs. He was the first to tell me I had a drug problem. I knew he was right. I thought that everyone had a place in life, and mine was to be a drug addict. I had accepted this fully. I didn't think anyone could change it. Not long after my bout with hepatitis, I returned to fixing drugs. I became addicted to heroin. I was fourteen years old. Heroin was the answer to all my problems. It made me feel like I could finally fit in. No longer did I feel different. All are equal in addiction.

I was kicked out of my house and I swore never to return. For the next three years I ran the streets, traveling all over the country, looking for that place where things would be different. I got busted for possession, so I joined the Army to beat the case.

This was going to solve my problems. I was shipped to Viet Nam, where I really got further down in my addiction. Not long after I arrived there, I was arrested again. This time they sent me to a hospital in Germany for drug abusers. I really liked it there. There were plenty of drugs available, and they were really cheap. Mistakenly, I thought the hospital had cured me. Soon after I got out of the hospital, I was discharged from the Military for failure to rehabilitate. I was sent home with a drug habit.

The drugs on the streets weren't strong enough for me, so I ended up on a methadone program. This is what I thought "cleaning up" was.

Not long after I got home I was arrested again. This time I went to prison. That was in the later part of 1974. I became institutionalized very quickly.

I was released from prison in 1977, right before Thanksgiving. I remember how frightened I was of all people. A part of me wanted to be back in prison. I got high to cover up those feelings. Before I knew it, there I was again, addicted.

I had a job and was working steady, but here I was, in the place I had become so familiar with, drug dependent. This was the beginning of the end, the start of my recovery. I was in a state of hopeless desperation; I just wanted to lay down and die.

I started looking for a methadone program, but none were available. My boss asked me the next day what was wrong with me. Before I knew it, I was telling him the truth. I said I was a drug addict. He asked me if I wanted help. I told him "yes."

This was the first of many spiritual awakenings. I went to a hospital in Louisiana, and from there to a halfway house. This is where I found Narcotics Anonymous. N. A. was the tribe I never had. I found the same type of people I had run with on the streets. There was something different about them. They had a peace I wanted.

The first six months of my recovery were hard. I couldn't talk without making everything rhyme. I had no control over this, so I stayed frustrated. My head would jerk at the oddest times. My arms would fly up without my permission. Through all these problems, the people of the Fellowship kept telling me to come back. I did.

I was told to get a sponsor, attend a lot of meetings, get phone numbers and get involved. I tried to do all these things. I was introduced to the Steps and Traditions. I got involved early in my clean time. I picked up ash trays, made coffee, and did everything I was asked to do. I gained some self-respect from these actions. Before, I had thought I was worthless. The people in the meetings loved me and guided me back to reality. Through working the Steps and gaining a working knowledge of the Traditions, recovery became exciting. My old patterns of behavior started to leave me. I didn't react to things in the same ways I had in the past.

I first got involved in Service work during my second month in N. A.. This involvement has formed the backbone of my Program. It gave me a feeling that I had something to give.

I have had the good fortune to be involved with a lot of people all over the country who are doing the same thing I am; staying clean. I found that this Program works like my addiction did; it gives me all I need to keep from getting sick. When I was using, sometimes I would get "a little extra." Now, the same is true in the Program. I get that "little extra" with every spiritual experience, and my service work brings me one spiritual experience after another. This is what keeps me coming back. I go to meetings daily, and talk to someone who is doing the same thing I am; caring and sharing the N. A. way. This is what allows me to take a back seat and let my Higher Power take over the wheel.

I'll always be grateful to N. A. for taking me from the depths of my addiction and giving me life; one that is full of love and true concern for others. These are feelings I never thought could be possible for me. As long as I take it easy, and make a commitment with my Higher Power to do the best I can, I know I will be taken care of today. I've come to believe in miracles, for I am one.

IN SEARCH OF A FRIEND

I "turned on" with marijuana four years ago. I was thirty-five years old and had a very responsible job as office manager for a small firm. I was a "workaholic" and spent long hours and weekends at my job. I was always tired and without a social life other than sporadic one-night stands which never developed into any deeper relationships. I felt martyred and overworked.

I'd avoided street drugs even though my family had used them sporadically because

they were illegal and I was a law-abiding WASP. I had had a few long-term encounters with prescription drugs - downers, pain killers, and weight loss pills in the past - but I never had a "problem" with them, because they were legal.

In 1977 the possession of marijuana was considered a misdemeanor in Oregon, and many of my friends were getting high. I began spending weekends playing pinball for hours to relax with a friend who smoked pot regularly. We'd sit in the car while he got loaded, then play pinball till he came down. We'd return to the car and he'd smoke another joint. After a few months of weekends, I began encouraging him to smoke more often, because it made my pinball stroke better. After several months of my contact highs, I finally smoked my first joint and loved it. Within six weeks, I was buying \$75 to \$100 worth of marijuana a week. At first, I only smoked after work, to relax. I needed something "special" because I worked such long hours. I smoked every night, then from Friday night till the wee hours Sunday nights. Soon I found being loaded helped my attitude driving in freeway traffic. I felt so mellow! So I began smoking on the way to work in the morning.

My life style had suddenly changed. Everything seemed to be moving faster than I could handle it. I became very emotional and felt a sense of panic because I couldn't assimilate all the vivid new perceptions pot was showing me. I needed time to sit back and sort everything out.

Within ten months of my first joint, I'd quit my job, sold all my furniture, and was living out of my car. I lived on unemployment benefits for a while till they ran out, then I took a waitress job. I was unable to cope with any job that required concentration. I moved in with my sister and her children. Quite often there wasn't enough money to pay the rent, but I always had pot. I began feeling a daily despair and depression. I needed to get loaded to face each day.

A little over two years ago, some friends took me to another 12 Step Program to deal with my weight problem. During this long depression, I'd gained almost a hundred pounds. I began attending these meetings regularly, always loaded. I hated the meetings, but had nowhere else to go. Quite often I'd fall asleep there and wake up as the meeting ended and people were leaving.

I went to a marathon of this other 12 Step Program last summer, and spent most of the time alone in the woods, getting loaded. However, I did ask a sponsor to read my Fourth Step Inventory so I could complete Step Five. After reading my pages and pages of rambling "inventory", (I'd always been loaded when I wrote), she very gently suggested that I might want to "take a look" at my pot smoking sometime.

The marijuana didn't seem to be getting me high any more, so about a month later I tried to quit - and I couldn't. I would try to go just one day without using, but would find myself pacing the floor and unable to focus my concentration on anything else but pot. I thought I was going to go insane. I couldn't get high, but it hurt too much to not smoke dope. I began looking for another connection who could supply something that would work for me.

One night at a meeting of this other 12 Step Fellowship, I'd listened to several

people sharing their "experience, strength, and hope." I stood up when it was my turn and began to cry. I couldn't look those people in the eye. I felt like a hypocrite. The "rigorous honesty" of the program had me. I told them that I was loaded and had been at every meeting and function I'd attended. I felt like a thief. Several people put their arms around me and said "keep coming back!" I found a piece of paper in my hand with the phone number of Narcotics Anonymous and the names of several people who had been clean for a long time.

I went to my first N.A. meeting the next night, terrified. I knew I wasn't a "junkie" but I was hurting so badly I thought I might hear something that could help me not want to smoke any more dope.

A tall, blonde woman welcomed me and gave me a cup of coffee. I was so nervous and uncomfortable. I'd smoked a joint before leaving for the meeting, but it had not "gotten me off," and my jaws ached from clenching my teeth. She sat next to me and told me she'd stopped shooting heroin three years ago. She showed me ulcer scars on her legs, then introduced me to another woman who'd had a "problem" with marijuana and would be celebrating her first year clean in two weeks.

I cried all through the meeting. I felt such a sense of grief and loss, because pot had become my lover and husband, mother and father and best friend. And it wouldn't work any more. After the meeting, these two women took me out for coffee and gave me their phone numbers and told me to call them. They suggested I attend ninety meetings in my first ninety days. I couldn't imagine how I could find the time to do that, but after the first three weeks of attending only one or two meetings a week and not smoking dope inbetween meetings, I found the time! It was too uncomfortable when I was alone without dope. In the meetings I heard things that kept me clean and hoping for peace till the next meeting.

I soon got a sponsor because I couldn't do it alone. I needed someone who could answer questions and reassure me that I could live without using drugs of any kind. That was a giant step for me - to reach out to someone and admit I needed support. And learning to trust another human being was a second giant step. I talk to her several times a week, and more important, I listen to her, I respect her, because she's been where I've been, and she's clean today. She helps me to work the Steps of the Program and she cares about my life.

Through N.A., I've come to understand that I was an addict long before I ever used drugs. And I will be an addict as long as I live. But if I stay clean today from all mind-altering chemicals, I have a chance for a life of quality. Before N.A. found me, I felt something crucial to my survival missing in my life. As though at birth, every child had been issued a book of instructions on how to live - except me. My life was spent in quiet desperation, trying to figure out on my own how to do it. Today, through N.A. and my Higher Power, I've got my instructions: the Twelve Steps and the Program.

I QUALIFY

My name is Iris. I'm a drug addict. In the beginning of my clean time, I didn't really think N.A. was the place for me. Then again, the stories from the other Fellowship didn't relate either. But I sure wasn't as bad as these "dope fiends" that I found myself in the middle of. Since that time--almost three years ago--my ideas have most certainly changed.

I'm the oldest of four. I'm the only one in my immediate family that has any such problem. I figure I started out as a pretty happy kid. We didn't have much money but we were close. Recently, someone said, "a drug addict is nothing but an experienced escape artist." I can relate. My career of running or escaping started after a crisis at age eleven. I went through a lot of pain and humiliation. At first I ran physically--later mentally. I escaped reality through books, TV, sleep, etc.. I was very much a loner--but only because I felt no one wanted to be around me. I figured I wasn't pretty enough, wasn't smart enough, wasn't rich or popular enough, and I wasn't funny or witty enough. Everybody was better than I was. At home, I became the black sheep, causing embarrassment and shame. Once I tried to commit suicide thinking the world would be better off without me.

I started drinking and smoking pot heavily the summer after I graduated. I started college for two years to be a secretary because that's what a girl is "supposed" to be. In college, I couldn't handle the pressure. I went to a doctor complaining about headaches and was introduced to barbituates. I started off taking as prescribed. By the end of that first week I felt "GOOD". I felt so happy and carefree. I even liked Iris! The day was nice and fresh, and I even bounced when I walked. I remember looking at the bottle of pills thinking, "I'm going to hold on to these." And I did--faithfully for the next three years.

To put it simply, I thought pills were the answer to my problem---then the answer became the problem. There was no real "fun" involved. From the beginning, I was using pills to cope. I remember somewhere along the line someone saying, "You're going to get addicted to those things." As long as they made me feel this good--I didn't care. Then I found out what addiction was really about.

After only six months of taking barbituates daily, I remember going through my first withdrawal experience when I couldn't get around to anything. After that week, I thought I'd be starting over again. Little did I know, by this time I had stopped drinking.

I was a bit of a loner to start with. Life was turning bad again. I had a car accident that I never dealt with. I started building a bigger wall around myself and I "needed" something to calm me down enough drive. I "needed" a little help to get me through work. I "needed" a little something for the courage to talk to people and even my family. Time became nothing but a gray haze where nothing seemed to matter. For me, therapy was a joke. I graduated college on the Dean's list but couldn't sell myself, so I ended up with two part time jobs. One was a Christmas job selling. There I learned to put on a show so that no customer would leave without a smile on their face. I felt that "the show" was all there was to

my personality. In the other job, I was a clerk typist. Quickly, I came to believe the girls there hated me. At a Christmas party I decided, out of fear, to stop the pills and limit the drinks. By the end of the third drink, the party seemed to stop and all I could think of was another drink. Back at the office, things got so bad that one day I came in with ear plugs and told everyone I had inner ear infections in both ears. If you wanted to talk to me, you had to tap me on the shoulder. That was one of the last bricks in my wall; blocking out the world.

At home, I slept 10 to 12 hours a day. I tried to "control" and even stop drugs but I couldn't. I wondered what happened to the flower children and drug addicts of the 60's--were they all dead? And what was going to happen to me? Depression was a normal state of mind. There was no conversation between me and my family. My only enjoyment in life was watching TV. I remember rocking back and forth in bed thinking, "no one knows loneliness like I do." I felt like a walking corpse. The only emotion I had was hate and that was directed at myself. Later, I found out everyone was waiting for me to commit suicide--they didn't know what to do. The only thing I remember of my family at that time was my dad hated me and in that grey haze, my mom was a warm soft light that was out there somewhere. She always seemed to love me no matter what I did. I didn't understand.

When the day came that my Higher Power took control of the situation (against my will), a series of events happened that got me to break down and turn to my mom for help. I said, "Mom, I think I have a problem with drugs." She said, "Well, we're going to the doctor's today. Maybe he can give you something to help." We were so ignorant, but it felt so good to share...and cry.

Things then started to move real quick. First detox. I loved it. My own room, TV, telephone, and all the hot water I wanted. My own private world. I didn't have to deal with anyone. I only went to a rehab so that I wouldn't have to return home so quick. I started to get into a romance until someone asked me, "What do you have to offer him?" I didn't have much to offer at that time and I knew it. I did learn about drug addiction and was given some tools to work with. Again, I only went to the halfway-house because I didn't want to go home and back to my old way of life. At the halfway-house, I learned how to live clean and to use the tools.

The main tool, the basis of my clean time, was meetings. I attended my first N.A. meeting in the rehab. The only thing I remember about that meeting was this one guy that looked so good that if he spoke to me, I'd melt. Later, I was told--doesn't matter why you come in the beginning--just come. So I came. And I strutted, and I smiled, and I did what I could for a cookie, a compliment, a look, or a stroke. My ego needed anything it could get. At that time--I still didn't really know what being clean was all about--but I kept coming back. Eventually, I started coming for me. I realized I'm a drug addict in many ways. I may not have taken a great variety of drugs, I may not have done the things other "drug fiends" have done, I may not have gone as far down the road--but only because I didn't have the opportunity. I am a drug addict, not only because of the drugs, but because of the defects as well. Because of the lying, manipulating, coniving, self-will, thieving, and escaping--I qualify.

I also found out that drugs were only a symptom of the disease. With meetings and the help of the people in those meetings and my Higher Power--I started to grow. I got rid of the fear and the guilt. My confidence was built up. I learned how to handle pressure and responsibility. I learned to reach out one hand "for" help and the other hand "to" help. I learned how to make friends and I learned respect for myself. I could go on and on. The main thing is I'm growing by using the tools of the Program. Thank God for the N.A. Program. I'm alive. I'm free, and I have a lot to offer--Today.

I KEPT COMING BACK

It was a warm summer night in New York. I was seven years of age. It was late in the evening, but the room was still full of life. My brother and his friends were having a party at our house. I remember the night well. I had a crush on my brother's girl friend. She was seven years older than I was. I had stolen one of my mother's rings, and I offered it to her. It seemed as if I was born with that sort of nature. She turned it down, and I was heartbroken. I had been associated with alcohol when I was younger. My father was always letting me sip his beer. It made me feel grown up. This night was different. My feelings were hurt. I drank on my own. I enjoyed it. It made me feel good, and it helped me to forget.

It wasn't for another year that I became independently high. This time, it was beer and marijuana. I enjoyed the feeling that this substance gave me. I always felt inferior before, but now, under the influence, I felt superior to the people around me. I came from a broken home, and both of my adoptive parents were alcoholic. I had been surrounded by drinking all of my life.

When I was eight, we moved to California. My mother had gotten together with a man whom I hated. He treated me unfairly. He had caught me for stealing, and he never gave me a chance for amends. I felt neglected. I never had any friends, and I was always lonely. I started smoking more marijuana, and drinking more alcohol. I became involved in "breaking and entering" and a lot of fighting. This all gave me a feeling of superiority.

My mother and I moved to Michigan when I was thirteen. I really felt like somebody there. I could smoke more marijuana than any of the "home town boys." I started growing my own pot.

A short time later, I moved to Florida with my father. There, I started dealing barbituates. I built up a large tolerance to them. They were not working as well as they used to.

At age sixteen, I was working in a pool hall. I had quit school and left home. I was living on the streets. Even in the gutter I felt superior. A lot of runaways hung around this place known as the "scum hole," and it was raided by the police at least once a day. Hookers, hustlers, and dealers made their living there. I was one of the leaders of this group. I became interested in cocaine and hallucinogens. As usual, I went overboard. I started pimping and dealing. I was looked up to by the runaways. I felt like I was "IT." There was no one better.

We traveled in packs like wolves, and we lived in pickup trucks. I remember going into stores in groups of 20 or 30 and doing our shopping without any money. We were the scum of the town.

Many times I could pass for eighteen. I spent a lot of time in bars which caused periods of loss of memory and blackouts. Later I overdosed on barbiturates, but it didn't stop me. I started using more chemicals than my wallet could afford. I was offered a job "breaking bones" for a living. I accepted it on the spot. This was satisfactory for a while, but I started requiring more substance. My disease was still progressing.

I hit my first and worst bottom when I started selling my body for drugs, I accommodated men as well as women. I would have accommodated lower orders if it had been necessary. I felt as if my life was not worth living. Many times I had strong suicidal feelings. My moral standards were shot. I felt defeated. Chemicals, marijuana, and alcohol were worth more to me than my own life. I needed them to sustain myself. One night I started thinking about what I was doing to myself. I couldn't handle it. Once again I resorted to prostituting to obtain cocaine. A "friend" of mine pumped my veins full of it. Wow! I couldn't believe it. I was never so happy in my life. I was kicked out of the house where I had been living and was told that, "no junkie was wanted in this house." When I came down, I was really in trouble. I was in a deep depression. I was thinking about my near past, and it made me nauseous. All I wanted was another fix, and that really scared me. I was afraid of becoming a human pin cushion. I had too many friends who were, so I hopped on the next plane to California. I thought that I could start over. I was leery of drugs for a while, and I couldn't get any. I didn't know anyone and I was very lonely. For about five months I turned to alcohol. I drank about one quart of alcohol per day. When I finally found a cocaine and acid connection, I started stealing for money to support my habit. My drug of choice was acid. I could not stop. I got a job at a doughnut shop and began stealing from \$20 to \$200 per day from the cash register. Every cent was spent on drugs. I took about one-hundred hits of acid a month for two and one-half to three months. I couldn't live without it.

My girl friend moved in with me. That was a mistake on her part. She had a good job and was supporting ninety percent of my habit. After about three months, that situation was at bottom. She moved out and so did my funding. I went into heavy withdrawals. I started working with a band, and I hit my second bottom. I was stealing from my mother to support my addiction. I was a human garbage disposal. I would have done anything that altered my mind. I once stayed awake for two weeks. I didn't eat any solid food at all. I was living on cocaine, acid, alcohol, and amphetamines. I dropped down to 115 pounds. When that period passed, I got my old job back and started stealing money again. I was living and selling drugs from my hotel room!

Shortly after this, my recovery started. My girl friend was admitted to a drug hospital by her parents. I couldn't believe this. Who were they to say that either of us were drug addicts. She found out about all of my lies and confronted me about them. My cover was blown, and my life was ruined. I again felt like life was not

worth living. I wanted to die, but I believed that I should make myself suffer for all of the things that I had done. She threatened to leave me if I did not get clean. I had no choice. I loved her. I went to meetings and couldn't hear anything, because I was too high. I tried to stay clean for someone else. After one and one-half months, she told me that she never wanted to see me again. That was really a blow. I stayed clean that night, but the next day I had another relapse. For two months I couldn't seem to stay clean for more than a week at a time. I was confused. I didn't know which way to turn. I started using acid again. Nothing had changed. We were both caught in a progressive downward spin. We almost fixed cocaine one night, but couldn't find a needle. So, we snorted it instead. This went on for another two months. It seemed like we just could not stop, that our recovery depended on each other.

Soon, we came back to the Program of N.A.. The first thirty days were confusing. My feelings were scrambled. I couldn't tell up from down. Then one night at a meeting, it was like someone hit me in the head with a two by four. I realized what was happening. I realized where I was coming from and where I was trying to go. I started going to more meetings. I was attending an average of ten meetings per week. I became active by becoming a secretary of one group. I got a sponsor and a lot of phone numbers. I started writing down how I felt about given situations. A Higher Power was becoming clearer in my mind. I started taking the Steps seriously. It seemed as if the program was the only way to go on living.

My feelings started to surface. Life slowly became better. I finally realized that I was not a bad person trying to become a good person--I was a sick person trying to get well. And the program was the key to this problem and many others in my life. I had reached sixty-six days of clean time. My life was great. Things were starting to make sense. It was like a large jigsaw puzzle slowly being put together. The picture was beginning to appear. I started feeling good about being clean and having a complete abstinence of all mind or mood altering chemicals.

Then, the impossible--at least that's what I thought. I had a compulsion to use, and I had the most frightening and humiliating relapse in my recovery. I took some acid, snorted cocaine, smoked pot, and drank beer all in one night. It took me three days to come down. I was scared, because I thought that I was going to end up in a mental institution. I couldn't believe what I had done. I had proved myself to be powerless over my addiction, and felt like a failure. I experienced so much humility. I was afraid to look into a mirror. I was embarrassed to face the other members of the Program. I fought with the help of people that cared, people in N.A., I regained confidence. I started working a better program and obtained a new sponsor. He had me write out my First Step. I worked my First Step for approximately one month. I imbedded that Step on my forehead. I took my time on my Steps. My girl friend had a relapse about two weeks later. I went to a party and she was there. I sat on my hands and watched the mood changes in the people that I used to party with. I don't suggest a situation like that for anyone. But, that's what it took for me. I had to prove to myself that I could do it. I watched my old friends get obnoxious and loud. I decided that night that I was going to live. I was tired of being a walking dead man, mentally and spiritually.

The only chance I had to live was by the Program of Narcotics Anonymous. I must admit that I still have off days like anyone else, but the big problems in life aren't so big any more. I am slowly gaining back my ambitions in life. I started putting an effort into school in order to obtain my high school diploma. I lived with my sponsor for three months, working for my room and board. I performed everyday chores which would never have been considered during my period of addiction. I did everything that my sponsor suggested. If he said jump, I asked "how high?" I was willing to go to any lengths. I did nothing but work my Program. It was no bed of roses. In fact, some parts of my recovery were living hell. It was worth it. The picture started to come into focus once again. Things improved with life in general. I had learned to live on life's terms. I also learned to live a day at a time. I did it the hard way, but today is what counts. It took me six months to grasp this remarkable recovery program. It took everything I did to get to where I am now. I enjoy my life now, a day at a time. I can work the 12 Steps of N.A. on any given situation at any given moment. I enjoy working with others and giving them the same chance that was given to me. I owe my life to the Program of N.A.. I owe special thanks to the loving people that helped me and gave me a chance to become a new person with a new life. And the ultimate thanks to my Higher Power -- God.

IT WON'T GET ANY WORSE

There were a lot of reasons why I first started using. I felt different from my peers. I went to a private school. The kids in private school didn't like me because I hung around with the kids on my street who went to public school. I was a misfit. The public school kids would pick on me, too. I couldn't leave the block, so I had to hang around with them. I grew up feeling different. I had a lot of fights with my parents because I felt very restricted. I really didn't like myself and I wanted to change so that the other kids would think I was cool. I was afraid of girls and thought they wouldn't like me. My first encounter with using was when I was about 12 or 13, with a bunch of girls who were huffing glue. They were real friendly to me and asked me to join them. I didn't even have to think about it. I just did it. Huffing became very compulsive with me. I started doing it all the time, by myself, and anywhere I wanted. I remember feeling guilty, thinking, "God's watching me," and feeling wrong. All the guys on the block could drink on the weekends and I wanted to be a part of it, so I wanted to drink. I had to be in when it got dark so I had to wait until my parents went somewhere on a Saturday. I wanted to be able to say that I got drunk, so I stole a fifth of booze from my father and drank the whole thing. I got really sick and did a lot of weird things in my neighborhood, and everyone knew that I was drunk. I couldn't wait until I got to school the next day to see what all the kids would say. I didn't care that they thought I was a fool. It just felt really good to know that they were all talking about me. It enabled me to say things that I was afraid to, do whatever I wanted to, and I could say, "Well, I couldn't help it, I was drunk." Soon after, I started smoking dope and I loved it. I also remember the paranoia, thinking that God was going to strike me dead. I started smoking compulsively soon after I tried it. Dope made me feel really hip and like I had a lot of friends. I remember feeling that God was bull and that I didn't need him. All I needed was to get high, do nothing. I was just going into ninth grade and my grades were going downhill. I was fighting with my parents all the time and I was unhappy at home. All I wanted was for people to leave me alone

and just let me get high. I started burglarizing houses to get booze and money to get high on. Although I made eighty dollars a week and had seven-hundred in the bank, I was draining that quickly. I got caught ripping off houses and my parents couldn't believe it. I got put on probation and I felt like it was a big joke. While I was on probation dope was dry, so I bought three pints a day. I needed to get high and tried THC. I was told it was from pot. I remember hating it. As soon as I came down, and was able to stand up, I wanted more. This became my drug of choice. I soon found it was PCP, but it was too late and I didn't care. I was soon doing acid and everything else I could get and I remember stealing medicine from my mother and doing it in school and being sent to the hospital because I could not wake up. They were downs and I took too much. I thought I'd just have to take less the next time. I started seeing a psychologist because my parents didn't know what to do. I told this shrink that I just used socially. I had it together in my head. He stuck up for me and told my parents not to put it down until they had tried it. He gave me a new license to use. He helped me to get my parents off my back. My father knew I was dealing dope and was going to put me away, so I partied it up and overdosed. I told my parents that I wouldn't use like that if they wouldn't threaten me like that. My shrink still stuck up for me. I conned that guy into thinking I was his friend and I really cared for him. It was me and him against my parents. We convinced them that I was responsible because I paid all of my drinking fines and disorderly conducts. I usually owed money on three of them, and I was just one step ahead of the constables. I was always ripping houses off and people (other addicts). I stole money from my mother twice a week, usually twenty dollars at a shot.

Things kept getting worse for me. I had a girl friend who did not show up for a party with me, so I did her share of drugs as well as mine that night and I overdosed five minutes after taking it. My brother found me chasing cars and barking at them and he dragged me home and my parents took me to the hospital. I woke up in a strait jacket that was tied to a bed that was soaked in piss and sweat. I was fifteen years old then. I remember a psychiatrist asking me why I wanted to kill myself and I couldn't understand what he was saying, and I just wanted to get high. After this, I saw this shrink for a week and he convinced me that if I took acid again I would lose my mind (of PCP). When I was in the hospital part of me died. I was pale, and slow talking and thinking--I was physically, mentally, and emotionally beat. I tried at this point to just drink three beers a day and just smoke one joint. I really tried and it only lasted three days and I dropped and smoked as much as I wanted. I didn't use chemicals for a while. The progression was tamed for the time being. When I graduated from this shrink, he told me I could function in society if I stayed off of hard drugs. After a couple of weeks, I was with a girl who had some pot sprinkled with PCP. After I smoked it, I wanted to do more. Two days later I was out to do anything I could get my hands on. My master plan was being formed. I had just turned 17 and I was planning to set up this big dealing operation. I started getting paranoid, afraid of being busted, or killed. I was afraid to go out in the daytime or to talk to anyone on the phone. I had quit school and I wasn't working. I knew it was the drugs and I figured I would just stop using and clean up my act so I could use again. When I stopped using, the walls started breathing, flashes of lights, sirens, friends plotting to kill me, shakes, sweating, crying, and I felt like I was losing my mind. God, how I hurt! I paid friends

not to kill me. They told me I was crazy and I offered them more dope. I didn't know what was real and what wasn't. In a last desperate effort to find the answer in drugs, I bought five dollars worth of pot and smoked it to get to sleep for a day or two. I was halfway done smoking when I realized that I wasn't getting tired. I was getting more spaced out. It made all of those things I was feeling worse and I took the pot and pipe and threw it as far as I could. I ran home and begged for help from my father. I had never heard of a rehab before. I had only heard of the methadone program and I wasn't a junkie. They wanted me to join an inpatient and I wouldn't buy it. They asked if I wanted me to join an inpatient and I wouldn't buy it. They asked if I wanted to go into an outpatient rehab, and I was willing to try it. I just wanted to stop hurting and this addict told me that I might not get any better --meaning that walls breathing, flashes of light, shakes and sweating might never stop. If I did not use today, they wouldn't get any worse. I went for forty days and one morning I got up and it was all gone: the pain, the hallucinations, the paranoia. I had prayed so hard for God to remove these and he did. That was all I really needed God for--when I felt better I stopped praying. I attended a few meetings and really felt I didn't need them. The Steps mentioned God and I had nothing to do with that. I got better and I tried to be a very honest person. I had a hard time staying clean. It was a constant battle. My old friends hung in front of my neighbor's house all the time. I turned down drugs a lot. My brother and I shared a room together, and he was still using. He stashed dope in the room and I knew where it was. I used a lot of people for support and I started recovering. I was always being told by my brother that my friends said "Hi" and the fact that I couldn't really be rid of them made it really hard. I stayed in touch with people constantly and things at home got some better; trust gradually developed. After going through the rehab, I had a lot of clean friends. I had a girl friend who I moved in with. So much had been going really good. I had a diploma, a brand new car, a driver's license, and a good relationship with my parents. My girl friend was seeing a therapist who told her we should get involved in something together like starting a N.A. meeting in our area. The closest N.A. meeting was over an hour away, and there were only two a month at that. After we started the meeting, she got high and moved out. My best friend had been getting high for a while and they started going out together, and that really ripped me up inside. I had a dog who I cried to every night, and he couldn't even stand it and ran away. My girl friend moved out of the apartment and I felt like nothing. The two friends I had left were still friends of hers and spent a lot of time with her. I was lonely, isolated, depressed, and I needed help. Since I had started this N.A. meeting, I continued to go and the meeting grew. Here I was with two years, crying in the meeting, feeling sorry for myself and depressed and having newcomers with 30 days clean telling me it would get better; be grateful for what you have, and keep coming back. People who were new in the Fellowship would come over to my house and 12-Step me. They kept me coming back. They told me that they loved me. I was depressed for two months like that and during that time, two more meetings started. I was making three meetings a week and I started working the Steps. I was getting involved in our area service and I started being grateful for everything I had. I was so grateful to be alive and I believed that that was the cause of the N.A. Fellowship. It was time for me to get up off my butt and start doing something for others. I started doing Public Information work in my area and started accepting God's will for me. I attended a lot of meetings, and spoke very often, trying to carry the message of

recovery through N.A., I tried giving away what I had to other persons, especially the newcomers. I prayed very often and that hollow feeling of being different didn't apply any more. I attended conventions and conferences. At one of these, I had a spiritual awakening! I saw a tiny glimpse of God's will for me, and I prayed for the courage to carry that out. Through service, I can make it possible for many addicts who seek recovery to find it in N.A.. Today in meetings, I try to carry a message of hope, and I let everyone know that if they want to recover from addiction, they can through Narcotics Anonymous.

At one point, I realized I needed a little more than meetings. I heard people being told to get a sponsor and work the Steps, but this was to new people. I tried to work the Steps, but I really didn't know how. I didn't have a sponsor and wasn't sure if I needed one. Finally, I came to a point where I was ready for total surrender; that meant that the things that were good for newcomers - sponsor, meetings, Steps - would be good for me. I finally asked someone and he said he would sponsor me and I started and couldn't come out with the words but he said, "OK."

We moved away from each other two months later and I had to ask someone else, and I did. It's been working out real good. He guides me through the Steps and helps me to think for myself. That aimless wondering I had done all my life has finally subsided. I learned to enjoy living a day at a time. I try to enjoy my struggle through the steps. I used to think that when I got to the end of the road I would be happy, but today I learned to experience the road I'm walking on - not becoming self-obsessed with where I want to be. I'm happy where I am today and becoming self-obsessed with where I want to be. I'm happy where I am today and feel I'm making progress in life. Today, I work the Steps with the guide of my sponsor, and I attend three or four meetings every week. I attend meetings to share my experience, strength and hope. Other members learn from me in this way, and I learn from them when they share. It is important for me to always remain teachable. I pray every day and thank God for each day, and the 12 Steps and this Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

JUNKIE MOTHER

When I got to this program I knew I was dying - mentally, spiritually and physically. I had been using drugs and alcohol for the past twelve or thirteen years with brief periods of what I thought were control and never a thought of complete abstinence. Since being clean and sober, I've been able to look back at my addictive behavior and realized that my ability to cope has never been up to par. I remember, even at age nine, the need to avoid pain; taking fifteen to twenty aspirin a day, because, that's what I knew made me feel better if anything hurt. What I didn't know at the time, and didn't learn until coming to N.A. was, that my pain was not physical, but emotional and eventually spiritual. For the next thirteen years I attempted to fill that hole in my gut with anything I could. I started with acid in the middle 60's to find a Higher Power that I could control.

Eventually I got involved with black magic and witchcraft. There was a long period of confusion after that, my memory of dates and sequence of events is poor. I was taking a lot of downers, uppers, weed, alcohol and drugstore dope. I was arrested once, spent a short period of time in a Juvenile Detention Center, and saw a

Probation officer three times afterwards. There were many times later in my drug career that I thought of looking up that P.O. and asking her "Didn't you know, couldn't you see? Why didn't you lock me away then?" But that ability to put up a good front, along with many other things, is what drove me to the gates of insanity, and I know today that there is no one person, place or thing that is responsible for my actions.

It was never again necessary for me to come into contact with the law but I can tell you every feeling of every person who has ever done time because I was locked down in a prison of my own making. I continued to take chemicals of all sorts, eventually shooting heroin with the rest of the gang. I believe that part of my early using was due to my need to be accepted. As it progressed I became more and more self-centered. By the time I got my first fix, I knew I was doing it because I had to in order to survive in this lonely, frightening world. For the next seven years, my life was a series of runs and clean-ups. I think one of the reasons that I stayed out as long as I did, was because I believed that I had a certain amount of control. Somehow I held jobs most of the time. I got married (to another hype) and had a son. Of course, I didn't take into consideration the fact that I had to quit jobs before they fired me for stealing their money.

I was so addicted that when I got pregnant and had my baby, I left the hospital fifteen hours after giving birth because I was sick and had to fix.

I kept trying to prove to myself that it wasn't as bad as it seemed, that I could get myself together, one way or another. I moved to different towns and got different jobs. I saw psychiatrists and doctors. I read self-help/awareness books, switched from drug to drug and tried methadone on and off the streets. My obsessive, compulsive insanity grew worse and worse.

One year after my son was born, my little family and I ended up back at my parents house. There is where I spent the last six months of my using. I was completely incapable of caring for my son or myself. My mother took over the care of my son. I was barely able to get out of bed in the mornings to try to hustle for the day. I was dying and I knew it. I was praying to God for death.

For some reason, I visited my husband three times in that recovery house. I saw and heard things I had never thought possible; the message there was Addicts Do Recover and I knew it was my only hope, my last chance and I went for it. Within a week I got myself checked into a recovery house and started recuperating from the disease they told me I had. There was no medication; I already knew that didn't work. They told me this was a program of complete abstinence. That by not putting any chemical into my body I could get better. They took me to N.A. meetings every night - sometimes twice a day. I listened carefully, because I thought there must be some catch to the whole thing. I haven't found one yet. What I have found is freedom; freedom from that immobilizing fear that kept me enslaved for so long.

I spent 9 months in that house, building a foundation for myself, making new friends and finding out all I could about my disease and the Twelve Step Program. I found a Higher Power I accept and allow to help me. I believe I had a spiritual awakening

the day I walked in. I have not had an obsession to use or drink since that day. I know that I am not the same person who sat in a bathroom with blood spattered all over trying to find a vein to fix that dime bag in and then that wouldn't even get me well.

Today I work full-time, drive my own car, spend my own money. I go to a lot of meetings, stay active in the business end of N.A. and try to give as much as I was given when I got here.

JAILS, INSTITUTIONS AND RECOVERY

I first came to Narcotics Anonymous in a state prison. It was my third term in prison over a 7 year period, with only a few months at any one time on the streets.

In this prison, one night, I heard of a meeting going on about something to do with drugs. Well, I could relate to this, so I decided to check it out. Besides, it would get me away from the cell for awhile.

I can remember how confused I was leaving that first meeting. Back in my cell, I dwelled on all those years in and out of jails and all the things I'd been through just to get loaded. Most of all, I began thinking of how tired I was of living this kind of life. This group called Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.) seemed then to be a little too much for me. I told myself I wasn't a hardcore dope fiend, but just a guy that liked to get loaded every day and a thief who could not stay out of jail. Although, in those first meetings, I did not see N.A. as any solution to all my craziness, I did hear some things I could relate to, so I kept going back. I heard the people in N.A. say they didn't take drugs anymore, not even grass. I listened. Sure I wanted to stop all the insane situations in my life, but I didn't think I had to give up drugs altogether to do it. I thought all I needed was to learn how to handle it better.

Some of the N.A. members who came into the prison to share at these meetings had been inmates themselves, and said they contributed the change in their lives to the support of Narcotics Anonymous; one addict sharing and helping another addict. I enjoyed hearing these people tell how it was, and how it is today, and soon felt a real kinship in the pain we had all been through. I began respecting these people in N.A. who talked about how they found a way to live without drugs and alcohol and jails.

I continued to get stoned in the institution whenever and whatever way I could while still attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings regularly. The members told me to keep coming back no matter what, so I did. Besides, it sure beat talking that talk in the yard.

Soon, I was to be transferred for pre-release to a much looser security prison. I had been there before and gotten busted for smoking grass, for which I was sent to a more maximum prison. Now, as I was packing my property for this transfer, I remembered a lot of trouble I had gotten into at this institution, for the sake of getting loaded. The "Man" knew me there, and I was pretty nervous now, thinking about being eye-balled from the time I stepped off that bus. I was already thinking hard about getting loaded when I could, and scared stiff inside knowing what would happen if I got caught again.

So, I smoked a joint that morning before the long bus ride. I didn't know it then, but this was to be my last. Back in the beginning when I was attending these N.A. meetings, I would wonder why it wasn't working for me like it did for others. I was tired of this drug and institutional life, but, at that point, I guess I wasn't tired enough, because I was still using when going to the meetings. I had a decision to make on that bus ride home which was paid for by the Department of Corrections. The decision I made that day was out of fear, and some things I heard in those first N.A. meetings.

I remember being in that bus, moving down the highway with chains wrapped around my waist and shackles on my feet; uncomfortably looking up at a resentful guard behind a cage with that shotgun. Staring out the window as the miles of freedom passed me by, I wondered why I couldn't be a part of that world. Getting loaded did not feel right anymore, yet, thinking about not taking anything sure felt strange. What a relief, when sometime later, I learned that this was easier doing it just one day at a time.

Upon arrival at this other prison, I was met by an inmate, who was a N.A. member that I knew from meetings we had both attended at another prison. It really made the difference to see his face when I drove up, because again, I knew I had the support that would help me make it. I continued in the Fellowship at this prison, and became active in the service part of the Program in the institution.

So, during these last six months I had to do on my sentence, I would wake up in the morning and say, "Just for today, I won't take anything to get high on," and I hung with N.A. people in the institution to keep myself away from temptation. There were plenty of opportunities, so it wasn't easy, but I now had the support of the N.A. Fellowship. Once, I was let out to attend an outside meeting, which made me want the outside Fellowship even more. I started going to the meetings clean for the first time, and something happened.

Today, I know what makes N.A. work. One really starts understanding why it can work, only when totally abstaining from all mind-altering chemicals.

I also was beginning to understand what caring means; and by helping each other, we can make it. I felt that the only one who really understood me was another addict.

I was so proud to stand before the group and announce that I had 90 days clean. Feeling proud sure was not what it was about before. It was such a relief, not having to hustle drugs out on the yard, and do the crazy things I did to get high. I had never done time like this and it sure felt great.

I made another decision through the advice the N.A. members gave me, which was the second most important decision I had ever made in my life. This was, to have someone from the Narcotics Anonymous Program at the gate to pick me up when I was released. A person I knew understood what I needed my first day out, because I sure didn't, at this point.

When I go into the prisons today, to carry the message of Narcotics Anonymous,

the message I bring is to have a member at that gate when you get out. I have heard so many say, "Oh, I'll check it out, but I've gotta do this first, or be here first." Don't kid yourself; you might die first, if you are an addict like me.

That first day out was SO RIGHTEOUS. I was taken to a home where N.A. members were expecting me. This one member gave me a new address book with N.A. phone numbers in it, and said, "Give me your old address book, you don't need those old numbers of your connections anymore." Another member took me to his closet, and gave me some clothes. I went to a bunch of meetings that day, and sure received the love and caring I needed, which seemed to make up for all the attention I missed over the years, being locked up.

Recently, one of the many benefits, for me, of Narcotics Anonymous was being able to stand before the Judge of the Superior Court and receive my Certificate of Rehabilitation. I never thought I would be standing in front of any Judge for this reason. I am so grateful, today, to say that I have been able to go beyond the Fellowship for the support I need. I'm speaking about God. I mean a God I can understand and talk to when I need a Higher Strength, the God I found in Narcotics Anonymous.

So, if you are in a cell reading this, my message goes to you. If you are wondering whether drugs or booze, or both, are screwing up your life, find out where a N.A. meeting is in your facility and check it out. You might be saving your own life, and learning A BETTER WAY. If one addict can make it, so can another. We help each other in Narcotics Anonymous.

A LITTLE GIRL GROWS UP

I was born the youngest, to a family of eight, on Christmas Eve. I heard all of my life how my coming occasion, as a result of my birth. I too, thought it was a celebration, and continued to for the next 26 years. My parents were close to 40 when I came, so naturally I felt like a grandchild. Everyday to me was supposed to be special. I demanded and got all the attention I needed and wanted. My conception of myself at this time was that I was to be taken care of the rest of my life, and that all I had to do was be pretty and smile and the rest would be a piece of cake. I put the responsibility of my existence on everyone but me and if I wasn't happy, they weren't doing their job. Of course when things went my way, I took all the credit. To me, no one knew how to make me happy. I was constantly filled with frustration and anxiety because nothing I did seemed to get me to that place called "Happiness."

I was brought up in a religious atmosphere, but I never seemed to be able to grasp what it all meant. I couldn't understand how God could love me one minute but the next strike me down to hell. This understanding of mine sent me to rebel against all that I was taught to be "sinful." I was determined to prove that if I danced, smoked, cut my hair, or wore pants, I would not go to hell. I began to do all these "sins" in Jr. High and ended up pregnant at 15. I did not want to get married and be a housewife. My first reaction was to have my baby and raise it myself, but that didn't go off very well, so I got married and had my child at 16. You see, again I didn't want to take the responsibility of my actions, so I went into the

marriage bitter but determined to make it work.

My husband and I were two kids playing house. We began going out to clubs drinking and living it up. My thinking at this time was that I had found it, this was the life! Right before our third wedding anniversary, my husband was shot and killed at one of those "live-it-up" night clubs. Well, needless to say, I really had a good excuse now. I now had another reason to 'cop-out' on this big bad world. I honestly felt, that mean God up in the clouds was really paying me back for all the sins I had committed. I hated Him! I'd lay awake many a night in agony wondering if God and my husband could see and hear the pain of loneliness I felt. I never got an answer.

After my husband's death, his best friend and I began spending time together crying and laughing at memories of the past. Not too long after this I was introduced to "Acid". My first trip was spent on the floor with me crying and wishing my old man hadn't died on me. The bad trip didn't seem to bother me because somewhere in my mind I knew I had found something new -- a new world. Maybe "happiness." I was constantly in search for relief from the pain and about this time another man came along, except he was different because he had cash. This man saw a scared little girl in agony and wanted to buy the hurt away. Well, I tell you, it didn't take me very long at all to grab on to that and hold on till I used him completely up. With the access to so much cash it was just a matter of time before I was burnt out on all pills I was taking, the high just wasn't the same. Again, I began a search for escape from myself and I found it, the needle!

My first shot was ecstasy. The feeling that ran through my body and veins, when I got off, was one of contentment and exhilaration. I had never dreamed anything could feel so good. During this time of discovering the new highs I was trying to keep two men happy. My sugar daddy was constantly forking out cash and I was forking out lies. My old man and I really thought we were something having all that cash to buy all the dope we needed or wanted. But there was something wrong that I couldn't quite grasp, and that was that I was slowly running out of whatever it took for me to lead a double life. For about a year I shot dope for fun. My feelings were, if it feels good, do it! It wasn't very long before the needle had taken full control of me--no more was I in command. This dependency led me to be very careless and the next thing I knew I was busted twice in a period of a few months. I'll never forget the feeling I had as I was being photographed and fingerprinted. All I wanted to do was go back and fix drugs. My mind and body were so screwed up I wasn't even aware that I had a daughter at home waiting for me.

Someone told me that if I went to a hospital and kicked that I could probably beat the case. So that's exactly what I went for. I knew I had been doing too much dope but I thought I just needed rest. I ended up having my friends bring me dope through windows, and in the meantime proceeded to drive my family crazy. My husband was sentenced and I got 2 years probation. Well, that really did it! Again God had taken away my reason for living. Before my husband left I made promises that I would be faithful, save money, that my sugar daddy gave me, and only shoot dope occasionally. I was only able to keep one, and that was "to be faithful."

I literally stayed in my bedroom and bathroom for two years waiting for the day my husband would come home and make me happy again. But there was a problem,

the needle slowly became my friend, lover and my reason for living. I lost that glimpse of self-respect I had left. I spent hours in the bathroom fixing and crying because a syringe owned me now. There was nothing I could do. As a result of shooting dope, I began to "miss" a lot and those "misses" turned into infected sores from my head to my toes. I spent a lot of time telling my daughter and parents that those sores on me were just boils. I didn't realize how sick I had become. I lost everything. I was a zombie with no feelings for anyone or anything except my rush. I remember thinking that when my husband came home I could quit and everything would be alright. It wasn't.

I tried staying clean for awhile working in a furniture store, my father had started for us, but nothing worked. Before long I was at it again and by this time I was out completely. There were no veins left, so I had to go in about an inch and a half to find one and I nearly lost my veins for good. All this time I was trying to be a mother, wife, and girlfriend. I'd dress myself up for a day, put on my mask and perform my duties, but it never did work. I had no motivation to help myself.

During the worst time of my addiction my thoughts were never suicidal. I just wanted to sleep till it all went away. My old ideas told me it was a "sin" to take my own life. I couldn't really see that, I was slowly doing just that. As deep as I now was into my habit, it wasn't long before I was selling everything. I had run out of lies to tell my money man, so, next went my house, cars and jewelry, but I didn't care, I had to have my dope. There were people reaching out to me with all they had, but all I could do was shoot more dope. When someone tried to get close to this scared little girl. I didn't have any idea how. I didn't have the strength to get out of it at all. It wasn't long till I got busted again. This time it was different. It was the end for me. I had never been one to assist cops in anything but now the running was over, I knew it. I told them exactly what I had done and I didn't really care what the consequences were, I just wanted out. I was picked up at a drug-store and taken to jail. I was so messed up that nothing mattered--nothing.

I was unable to walk, both my legs were bent from infection so that I couldn't straighten them out. I was carried by the nurses before the judge to have my bond set. As foggy headed as I was I'll never forget the voices of disgust and pity as I was carried into the courtroom. Something inside my sick mind and heart told me it was all over finally! I suddenly realized how close I was to death or even prison.

Without my knowledge, my father had found a lawyer to get me out. The nurses informed me that I was on my way to a hospital, police escort and all. Before I left the jail my lawyer arrived. He came in, introduced himself, and then proceeded to tell me the most frightening words I'd ever heard, "it's time for you to grow up!" He told me the only reason he was taking my case was because he hated to see a grown man cry and my father had sat in his office and cried like a baby, pleading with him to please help his little girl this last time. He informed me there would be no more calling my parents, brothers, sisters or sugar daddy for help. I was to stand on my own two feet for once and take the responsibility for my actions. I had never been so scared in my life. The things he told me scared me more than anything, even my arrest and losing my daughter weren't as scary as havint to grow up. I didn't know where to begin. I had no idea of how to grow up and no idea of

what he really meant, except that it had to be done somehow.

When I arrived at the hospital, I was informed that there would be no phone calls in and no phone calls out. I couldn't even talk to my parents. I didn't like it too much but I knew I had better listen for the first time in my life. My lawyer was the only visitor I had for the first few days and he really helped me laugh at myself. I was laying in the bed one day feeling sorry for myself and counting my scars, I had 22. He looked at me real serious and said, "I know what we'll do, we'll paint you green and play dot to dot!" I had never in my serious, condemning mind that I could ever laugh at myself in such a forgiving way. Before, if I laughed at me, I was judging me for being such a failure at life. Now there seemed to be some relief and hope, nothing was THAT BAD anymore.

My next trip was to a treatment center. I was determined to make it work this time. I spent a lot of that time preparing myself to go to prison because there just didn't seem to be a way out of it. My lawyer told me there would have to be a miracle somewhere, because I'd really gone my limit. I knew this, people just didn't get out of three narcotics arrests (including fraud), without ratting and without going to jail. The song "Why Me Lord" came into my head while I was there and stayed. Everytime I laid down to go to sleep it was there. I had begun to know what gratitude was. My prayers were limited to just, "help me," I didn't know what I was really praying to, but I had to pray anyway. I couldn't carry the burden alone anymore. The people around me were telling me I had to believe in something bigger and greater than me or I would die. I could look in their eyes and see that they must be telling the truth, because something was there and I wanted it. For the first time I was told I could have my own God, who would love and understand me. I could have a God that no one else had if I chose. Wow, what a relief this was to me. I no longer had certain rules and regulations to belong somewhere. My God and I could make up our own. Now I was beginning to know what faith was and I had taken the first three big steps in my life. My heart told me now that whatever happened in my life would be God's will and that my worries could be taken away if I just prayed and believed. It all seemed so simple to do, but my will just wasn't ready to give up. I kept telling myself, "You've made a decision, stick with it for once and see what happens." The words in the third Step, "Made a decision" scared me because I didn't know what "decision" meant. I had never decided on anything, I just reacted.

To the best of my ability, I stayed with the Third Step throughout my time at the treatment center. My next trip was to a halfway house in Birmingham. My counselor recommended that I go, so I could get some time behind me and see what it was really like to be clean for more than 30 days. When she told me the name of the place, I had second thoughts. I thought there would be a bunch of sisters in robes greeting me. I couldn't conceive living with 18 women under one roof for too long, but I knew I had to go. To my surprise, I was greeted by several lovely women that were not nuns, but alcoholics. I knew I had come to a place of love, acceptance and understanding beyond my comprehension. They told me everything was going to be alright, and I believed them with all my heart.

My stay there began with mixed emotions. I often wanted to leave, get my little girl and take off somewhere to get away from all the pain of reality. I also read a great deal about the Fourth Step and knew it was time to take a Fourth Step of my life. I spent numerous hours writing about what had happened in my life, the pain I had felt, and the pain I had caused. I wrote about everything! There was a great deal of pain and embarrassment involved, but also an overwhelming feeling of relief. I was finally able to get out all the pain that had been with me all my life. To look at me on a piece of paper and realize how irresponsible I really was, just verified the fact to me that there would be no more running. The old me was finally beginning to die. I began to see that I really didn't deserve all of the punishment I had bestowed upon myself, and that maybe I was worthy of that thing called "happiness."

I spent several months on the 4th and when it came time to do the 5th Step there was no planning. It was just time to do it. The only way I could have held on to all that garbage would have been for me to start rationalizing my actions again. I could not stand the thought of losing the honesty. To my astonishment, the woman I did my fifth with didn't laugh, snicker or frown at all. She only had compassion when I cried and laughed when I laughed. Halleluyah! Someone finally knew the crazy thoughts I had and the crazy things I'd done.

I now felt completely forgiven and was truly ready to have God remove the old me and my sick ways. But I soon found out that the key word to Step Six was "ready," and that it would have to be done when God was ready, not when "I" decided. Step seven came with the Sixth because, as a result of Step Five, I now had some idea of what my defects and shortcomings were. I needed someone or something desperately to take it all away. I now had started to understand willingness.

Steps Eight and Nine hit me when I came into the Program. I was ready to have everyone accept my apologies instantly, when I wanted them to. I was so relieved that God had forgiven me and thought everyone else had too. But again, it was only to find that I had to wait for God's time not mine!

I work Step Ten daily, searching for where and if I have wronged another human being by allowing my defects to overcome God's love. As a result of the Twelve Steps, I'm not able to hold onto old ways of deceiving myself, for as long a time as before. God allows me shorter periods of time for rationalization, He knows I'll die if I keep it.

Step Eleven is my way of getting out of myself. My time for prayer can be anytime/ anywhere, because I now have a friend that listens whenever I pray. Meditation was hard at first for I couldn't hear anything God was saying. As I work the Program I find that Step Eleven is when I work Ten my listening to God to tell me when I've wronged another.

Step Twelve is my reason for being alive today. Being able to share what Narcotics Anonymous has done for me has allowed me to be alive. I now have an identity. I know who and what I am. Maybe somewhere, someone can relate to the pain my addiction caused me. If this is so I've achieved my purpose for being alive and happy today!

The Program of Narcotics Anonymous gave me an identity. I can now hold my head high and tell anyone "Hi, my name is -----; I'm an addict." Before I came to the program and was asked, "Who are you?", I wouldn't answer because I had no idea what it really meant. I love the newly found me. I love getting to know me and getting to know other people who are like me. I now can feel emotions that were buried deep within me for many years.

The Program has given me everything non-material. To me, "happiness" (I used to think), was what and how much I could buy. How little I knew of true "happiness." I'm beginning to accept pain as growth. I know pain is essential. Through pain God can break down the many false personalities little by little, in His own time.

There is so much hope for me today. The Program was a challenge I needed desperately and was given to me as a gift. Each day I want more of what it has to offer. I want so much to learn, and have a long way to go to reach the understanding, I'm searching for. That's okay, I'm at least searching.

To put into words what God and the program of Narcotics Anonymous have done for me has been difficult, there aren't words to express God's love. I hope that my story can reach someone, somewhere, but if it doesn't that's okay because it has reached me.

Thank you God. Thank you Narcotics Anonymous for giving me, me.

MY GRATITUDE SPEAKS

I was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1960. The son of a doctor and a mother from an affluent family. All my life I have had food, clothes, and shelter. I had a lot physically; I was an athlete.

As I grew up, however, I noticed the other kids developing hobbies. I kept to myself and my little fantasy world. Soon, I became uncomfortable around other kids. I could fight well and was respected for it. In 1969 I moved to a nicer neighborhood. I felt the other kids were snobs. I stopped fighting so much and became a class clown. In 1972 I went to a school where the bussing project was being implemented. I met tough kids and we fought every day. I loved it.

I could not relate to my six brothers and sisters. They had hobbies or studies on their minds. I had mischief on my mind. I went to a private school in the 8th grade where I was expelled for stealing pocket books and undermining the morale of the entire 8th grade. I was a tough guy con-man.

I went to High School determined to grow my hair to my waist and be a tough guy. Doing drugs came naturally. At first I smoked pot. Then after only three months, I was dealing it and hooked. My first year in high school I went from doing nothing to getting loaded every day. I could not go without drugs. I was hooked from the start. I made straight "F's."

Appalled by my conduct, my parents sent me to a military high school. I stayed loaded on MDA for the four weeks I was there, after which I was expelled for possession of drugs. So, I went back to the other high school. At first everyone was

glad to see me, but soon they would only shake their heads and lecture me on how drugs were taking the color out of my face and making me a vegetable. I resented their judgemental attitude and rebelled. These were freaks telling me this.

After doing 16 hits of purple haze (LSD) on my 16th birthday, I was never the same. Drugs were not fun again. At best I had been aware of what I could be and the pain of what I was kept me doing drugs, but drugs made it worse.

After flunking the 10th grade, I was sent to a six-thousand dollar a year tutoring school for hard cases like me. I was going to clean my act up, take karate and live spiritual or die. I lasted two weeks that time and went back to using. The suffering was overwhelming, as was the alienation. After doing over-the-counter diet pills each day for five months I went into a mental institution. I stayed there eleven months and nineteen days. It was there I first attended meetings. I was not ready, however, and I continued to use the speed I snuck in. The doctor had me on 1,000 milligrams of Thorazine a day. I was a zombie.

The pain I felt that year was beyond words. I felt like an animal in the zoo. I would pace the floors. I would think of dope day and night. I was treated like a sub-human life form. I hated being locked up. I hated being treated like a madman. I ran away three times. Once a policeman caught me running. He pulled out his gun and said if I did not stop, I'd make him shoot me. In my mind I hoped if he shot, he'd kill me. I thought of suicide often.

On the day I got out of the hospital, I got loaded and wrecked a car. The next day I stole a pound and a half of marijuana. I maintained on marijuana, alcohol, and pills for the next four months. My condition got worse. I could not work or do anything productive, so I stole and was lonely. I wanted to be with others; I was getting afraid to be alone, but I really did not want to die. I hated the hospital so much but I felt "at least you're out." I would rather die than go back.

After a dope deal fell through and I was ripped off for \$105, I had no more resources. I went with a group of young people on a religious retreat. It smacked of Christianity and I felt I was destined to burn in hell, but the women looked good and I needed some people to take care of me. During that weekend, I met a member of a 12-Step Program and I turned my will and my life over to the care of God. With Him, I got grateful for the material things I had. I determined to go take a last chance at getting clean.

I found a card with a N. A. member's number on it from when I was locked up and called him. I ended up at my first N. A. meeting. I really felt sorry for the folks there. I had been "straight" five days except for 300 mgs. of Thorazine, the 10 mgs. of haldol, and the 100 mgs. of benedril I was taking each day. As you see, I was not serious.

I went to meetings for a month loaded like that; then I used street drugs again. At first, I maintained on marijuana then it ran out and I overdosed, eating forty capsules of speed. That was my last usage. I realized that it is a serious disease

and it could kill me. I had overdosed plenty and ended up in emergency rooms, but never like that speed. My heart would go faster and faster and then stop then start again and repeat the process. I knew how to handle bad trips on drugs. I was a veteran of bad trips, but that load of amphetamine should have killed me. I did not even know what I was taking.

I came back to N.A., this time gravely serious. I sat in the first N.A. meeting where I felt the total seriousness of the N.A. Program. I looked around the room, the speaker was telling of how he used to plan to kill himself. I could really relate and I saw other people relating as well. I felt good about that but it was like leaving home. I had had to go through everything to get there, but now I had a new home and I was going to stay. A voice in my head, however, had different plans. It suggested that I get high after the meeting to celebrate my new home. I knew it was insane, yet the thought was so overwhelming I knew I could not fight it. Desperately, I glanced around the room. These people could stay clean! I could not. They were not like me. I was going to get loaded. "No!" I thought, "No!" God, help me, God...God, restore me to sanity." I cried in my mind. When I said that I tingled and the compulsion left. I was overwhelmed. I tried it again. It worked! It worked! Now, I really could stay clean! Even me.

I did everything you told me to do. I was as willing as only the dying can be. I made 90 meetings in 90 days. I got a sponsor and I called him twice a day and we talked for hours. At the N.A. meetings I felt an awareness between us addicts. I felt N.A. was really solid and it was the rock on which I would surrender my life. I did something very important. I stuck with the people who were serious about staying clean. We were into service work: emptying ash trays, setting up and cleaning up meeting halls. We would get there early and leave late; then I would call my sponsor at midnight and we would talk until two in the morning. I would take hot baths at night, and pray and write down my concept of God until 4 a.m.. Then I would get to sleep. My parents supported me and I tried to show my gratitude and love for them. They paid fifty-thousand dollars a year for hospitals. They knew N.A. worked. It is the only thing that ever worked, but I had to be beaten to the very end. I did as much as I could do. If I used any more, I know I would be dead.

I feel my disease is progressive. Today if I used it would be even worse than when I stopped. It has subtle ways of trying to get me to use, like luster and lust, anger and pride, but I always remember what my last one did for me and say, "No thanks, not today."

Going to any lengths to stay clean is a big part of the N.A. Program in my opinion. I would work the Steps or tunnel to China to stay off drugs. I feel I have found in N.A. the way to the daylight and freedom. If I ever use again, I will die and lose everything. So, I just don't use today.

I do not remember the good times using; that is not a good First Step. I remember the mental hospital, the suicidal thoughts, and the times when I was hurting very badly. I do not want that. So, I came to believe in a loving God who can restore me to sanity. I pray for God to reveal himself to me in ways that I can understand.

I pray "God, genuine faith." Then I turned my will and life over to the care of God. I know that my way did not work so I have to surrender to God's will for me which I do not understand, but which turns out better than anything I had planned. I just prayed to the same God to write my inventory through me; in this way, I sat at a desk for two or three hours and did write down some defects of character and some assets. I began to see my "inner nature." I did not share my inventory with another human being for a week or so. During that week I was frustrated and hurt. I would go back and work on my Fourth Step and get nowhere. Then I learned a very important thing; to go back and read the inventory. When I did that, I saw it was time for a Fifth Step. Next was getting ready to have the defects removed. Of course, I had a good sponsor take me through these Steps and I learned to be gentle to myself and be my own friend. When I became my own friend, God added a woman to my life. That has been a learning and growing experience. The relationship forced me to work the Steps and call my sponsor. I learned I was still insecure and had to make amends and demonstrate my good will. By working the Eleventh Step, I feel protected from turbulent emotions. I can stay more calm, and rational in busy days or hard times, like when my girl friend is playing games.

In relationships, I have learned that I have to be my own best friend and work on myself. Then I have something that the woman wants. I think women give beautiful gifts and are great teachers.

Nothing has been so rewarding as working with other addicts. No matter what is happening in my life, I know I can get out of my self-centered trip by simply becoming interested in the welfare and recovery of a newcomer or an oldtimer in pain. My story, by the grace of God has a happy ending, thanks to N. A. I would like to thank them in my words and in my deeds.

NO EXCUSE FOR LONELINESS

Like everyone else, I started my life as a baby, and later became a child. And, like everyone else, I grew up one day and discovered that I had an adult body. But, unlike most people, I was still a child when I made this discovery. I am an addict. Drugs, in whatever form, were my primary addiction. Self-destructive behavior, obsessive and compulsive thinking, were symptoms that lived with me, before I ever used chemicals, and stayed with me after I let go of drugs.

When I was a little girl, I started to look for a substitute for Papa. I had a father, but he wasn't the father I wanted. He had a domineering, compulsive personality. He was intellectual, but very bigoted and negative, and above all, violent and unpredictable. I believe that he had a drinking problem. His job required that he spend a good deal of time away from home, so there were months out of every year that I didn't see him at all. He was my Higher Power, when I was small. He was big, strong, and frightful. When he did take the time out to play with my older brother and me, he was so much fun! But, even when we were playing together, he could not be trusted. The slightest thing could send him into a rage. Yes, I was a battered child. It was not uncommon for me to go to school with bruises on my face, along with instructions as to what lie my parents wanted me to tell the teacher on

how I got those bruises.

I had an older brother. He and I were very competitive. Although he was two years older than I, we were always about the same size growing up. He was popular in school, both with the teachers and with the other kids. All his life, people told him what a genius he was. I worshipped him also.

When I was eleven, my little brother was born. I didn't like that at all, because my status as the "baby" was gone. He represented my first responsibility around the house. Now, there was much more work to be done around the house, and I was expected to help with it. Mama didn't have the time to spend with me that I had been used to. He was a lovely baby, but deep down inside I resented him for being born.

Mama worked all my life. The black maids that raised us kept the radio on the rock and roll stations all the time, and kept the atmosphere pretty loose around the house during the day. I liked the way they seemed to live and think much better than the lifestyle my parents were trying to teach me.

What I seemed to want most in life was attention. I usually got it. I was bright, pretty, and wild, with a tough little spirit. I decided early on that I would grow up to be either a singer, a writer, or an artist. By the time I was fourteen, I had chosen singing as a career.

In the late sixties, there was very little of the "sub-culture" trickling into our community, compared to some of the larger cities. But, eventually, through the mass media, a little "hippie" movement was starting to blossom in our city. I had seen people like that in movies, and I really thought they were neat. The men all looked like rock stars, and I wanted what they had. When my older brother discovered pot, I was close on his heels. He found out where all the flower children hung out, and joined them. To his embarrassment, so did I. He was witty and handsome, so older kids in the street scene liked him right from the start. I didn't feel like I had anything to offer these wonderful people, so I donated my body to the "cause." I donated it to any guy that looked the way I wanted him to look, especially if there were drugs available.

I had my first taste of illicit drugs at fourteen, when I was sent out of town for an illegal abortion, and the doctor gave me morphine. I liked most of the effects. I had been experimenting with alcohol since early childhood, and was quickly becoming a partier. And, any time anyone suggested a new kick, like cough syrup or glue, I tried it.

Once, I found the right sources, I began taking all kinds of goodies. I really liked smoke, in all its forms, especially hashish. I had my first hit of acid when I was fifteen, and I dropped speed in pill form every chance I got. Downers never really agreed with me, but I took them. Even back then, I can remember a real sense of desperation in trying to find drugs when none were around. The drugs I took gave me the first real freedom I had ever known. I depended on them to expand my mind, to relax me, and to mix with my "hip" buddies.

When I was sixteen, our family moved to South America. I was four months pregnant (again), and I'd been eating acid every other day or so for the first three months of the baby's gestation. The premature baby I gave birth to died in less than five hours. Its little insides were deformed, and it was blue. For a couple of months after that, my parents kept me under lock and key, but they couldn't hold me for long. The pot in Columbia was strong, and it drew me like a magnet.

After a year, we returned to the States, and I was enrolled in school. It had been a long time since I had been in school, so I didn't adjust to the discipline well at first. During my first couple of months back, I continued to use, and to fool around with a lot of guys, but that changed when I came down with hepatitis. School got better for me without the drugs. I made good grades, and I even won medals and superlatives. Unfortunately, I had been working on a correspondence course for my junior year, and I never did finish it. I skipped Graduation Day, in order to avoid the embarrassment of being the only senior to walk away with no diploma. I liked about that fact for years.

When my eighteenth birthday arrived, I tried to get out of the house as soon as possible. I had run away from home once before, and the legal aspects of it had brought me back. Now, I was free to go. Of course, it never occurred to me that I had no idea where I was going. First, I hitch-hiked out of state to visit a lover, only to return broken-hearted when his mother threw me out of their house. Then, I moved in with my brother's rock band, until they kicked me out too, for playing "head games" with three of the musicians, at once. From then on, I used people, in order to have a place to sleep. Believe me, they used me too.

I had never worked in my life, so when it dawned on me that I would be supporting myself, it came as a shock. I had several jobs. The first job I had was slinging beer in our town's first "hippie bar." After that, I went from one thing to another, until I landed a really easy "gig" minding shop in a health food store. For a while, I stayed away from most drugs, because I was on a health kick. Unfortunately, I still had my compulsive personality, and I blew up like a balloon. I might have looked healthy and serene, but deep down inside, I hated myself. It became obvious to me that something was terribly wrong with me. Here I was, clean from drugs, and all I could do with myself was eat like a pig, and hole up in my room.

Music was the only thing I had going for me. There was a piano player that moved in with me; and we went everywhere together, even to the bathroom. Both of us had very high ideals about spirituality, which we tried out on one another, and found to be impossible. Of course, that was the kind of thing that called for organic drugs, like peyote, mushrooms, pot and such, so I started using again.

Right before my nineteenth birthday, I left town, heading west. I didn't have a dime. I didn't bother to tell my mother and father where I was going. I didn't even give an hour's notice at work. I just left. Once I got out there, I got weird. The street scene there reminded me of the one in South America, and I fell into it immediately. The first people that took me in were the "guru" type. They were pretty interesting, but I got restless. The next group I fell in with was more down to earth. There was a street gang in the town that ruled the block. One of the members took a liking to me, so I moved in with him. We loved each other as much as either of us were

capable of loving anyone, but we sure had funny ways of showing it. We screwed around on each other all the time, and when he wasn't throwing me out or taking me back, I was running out the door, with my thumb outstretched. We were lovers for about six months before his death. One night, when he was out on the strip peddling "MLA," the police searched him. Before they could find anything, he ate the entire "stash" which was enough to intoxicate ten people. His mother came to the funeral, and she gave me a ring that had been taken off his dead finger. I still wear it.

This man's death was the turning point for me. It was just the excuse I wanted to just let go of all sense of dignity, and just stay loaded and filthy. Before his death, I had been living however and wherever I could. I hadn't really been staying stoned all the time, I'd tried to be useful and kind to people, and I was even creative at times. But, once my lover was gone, I was free to let everything slide. I went on a drunk for about six months, traveling around the country. I supported myself by pan-handling, and I stayed drunk and stoned on anything I could find, all the time. There was usually a man in my life, whose main function was to protect me from the evils of the road. Sometimes, though, the men I chose were the evils. During that time, I changed my outlook and my behavior drastically. In earlier years, I was so peaceful that I didn't even eat meat. Now, I was violent and hostile. There were several instances of rape, which went unreported to the authorities. A woman hitchhiking is considered easy prey to sexual abuse, and I knew that I'd get no sympathy from them. I sobered up a time or two when I found myself in jail, and I made several jails all over the country. Rape and arrest were just part of the package of living the way I was living, so I accepted them without question.

After almost a year of living on the road, in and out of jail, in and out of scrapes, I returned to my home town, broke, sick, and beaten. Of course, my old friends from high school were still around, so I figured that I'd be taken care of. They didn't respond to me the way I'd anticipated. Frankly, they didn't seem to want to have anything to do with me, so I switched crowds. Humiliated, I ended up moving in again with my family, because they were the only people that would claim me. That's when I reached my bottom. It took a couple of months for me to really let go of the drugs and the booze, but I did come to a realization of how unmanageable my life was. I had to at least try to clean up my act a little bit. A little bit just wasn't enough. During the day, I was too hung-over to work, so I couldn't function out in the world. I hated the way I felt about myself, I hated being frightened and sick all the time, and I hated having to drink and use drugs to just get through the night. A few months earlier, I had gone into delirium tremens, and I was deathly frightened of going into them again. But, I started really thinking about the danger my family was in with me living right there in the house. I couldn't be trusted, once I took in the first drink or drug, because I had a tendency to get violent and obscene when I'd black out. Black-outs were becoming an every day occurrence for me. There was no way my body or mind could function without taking in at least enough booze and barbituates to knock me out every night. With my back against the wall, I paid a visit to the local university clinic and begged an intern to prescribe a bottle of tranquilizers for me. He did, and I actually followed his instructions to take just a small number of them each day, and withdrew from them gradually. That was in the summertime. I continued to take pills and smoke marijuana for another four months after that,

but my attitude and pattern had changed. On sheer intuition, I started to realize that I'd better let go of all mood-altering chemicals. I knew that I would jump from one drug to another, if I didn't. That idea must have been planted in me by a Higher Power, because I certainly hadn't been given any information that would cause me to believe it.

I stayed clean for almost a year with no outside help. This is not something I recommend to other addicts. During that year, I really developed some serious emotional illnesses. It has taken me years of living the N.A. way to get over that first year with "my own program." For one thing, I became an anorexic, suffering from a disease just as devastating as all of my other addictions put together. When I wasn't starving myself, I was compulsively gorging myself and vomiting. I also went into a three month depression, when I didn't even have enough faith to walk outside, because I didn't trust the sidewalk to be there. I lived in constant paranoia, and I lost control over my emotions, crying at the drop of a hat.

One day, I woke up so upset that I just had to have help. I wanted to get my hands on some drugs, any drugs! The only help I could find in the phone book was a program that helps people with drinking problems. I knew I had a drinking problem, when I drank, so, I figured they'd let me slide in under the wire. I also knew that if I didn't call someone to keep me from using, I would call someone that would get me high. The day I walked into that clubhouse, shaking and crying, nobody had any reason to believe that I hadn't had any booze or any drugs for almost a year. I was a wreck. After all those months of clean time, I was just as jumpy, just as lost, as a person who'd been on a drunk the night before.

The people in that Fellowship took me in like a sick child, nursing me, and feeding me. I was twenty-one years old, and I'd lived a completely different lifestyle than anyone I met there, but at least these new friends were staying away from drugs and booze. Most of them believed, like I did, that all drugs were off limits for them, but that was a burning issue, and nobody really had any answers. I felt love, and I felt better, but I still wasn't home.

A lot happened to me in the next four years. I stayed clean from drugs, and I continued to attend meetings, wherever I was, and whatever else I did. I was introduced to the Twelve Steps, and I made several attempts to work them. I read and memorized the literature I was given and I did several inventories. I started to develop a relationship with a Higher Power. I never missed a day asking God to help me stay clean each morning, and thanking Him each night. I talked about my feelings sometimes, and when I did, I felt better. But, I usually felt like a little kid around the others in the meetings. There was still something terribly wrong with me. I had not really gotten honest about my strange food related addiction, and I continued to indulge in it, and to wallow in self-obsession and self-pity for four years. It was also never really clear to me about what to do with my feelings, my obsessions, and my dishonesty. I didn't make any connection between the feelings and the chemicals, so it never made sense to me that all of it went together, as symptoms of an illness.

After my fourth birthday, some of the people I had used with as a kid started coming

around, trying to clean up from drugs. Then, a songwriter blew into town from another city. He seemed to be a nice guy, but he kept asking me when we were going to start Narcotics Anonymous. I had heard of N. A. a few years before, but I really didn't know anything about it. After some prodding on his part, a couple of us got started on the project of forming a chapter of Narcotics Anonymous in our town. We had to wait a while for the literature to come from the West Coast, and I don't know how many conferences I had with the preacher that agreed to let us meet in his church, but in the spring of that year, we held our first N. A. meeting. There were three people there and we felt very close. Now, there are six N. A. meetings in my city.

I have personally gone through a lot of changes since then. In my service work for this Fellowship, I have found a feeling of accomplishment and belonging that is beyond belief. I have had to do a lot of growing up though, because now I am surrounded by my peers, and they can see through me more quickly than anyone else ever could. I no longer feel like a child among giants. My relationships within the N. A. Fellowship are very deep and loving. I have close friends, brothers and sisters all over the country, and I hope to have more all over the world.

A couple of months before my introduction to Narcotics Anonymous, I let go of my self-destructive behavior. I started to recognize it as part of the same basic problem that I'd had with the drugs. Once I saw the First Step of N. A., all my questions were answered, and I understood what to do with my feelings, and what to call my insanity. I admitted that I was powerless over my addiction, that my life was unmanageable. The addiction was that feeling of isolation, that unnatural desire to hurt myself, that feeling of insatiability, that self-obsession. Now, I could talk about these things. Now, I could turn them over to the care of my Higher Power. I really started to get in touch with my Higher Power. My concept of a God is different from most of the concepts I've heard outside N. A., but similar to some of the concepts I've heard in meetings. I don't really know what God is, but I do attempt to communicate with Him several times each day. I only call Him "God" or "Him" so that things will stay simple, but I think of Him more as a force or an underlying intelligence than anything else. There is no way I could begin to tell you all the miracles I've been shown. I do know that this Power kept me alive for years, even when I was out to destroy myself. Now, the most obvious way I can see and feel God is through Nature, and through the communication I have with my brothers and sisters in N. A.

I have many interests, hobbies, and talents now. I sing rock music, I draw portraits, I run, walk, and swim. I plan to attend an art college next fall, and develop a career in commercial art. I date men, and I no longer feel as if I owe them something for taking me out. For almost three years, I held the same job, and that's record for me. My life is well-rounded, and I am becoming a more comfortable version of myself, not the neurotic, boring person that I had thought I'd be without drugs.

None of my outside interests and relationships are as important to me as my relationship to Narcotics Anonymous. I have learned plenty since I found this Program, and gained many things that I can't even put into words. The most obvious things

I've learned are that I don't know much, and that I can't make it alone. I need my brothers and sisters in N. A., because I now know that I am powerless over my addiction; not over any substance, but over an isolating, sickening, frightening illness that is inside me. In the Twelve Steps, I have a way to live clean, honest, and comfortable. With the love that I'm shown in Narcotics Anonymous, I have no excuse for loneliness. I have all I need.

I WAS UNIQUE

I had nowhere to turn, I felt no one could help me - as my situation was so much different from that of anyone else's. The feelings of frustration and loneliness were overwhelming. I thought I was doomed to continue in an insane drive toward self-destruction that had already sapped me of any determination to fight. I thought I was unique - that is, until I found the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. Since that day, my life has taken on a new meaning and a new direction.

I came from a white middle-class background where success was almost assumed. I excelled academically and went on to medical school in California and in Scotland. I looked with smug disdain on my schoolmates who were experimenting with drugs. I felt I was too good and too smart for that. I thought that a drug addict was a weak-willed, spineless creature who must have no purpose in life or sense of worth. I would not, nor could not fall into that trap, as I was an achiever, winning at the game of life, and felt to have such great potential.

Sometime after having started my internship at a prestigious west coast hospital I had my first experience with narcotics. Call it curiosity (I thought), but perhaps I was looking for "something better." I was amazed at the way patients in severe pain would relax when a small amount of morphine was injected into their veins. That was for me! Over the next few months several personal tragedies led to my world crumbling about me, and experimentation quickly led to abuse and an addiction with all the bewildering helplessness and self-condemnation that only a drug addict knows.

Shortly after having started my residency training, in neuro surgery, I sought help from a psychiatrist, as the delusion that I could control my narcotic use finally evaporated. I was hospitalized in a mental institution for a few days until I felt better, and then convinced my psychiatrist that I was well enough to return to my training program. He was either naive or gullible enough to let me go merrily on my way. I lasted a few months before relapsing, with no changes made in my thinking or behaviour problems. Relapse followed relapse, and I established a pattern which I would maintain for almost ten years. I continued to try psychiatrists and mental institutions (five hospitalizations) but after each I would relapse again.

After having performed over one hundred surgical procedures while high, I was asked to leave my residency. Another hospitalization followed and I returned to my pattern of relapse. Besides institutionalization, over the years I have tried job changes,

geographical relocation, self-help books, methadone programs, only using on weekends, switching to pills, marriage, health, diets and exercise, religion. None of it works other than temporarily. I was told I was incorrigible and there was not hope for me based upon my track record.

After about five years of heavy using, I started to develop a physical allergy to my drug of choice; insidiously at first, but progressively, each time I used, a small amount of tissue would die around the injection site. This soon led to open sores and draining wounds. I found I could prevent the process by using cortisone initially, but after several more years it returned in spite of the cortisone. In the meantime I developed all the attendant side-effects of the confusion, e.g., obesity, acne, ulcers and propensity toward infection (as my immune mechanism was knocked out). By the time I reached my last hospitalization, I had a large open wound in the left forearm with exposed infected bone. I had destroyed several tendons so that I could not raise my wrist and the scar tissue prevented me from extending my forearm. On admission, I was very heavy and my hands and feet were swollen and full of fluid. I must have been a sight to behold as I was a physical wreck. Worse yet, I was totally demoralized and suffering a spiritual bankruptcy of which I was unaware. The denial and self-deception was so great that I hated to see what a pitiful creature I had become.

I entered a chemical abuse treatment facility in California and there, for the first time, was confronted by physicians who were addicts themselves. They asked me first if I wanted help, and then if I was willing to go to any lengths to recover. They explained I might have to lose all my worldly possessions, my practice, my profession, my wife and family, even my arm. At first I balked, I figured there was nothing wrong with me that a little rest and relaxation could not set right. But instead, I made a pact with them, that I would listen and take orders without questioning. I had always been independent and this was certainly a change for me. This was my first introduction to the "tough Love" which has helped me so much in N. A.

During that month in the hospital, a great change came over me. I was forced to go to outside N. A. meetings. At first I was rebellious. These people were not like me, they were common people, junkies, dope fiends, pill heads, and coke heads. How could I relate to them? They had not come where I had come from. They had not experienced what I had experienced. They had not achieved what I had achieved. Yet when I listened, I heard my story, again and again. These people had experienced the same feelings, the sense of loss doom and degradation which I knew. They too had been helpless and beaten down by the same hideous monster as I had. Yet they could laugh about their past and speak about the disease in positive terms. There seems such a balance of seriousness and levity with an overpowering sense of serenity, that I ached for what they had.

I heard about honesty, tolerance, acceptance, joy, wisdom, courage, willingness, love, and humility. But the greatest thing I heard was about God. I had had no problem with the concept of God, as I had called myself a believer. I just could not understand why he had let me down. I had been praying to God, as a child asks Santa Claus for gifts, yet I still held onto my self-will. Without it, I reasoned, I would have no control over my life, and could not survive. It was pointed out to me

that perhaps that was the whole problem. I was told that perhaps I should seek God's will first and then conform my will to His. Today I pray only for His will for me and the power to carry it out on a daily basis and all is well. I have found that His gifts are without number when I constantly turn my will and my life over to His care.

I have now found a new home in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. My life again has meaning. I have found that I have but one calling in life and that is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. I am so grateful to God and N. A. that I may do this today.

I have found that you people are just like me - I am no longer broken down or less than - I have a real love and camaraderie in the Fellowship of N. A.. My greatest spiritual awakening has been that I am an ordinary addict - I am not unique. There are still those who don't take the path we have chosen because they, too, feel they are unique. They may die. But may God bless them too.

NOWHERE TO TURN

My name is George and I am an addict and a member of Narcotics Anonymous. Today I am able to live clean and sober because of the Fellowship of N. A.. I am now thirty years old and began using about twelve years ago.

As I was growing up I remember the feeling I had of wanting to belong or be a part of other groups of people. I was a loner and did not know how to do this. Fear and inferiority feelings were a part of me since childhood. I was unable to participate in sports and other activities because of these feelings that I could not do it. I had a fear of people, especially in groups, so I lived in a fantasy world where I was somebody. I had few close friends as a child and tried to control and isolate the friends I did have. I wanted to keep them to myself for fear that others would only take them away.

I was an only child and my father did at my age of three. I was raised by my mother and grandparents. I was very sensitive and did not want others to see this so I tried to hide it.

I didn't like myself and always tried to be somebody other than the person I really was.

At an early age, I would escape the reality of the here and now by fantasizing about the future. I thought somehow if I could change me or find the right situation that I could be happy someday. My need to control and dominate people only drove them away and I felt rejected.

As I got older, I began to rebel at the society that I was blaming for my inability to be happy. At the same time on a deeper level I blamed myself.

I started to get into trouble at home and at school for attention. Inside I was hurting and was very confused, but solutions were not at my disposal and I felt as though I must do whatever it took to be accepted by any crowd. I chose other kids

who were getting into trouble and breaking all the rules. But even in that crowd I felt different.

Somehow, I made it through high school and went on to college to please my family. I was not ready for the responsibility of college and I wasn't motivated to learn. I felt out of place there and did poorly. At the end of my first semester I left school and got a job. I thought that hard work and low pay was what I needed to prove my manhood. This got old quick.

I would develop problems with people wherever I went and would run from one situation to another, blaming others for the problems that would arise.

I began to identify with the peace and love movement that was catching on around the country. I thought the musicians of this era really had the answer and part of that answer was to escape to enlightenment with drugs. I felt that I could be accepted by the long hairs because they talked of unconditional love and other spiritual principles.

I started smoking pot and then came that first acid trip, then speed and barbiturates. My first experience with each drug was wonderful to me and I wanted to keep doing it. I especially liked the speed and acid in those days and smoked pot to keep that stoned outlook on life. I thought the drugs went along with the philosophies we all talked about and that it was all spiritual and mystical. One by one, I tried all of the drugs that I said I'd never do.

My relationships with women were few and none were successful. This drove me deeper into escaping with drugs. I felt fear and excitement with this new destructive way of life. Sometimes I had doubts and second thoughts about drugs, but when I was high I felt reassured and confident. I left the world behind in those moments until I came down confused and afraid. Fear of death became an obsession with me when I wasn't high. The effects of the speed and acid helped nurture the fear.

I went back to school and continued to use more and more. At one point I cut my hair and started to drink a lot. I thought a change of lifestyle was the answer, but I still managed to find reasons to take pills to study and any other excuse I could find.

I felt that life was empty and meaningless. I became more and more isolated at school and my consumption of speed increased until I was using daily and my health began to deteriorate. I became paranoid and fearful of people which made it harder to function.

I would hang out with users on the weekends back in my hometown. It seemed that their solution to the dilemma of using was to use more until you reached the point of not caring at all. I finally quit trying to control my using and decided to quit fighting it. If I was going to be a dope fiend and self-destructive, I was going to do a good job of it. It seemed that it was becoming more and more accepted that dopers were losers and we might as well stay loaded completely. Take as much dope as you can constantly became my new philosophy for survival. The speed runs left me burnt out, I had sores in my mouth, my skin was turning yellow and

much of the time I couldn't go out at night because I couldn't focus my vision and I would hallucinate.

I came home from school in the summer of 1971 totally wasted, it was then I was introduced to Heroin. Shooting morphine and heroin was becoming more and more a part of the local dope culture and I had a few friends who were well into it. I tried it and thought it was good for me because I could relax and eat and sleep.

I learned to use a needle and by mid-summer I was shooting dope two or three times a day.

Jails, doing time, violence were the new topics of conversation, no more peace and love. Now it was conning, ripping people off and doing whatever was necessary to get narcotics. I did not like any of this new talk, but the dope made it more and more acceptable. Finally, I got involved in breaking in houses and forging checks. I stole from my family, lied, sold my musical instruments for money to get drugs.

At the end of the summer I was arrested for check forgery and put in jail where I went into withdrawal. It was a nightmare to realize how far down I had fallen and was going to have to answer to the law for my actions. My mother bailed me out and the local drug council sent me to a psychologist for therapy which did no good because I was still using. So my lawyer suggested that I go to Lexington to the federal drug hospital. I stayed long enough to detox and came home with the idea that I would go to school and everything would be okay. I also thought one shot wouldn't hurt anything.

Back into active using again, I sought help again at the local drug council because I knew they were sending people to a doctor who was writing scripts for methadone and barbiturates for addicts. So my addiction took a new direction. I began to get my supply legally from doctors. Things were going well, so I thought, for about a year until the doctor said he could not give me any more methadone. I got panicky and bought some speed on the street and while I was in withdrawal from the methadone I started speeding. After a few days, I got crazy and started shooting a shotgun off in my back yard at imaginary foes. I ended up in jail for two miserable weeks of insanity and withdrawals.

The court sent me to the state mental hospital where they put me on two Quaaludes a night for all of the dope fiends on the unit were requesting them for insomnia and bringing in other drugs from visits.

After thirty days I was released and I went straight for the doctor's office with another drug to add to my requests. I continued to pop pills and drink codeine cough syrup and booze.

I started dating a girl who used and my dependence on her was a means to get more drugs. Her dependence on me was emotional. I feel that she kept me alive through those times when my using was so insane that I would have died without someone to

keep me from harming myself more than I did.

I had become a garbage can for drugs. Street drugs, prescription drugs, paragonic, cough syrup with codeine, whatever I could get. I had been put on probation for the check forgeries and I kept getting arrested on drunk driving or brandishing weapons. Needless to say, I was always in trouble with the probation officer and they would lock me up for a while and then send me off to another rehabilitation program or hospital.

In 1974 I was sent to a long-term therapeutic community after spending about four months in the county jail. I was very sick emotionally when I got there and stayed withdrawn for the first couple of months. I went through many intense changes in the time that I was there, most of them were positive. I learned to function with other people and started to become responsible again. They gave me a place to belong and something to believe in. What they couldn't give me was a way to live without drugs outside of the confines of the therapeutic community. I finally graduated their program in 1977 and as a graduate and also an employee, I was allowed to drink.

I decided that I wanted to return to West Virginia because the lifestyle of New York was not for me. Really, I wanted to get away from them so I could try to use successfully. I got a job in my old hometown and started to see my old girl friend who was still using and it wasn't long until I just let go and started shooting speed, and eating codeine pills and methaqualone. I hit the depths of despair because the dope had me again after all that time away from it and nothing changed.

After all that therapy, I still couldn't control my dope; it controlled me. I felt hopeless and worthless like a total failure. I couldn't go back to the rehab house because I felt like such a bad person, like a traitor.

I lost my job and continued to use getting most of my drugs illegally from doctors. One doctor had become a friend of mine and felt sorry for me in my dilemma and I used his compassion as a means to con him out of more and more drugs. I was using amphetamines, sedatives and various synthetic opiates all at the same time.

I was miserable, my highs were like lows. I couldn't live with drugs but it was worse without them. I just tried to stay numb or seek oblivion.

No longer could I blame my using on others like before, although I tried, but I really knew the truth. I was off of probation so that was no longer a threat, but still I was a prisoner to my addiction.

Between my sprees of using I started to try church, I began to feel as though God was my only hope, but I wasn't sure if God really existed. Maybe I felt as though God might just be a philosophical idea to comfort man and make sense out of life. But I needed something real and could not work and I hit another bottom and found myself alone and sick. It seemed as though being alone and sick were a way of life for me. It was at this point I was ready to ask for help in a sincere way.

I didn't believe in coincidence any more and it was a miracle that I stumbled upon a phone number of a N. A. member in the Atlanta, Georgia area. I spilled my guts to him over the phone and asked him what he thought. He said it sounded as though I needed to learn how to live without drugs. That was so simple but it said it all.

With God's help I caught a bust to Atlanta. In withdrawal and praying and some crying I made the journey. I feel that the willingness and courage to make such a move came from a power greater than myself. God as I understand him has worked many miracles in my life in the past two years of my recovery.

In those first meetings I heard people share honestly. They sat and talked with me and they understood. They really cared because they were like me. They had been there. There was no condemnation or lectures. They gave me hope by their example. It really was possible to get a new way of life filled with happiness and usefulness to other people.

I didn't have to be alone ever again. I could use my past to help others and pass this new way of life on to others who were in despair and misery. It was okay to let people know when I hurt. I didn't have to pretend to be cool and have all the answers or hide my true feelings.

They loved me back to health, people were patient when I needed to talk, they listened and shared what had worked for them. I was a part of their lives.

They taught me that the Steps were the foundation of recovery. The Program has freed me from my prison and shown me how to be myself and live life on its own terms. I owe my life to Narcotics Anonymous. God works through the people in this Fellowship and it works if you want it. Surrender has been the key for me.

If I work this program, my life gets better. Today I have friendship, love a family of brothers and sisters from all over the world from all walks of life. We are united in a way that was once impossible for the addict. We have been delivered from a living and dying hell to happiness, peace, joy and a fulfillment that escaped our wildest dreams in the past. It has been freely given to me out of love. The Program is simply sharing, working the Twelve Steps, attending meetings and practicing the principles of the Program.

First and foremost, I must remember that I suffer from a disease called addiction and that using is insanity and death so I cannot take that first fix, pill or drink. Drugs in any form are poison to me and will kill me emotionally, spiritually, mentally and physically.

God has revealed his love for me through the Fellowship of N. A.. I am grateful to be able to write my story and share it with whomever may read it. I pray that it may be of some help and bring hope to someone like me who once had no hope. May God be with you in the spirit of this Fellowship, I pray that this new way of life will bring all the joy and love it has brought me.

Love George S.

PAIN IS PAIN

On one of my first drunks, at 13, I made a fool of myself, got very sick, had trouble with my parents, and was kicked off the basketball team. In one night I made plenty of reasons not to drink again, a preview of coming attractions. Two important reasons outweighed all the pain and trouble and kept me using for years. First, was the attention I got at school. I was a celebrity for a short time. The other guys who drank welcomed me into their group and I felt the acceptance I craved. Second, and just as important, I liked the way the alcohol made me feel. I first smoked pot at 14, and by the time I finished high school I was smoking several times a week and getting drunk most every weekend.

I had experimented with drinking hard liquor, eating acid, mescaline, speed, mushrooms, and smoking different kinds of hash and pot. Being from a small town, most drugs were hard to get, but there was always pot. The pot was easier for me to get than beer. I could buy the pot right at school, but I had to find someone of legal age to buy alcohol. I always partied with the same group of friends throughout my using. We shared our common instincts in drinking and drugging and I was afraid of meeting new people. I was always looking for happiness, fun, those good times. Whatever I did, the plans included drinking and smoking.

I graduated high school at 17 and moved to a nearby, larger town with my school buddies. At last, I was free of my parents' control, and had a place to party. For the next 2-1/2 years I had my chance to live my life the way I wanted to. Doing things MY way. I got arrested for drunk driving at age 18 and spent the night in jail. I didn't consider then that I had a drinking or drug problem. I had a police problem. I just needed to let my friends drive.

The best way to describe the last couple years of my drug use is boring. I worked in a factory to pay my bills and to buy my pot and beer. Most of my spare time was spent sitting around the house, with the T.V. on and the stereo turned up. I smoked every day and got drunk every weekend. Sometimes my friends and I would get in the car and drive out in the country to the same places we had gone when we had first started using.

In the beginning I had some fun times when I used. In the end, it was a habit, the old fun just wasn't there very often. I always stayed around the people who partied the way that I did. I didn't think that there was anything wrong with smoking a joint by myself before grocery shopping. I told myself that it would help me enjoy the experience. Of course it was perfectly alright to go to a drinking party and keep a case of beer in the car in case the keg goes dry for 15 minutes. Or sitting in one spot after eating acid, watching the numbers change on the digital clock. Didn't everyone?

At 20 I got arrested for drunk driving again and spent 3 days in jail. As I sobered up I realized that every time I got in trouble with the law I had been drinking. Of course, nobody had gotten a drunk driving ticket for smoking pot. Maybe some acid or speed once in a while... To get out of spending 6 months in jail and paying a big fine, I agreed to go to an alcoholism treatment center.

I learned a lot there. Mainly that it is alright not to get high, that there are a lot of people who want to stay clean, I loved to sit and listen to the other patients talk about their experiences. "If I was as bad as these people, I would want to quit too," I thought. I learned that many of them started out just like me and ended up going through years of pain. I decided that I had gone down far enough and wanted to live clean. I also decided to treat pot and other drugs the same as alcohol. Getting high is getting high no matter what I use to get there. I started to like myself. I opened up to people and let them get to know me and they still liked me.

I got out of treatment with 30 days clean, but I hadn't truly accepted Step One. In two days I smoked some pot. The sensations were familiar, but all the knowledge about addiction kept racing through my head. I realized that those counselors were right, I am an addict. I am powerless over that first smoke or drink. That was the last time that I got high.

Within a week I had moved out on my own, away from the old friends that I had depended on. I started going to meetings regularly and hanging around afterwards, meeting and talking to the other members. I couldn't relate to the type or amount of drugs or behavior of most of the people. If I kept an open mind and listened for similarities instead of differences, I saw that we all share some common feelings and a desire to stop using. I first got involved by helping set up and clean up the meeting room. Later, I drove to the treatment centers and picked up patients to go to the meetings.

As time goes on, the Third Step becomes more real and important. It wasn't too hard for me to believe that there is a Higher Power working in my life. I just thought back to the car wrecks and blackouts when I could have gotten hurt or killed and wasn't. The things that I used to call luck or coincidence, I just call God's work. I used the word God because it's easy to spell. This God must really love me. He let me go through enough pain in using that I might learn a lesson from it, and have experience to share with others. He has guided me to this new, full, rewarding life at a young age. If He has been this good to me so far, I figure I can trust Him to take care of me each new day. I repeat Step Three in the morning and say thanks at night.

When I was using, I would sit around talking and fantasizing about the things that I'd do some day. Now I do them. Travel, meeting new people, and being trusted with respectable positions. Hiking, biking, running, skiing, dancing and even dating. I have got friends all over the United States now, and I feel closer to some of them than I ever did to my drinking buddies.

It has been over 2 years since that relapse and I have had quite an adventure so far. I am not always happy or comfortable. I have had to reach out when I am scared or lonely. I have had to watch people I like go back to their old ways. I have trouble with resentment, jealousy, and fear, among others. I have found the Tenth Step very helpful there. Yet, I can't compare a few uncomfortable hours to the years of hangovers, remorse and blackouts.

God is sure good to me. He has given me health, the N. A. principles and Fellowship. When that old thinking comes back that "I'm not that bad" I just remember "how bad does it have to be before I want to get better?"

TODAY I LIVE - Thank You!

PHYSICIAN-ALLICT

I have a recollection of sitting in my office late one afternoon listening to the story of a heroin addict consulting me about a problem with his gall bladder. He needed hospitalization and surgery and I was informing him about the procedure he was about to undergo. I felt a strong sense of revulsion as he confided to me about his habit and his concern about his need for strong anagesics in the hospital. I told him in my own unknowing way that I thought it would be very helpful if he could at least stop using for a week or two before the operation; I had ingrained images of him in acute withdrawal, writhing around on the floor pleading for his next "fix."

It had been a long day, and after the patient left I thought about his terrible plight and the disgusting thing he was doing to himself. I sat back, reached into my top drawer, pulled out a short acting narcotic and syringe and gave myself free passage into a world of relaxation from the tensions of the day. Like most physicians, I had practically no comprehension of addiction in others and certainly no recognition of it in myself. I was a busy surgeon insidiously developing a disease which cleverly had insinuated itself into my life. Addicts and addiction were foreign to my understanding and my medical school training had barely even touched upon the subject. I was also the unknowing, indiscriminate supplier of thousands of major and minor tranquilizers and narcotics to patients, many of whom became addicted themselves.

From intermittent bottles of codeine cough syrup in the Air Force to increasingly stronger medications for headache, insomnia, and stress, I developed a slow but progressive desire for something to ease my pains of living. At some point, I crossed that magical line separating me, the addict, from the occasional user. I lied to cover up my habit, and yet my wife always knew and this led to progressive deterioration in our marriage. I would use late in each day and would arrive home in a semi-stuporous state, eat a quick dinner and fall into bed early in the evening. By the morning, I felt rested and ready to face another day. And the more I used the more I felt an impending sense of doom and destruction. Periods of drug induced relaxation were often followed by periods of severe anxiety and depression. My colleagues noticed the change and one recommended that I seek psychiatric help. The pattern of my illness would have been obvious to any physician who knew as little as I did. On one occasion, I was actually caught and confronted by a colleague, whose only comment to me was a conjoining "cut it out before you get into trouble."

I spent long hours spilling my emotions to the psychiatrist and for a while things seemed better. I even used less for a while. But eventually I got back into the regular and progressive pattern of using. The psychiatrist even knew about some of the drugs I was using and allowed himself to be manipulated by my own thoughts on the subject. "I could stop anytime and only the drugs when I really needed them

to relax." How often has the addict mouthed those words? And, interestingly enough, at no time did the psychiatrist or any of my friends or my wife ever use the word addict. After all, in my social sphere, an addict was a degenerate tattooed person in a leather jacket who probably rode a motorcycle and committed heinous crimes to pay for his heroin habit.

I was a successful surgeon, making a great deal of money, living in a beautiful house and driving a beautiful car. I was supposedly an intelligent man who had completed years of training. Had I been called an addict at that time, I would have laughed it off in a casual arrogant fashion. Ridiculous! But I was sinking deeper and deeper into a morass of depression and I didn't even know why. I knew that I needed the drugs, but I couldn't comprehend why. When I tried to stop, I could manage for a day, only to be beset by a greater depression and all the physical sequelae of early withdrawal. I would drive to work in the morning, and, promising that I would not use that day, would end up finding some excuse to give myself that ever lessening satisfaction and relief in the form of a pill or syringe. My life, with all its positive "fixtures" to the onlooker from the outside, had become a living hell, only partly aided by drugs, a thirst that could never be assuaged.

My wife would ask, "Why" I was doing this to myself, and I could answer neither her nor myself. I had been in control of myself and my destiny up to this point, or so I thought, and now in the midst of financial and professional success, I was dying a slow death. With millions in assets, I was poverty stricken emotionally and bankrupt spiritually. I was ready to die, but held on for some strange reason because of a persistent though steadily waning love for my family.

As if by some outside force, my life and future was then snatched from a precipice as I was about to fall for a final time. I was confronted by two concerned and worried physician colleagues who saw my condition as one sees the summit tip of the iceberg peaking above the ocean. They knew little of my problem and understood it as I understood it--not at all. But they insisted that I seek out help or they would have to take measures to protect me from myself and to protect patients. I was bereft of any stable judgement, and had lost all my self-esteem and desire to live. I gave up at that moment and called a "hotline" established for physicians. I met with an individual a few hours later who started to listen to my story. After only a few moments, and after seeing my physical and emotional condition, he held up his hand as if to say "stop." "YOU're addicted," he stated categorically, "Do you want to do something about it?" When I answered "yes," he stated that I needed to be detoxified in a hospital. I put up a token resistance, but quickly acquiesced and was taken to a drug rehabilitation center. Nothing more seemed to matter; my pride was gone. I often reflect on those last moments and how my self-will had deteriorated to such a point where I was ready to give in. I don't understand even today what happened to convince me to go into a hospital, and that is perhaps my first introduction to what I later grew to understand as a "Higher Power" in some way watching over my life. Until the day I walked into the hospital and this Program, I was an intellectual and staunch atheist, who could not reconcile any force outside myself in my comings and goings. I had always done for myself and by myself and was convinced that man must make his way alone in life. I was in for a rude awakening.

Some come into this Program by attending meetings alone and some are fortunate enough to be hospitalized, medically detoxified and gradually helped into the program of Narcotics Anonymous. I am stubborn man and somehow I feel that nothing else less than the intensive hospital course was needed to turn my head. I entered the facility an arrogant, wealthy physician devoid of humility and looking down upon tragic, deplorable individuals around me. I had the audacity in my first moments in the acute detoxification unit to ask the therapist for her qualifications and what she thought she could do for me. She smiled at my hostility and merely replied, "I'm clean, baby, and you aren't for starters!"

People on the Program often talk about reaching the bottom before being able to take the first step toward recovery. We are surrounded today by people who have entered the group at what appear to be very different levels of personal, economic, and social collapse. But I feel that most have reached their own "bottom!" Something inside cries out "Enough, enough, I've had enough," and then they are ready to take that first and often most difficult step towards dealing with their disease. So it was with me. With all I had outwardly, I had lost almost everything inwardly. I had reached my bottom as surely as the addict on skid row.

I remember clearly my fourth day in the hospital sitting in a session with a group of male addicts, trying to remain somewhat aloof from the wretched individuals around me. After all, I was a physician, not a bum! And the man who was leading the session, noting my arrogance, suddenly turned and staring icily at me asked, "What do you think about all this, junkie?" Something inside me snapped at that moment and as the tears welled up in my eyes, I sank into the deepest depression I had ever known, only to be followed by a clearer vision of who I am, than I had ever had before; and from that moment on I was able to say without hesitation or qualification, "I'm an addict." That has made all the difference!

I began to change over the next few weeks and I began to attend N.A. meetings regularly, I initially felt that it would be impossible to attend more than one or two meetings a week. It just wouldn't fit in with my busy schedule. I later learned that my priorities were 180 degrees reversed. It was the "everything" else that would have to fit into my meeting schedule. An individual much wiser than I told me that my recovery had to come first; before everything else in my life; before my wife and children, before my job and my friends, because if I didn't make that commitment, I would lose all those things anyway. So first things first, ...not using is the bottom line and all else follows.

My Program now consists of attending meetings regularly, reading the literature and following the Twelve Steps to the best of my ability. I have learned the meaning of the word "honesty" both with others and myself, and I am slowly learning that once foreign word "humility." The Program has not only given me a way of not using drugs, "A Day at a Time," but has also given me a program of living, also "A Day at a Time," that had previously been unknown to me. I have learned that in N.A. there is a veracity to such sayings as "I can't, but we can," and "keep coming back" to meetings. Most of all, I am learning to accept myself for what I am.

Recently, I went on a skiing vacation in the mountains and I sought out the Fellowship of addicts at a meeting there. It was heartwarming to be immediately welcomed into a new group so far from home where I again met people from all walks of life united by our common bond. It's a fellowship that I cherish, for these people are helping me to stay drug free and helping me to maintain my intellectual as well as physical recovery.

Recovery is an annealing process from which I am emerging stronger and more able to face the tasks ahead of me. It is sad that we must pass through such Hell before reaching the serenity of peace of mind in recovery. Over the gates of Dante's Inferno is a sign which reads, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." They fit well the portals of the addict's personal hell. It has been a slow but progressive passage back through those gates into a world where there is once again hope for those who follow the N. A. program and its Twelve Steps out of the abyss of addiction.

As the years pass, I am sure that the growing awareness and understanding of addiction by the medical profession will parallel a public awareness which will make Narcotics Anonymous and its Program more prescient of the world of the addict.

POTHEAD!

My mother started calling me a pothead when I was fifteen. Today when I go to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting I call myself an addict.

My first addiction was to food. I remembered my mom putting me on a diet when I was five years old and I've been on one ever since. I've always had problems dealing with my feelings and socializing with people. I was born into an alcoholic family and we were not encouraged to express our feelings. I didn't know it was OK to be angry, sad, and depressed. As a child I isolated myself in my room and read. I don't remember going outside to play with my friends. I do remember hurting inside and feeling sorry for myself.

I continued to get sicker inside and when my older sister offered to turn me on to a joint in the seventh grade I accepted. I had told myself I would never smoke marijuana but I thought I was smart enough to handle it. Problems associated with using began happening immediately. I started skipping school, I lost interest in my pastimes, and I was getting in trouble at home. My attitude was rotten. I was belligerent and indifferent. I thought I was cool and getting high was the "in" thing. I began to realize I was having a problem with pot when I bought a bag for my thirteenth birthday and it was all gone before the big day even arrived. My friends told me that was not normal. I tried to quit that summer and I did for three months.

When I started getting high again it was worse. I was smoking more pot and I started taking a few chemicals. I started school again and it was obvious I had a problem. I would go to school high and then skip school to get high again. My grades dropped from A's to C's and D's. Luckily we moved and my parents never saw my grades.

I met a girl who was also in junior high and who liked to party, so we started using together. I managed to maintain through junior high. In high school my addiction started progressing more rapidly. I drank occasionally. I didn't like to drink because I always got sick. I took acid and speed occasionally, but I was dropped out of high school my first year. I went back the second year and I dropped out again.

I got a G.E.D. the spring of my junior year and was sent to the State Hospital that summer. I was suicidal. I thought I should kill myself because of all the things I had done and since I didn't, the world was going to end. I lost it and I didn't think that would ever happen to me--I was too smart. My friends, parents, and doctors told me it was the drugs. I could still handle it and started smoking pot again. In eight months I was worse. I was smoking pot every day and selling it to support my habit. I had tripped a few more times and was taking speed to lose weight. I ended up in the hospital again except this time it was a treatment center.

The first few weeks were a struggle. I still wasn't sure what was real and wasn't. I was afraid. I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I was too scared to go to meetings. I thought everybody belonged to some weird cult. The people gave me phone numbers and told me to call. I didn't go to meetings and I relapsed. I remember feeling like I didn't belong in N.A. because pot was really my problem although I had used other drugs. I read the little white pamphlet "Narcotics Anonymous." It said an addict was someone who "lived to use and used to live" and that "our lives and thinking were centered on getting and using of drugs." That sounded like me. Then it said they didn't care what drug I used and the only requirement for membership was the honest desire to stop using. I thought, well, maybe, just maybe they would let me stay. I started going to a meeting every day or I talked with another addict. The members told me they needed me and I began to feel a "part of!" I attended regularly and tried to support new meetings. I learned about the Steps and I tried to work them. I didn't use, I took inventories, I made ammends, and I prayed. That's one of the things I'm grateful for is having the freedom to have a God as I understand Him. One day I realized I was being freed from my addiction. The obsession and the compulsion were no longer the dominating force in my life; growing spiritually was.

I got a sponsor and I talked with her. I listened to others who had clean time. I watched others hoping I could learn from their mistakes, like what happens to people who don't go to meetings. I learned about spiritual principles: honesty, openmindedness, willingness, humility, gratitude, forgiveness, and love. I slowly grew to accept myself, to love myself, and to love others. I'm still growing in these areas. I've heard it shared, I am able to love others for I know I am loved. N.A. has given me the love I needed to grow. I worked on being willing and on helping others. I learned about service work. It started with picking up ash trays, giving members rides to meetings, cleaning up after meetings, to being secretary of a group and taking meetings to institutions. I've learned that being of service is a way to show my gratitude to N.A. for saving my life.

I feel real privileged to be clean today. I'm twenty years old now and I've been around the Program for over two and a half years. Some days are better than

others and other days, all I can do is to hang on with both hands. I've learned that it's on my bad days that I can grow the most. I just keep on believing that it'll all be alright as long as I don't use. I still do the same things I did in the first year of my recovery. I say "please" in the morning, "thank you" at night, go to meetings, read the literature, live the steps, and talk to other addicts.

Thanks N. A. one of my greatest joys was the day I realized "Just for Today, I never have to use again!"

REALIZATION OF A DREAM

I was born in the late fifty's in the south. My childhood was pleasant, I had all the love and all the material things that child could want.

As far back as I can remember, I manipulated people to get things to go my way. If I could not get my way I would rage, pout, beat my head on the floor, anything to get my way.

I was a perfectionist and until I took my first drink, I made straight A's in school and participated in all sports. The night I took my first drink, no one was around and I didn't tell anyone about it because I felt like I had done something wrong. I don't know why I took it, I just did.

I drank twice again by the end of the sixth-grade year, and both times were when I was under pressure. Something was happening to my attitude and I didn't understand it.

I was beginning to feel inadequate. My grades dropped and my interest in sports dropped. For the first time, my parents didn't approve of everything I was doing and I resented them for it. My self-esteem was dropping and I tried to impress my peers by lying and cursing. I had a big hole developing in me.

I was beginning to grow up and was attracted to girls. The desires were natural but I was so afraid of rejection and felt so inadequate that I had to force myself on them. I felt sex was sacred and when I fooled around with girls, I felt like I had sinned and that God would punish me. Nonetheless, I would use girls and brag and exaggerate to impress my friends.

I was two years younger than my classmates and I felt out of place, my age difference made me too small to play sports. I only wanted to be accepted. I idolized hippies and the drug culture. I thought that was where it was at for me.

By the time I had been in high school for three years, my grades were straight F's. I had been arrested several times and it was hard to find people who wanted to hang around with me.

I moved to South America to live with my father and finished high school there. I went to school in the morning and drank the rest of the day. Drinking was all that mattered.

For the next two years, I bounced back and forth between the U.S.A. and South America, getting kicked out of college. I had picked up a narcotics habit and I stayed strung-out most of the time. I drank and smoked pot constantly. After a heavy bout with morphine and cocaine, I ended up in South America with my father and resolved never to use again. I had a good job and did alright, just drinking and smoking pot for about a year.

I ran across an old connection and started shooting again. My life went downhill immediately. I got fired for using on the job and dealt to support my habit. I didn't feel anything because I was loaded all the time. I degenerated into an animal. I lived like one and thought like one. I would go into the city and sell drugs, then head out to the jungle and live until my liquor and drugs ran out. I finally got busted and deported.

Back in the U.S.A., my family and friends wouldn't have anything to do with me. I couldn't handle reality and the culture shock of living in civilization blew me away. For two more years I drank, used, slept where I could and went in and out of jail. Finally, I broke down, overdosed, and ended up in a rehabilitation program.

I resolved never to use anything again, except maybe a little pot. I had been in the alcohol and drug unit for two days when I smoked my last joint. When I made up my mind to get clean, I really felt free. I resolved to make up, somehow, with all of my family for the hurt I caused. But when I smoked that joint all the pain of eight years came down on my shoulders. In the controlled environment of the hospital, I was able to stay clean for five days until they took a van load of us to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. I had no idea what it was, but since it was required, I went. I don't remember what was talked about, but at the end of the meeting they asked if anyone had the desire to stop using. I said, "I do," and they made me get up and gave me a white chip and a hug. I was kind of freaked out, all those people hugging each other. They told me not to use and to go to meetings. They asked me to come back and welcomed me when I did, and let me say that I had not been welcome anywhere for a number of years.

My stay in the hospital lasted for sixty days. I was very intent on staying clean and I really went for the program. At that time N.A. didn't have a book, so I got my guidance out of the book of another 12-Step Fellowship.

I became very comfortable in the controlled environment. It was the intense emotional and spiritual pain, that I had suffered during my years of suffering addiction, that had brought about my desire to stay clean and my willingness to go to any lengths. I couldn't understand the patients in the rehabilitation unit who wanted to return to the suffering that I had been through, and after a while I stopped having anything to do with them.

The First Step was easy for me because the destruction of my addiction was painfully obvious to me. The Second Step was easy too, for I came to believe that the group could restore me to sanity and thus, I turned my will and life over to the people in the group. My first Fourth Step was an honest try at a list of my worst defects and I did a Fifth Step the day I left the hospital. I was determined to complete my Fifth before I left the rehabilitation program because I was scared to

death of getting loaded. I had become very dependent on the patients and counselors at the recovery house and my leaving was very emotional. I cried like a baby.

When I got home, I followed the instructions I'd learned. I kept it simple, went to a lot of meetings, and used the phone. I remember I had a very justified reason for getting loaded early one morning and I called a guy in the program. He said, "there will be lots of reasons to get loaded, you have to find a reason not to get loaded." I found one. I didn't want to die.

Until this point in my life, I had identified dope as being my problem. I was slowly coming to realize that I was the problem. I was told that I had a disease that I was not responsible for, but that I was responsible for my recovery. I was told that the dope was only a symptom of this physical, mental, and spiritual disease that I had, and that if I treated my disease the most apparent symptom, using dope, would go away. I was told that as long as I maintained my spiritual condition, I would be granted relief from my disease, a day at a time, for as long as I had the desire to stay clean.

I learned many things that helped me, like, "if you don't use, you won't get loaded" and the "one too many" was the first one. On the days I wanted to get loaded, I would con myself by saying, "Well, I may get loaded tomorrow but I'm not going to get loaded today." Thank God tomorrow never came for me.

For me, my program is based on what is happening right now. I learned that projecting into the future or dwelling on the past would bring me feelings of impending doom, that I could not enjoy life if my mind was wandering off somewhere. My inventory and Fifth Step have helped me accept the past and my faith in a loving God who wants me to be free and gives me enough courage to face the future.

I have also learned that it not important to understand why I am an addict. Why I am an addict and how the program works to arrest my disease does not concern me, I am just grateful that it works. Even if I weren't an addict, I would choose the program over using because I'm the type of user who likes to consume as much dope as possible in as short a time as possible.

The program gave me hope. It gave people who were like me who could share their experience with me when I had a Problem. And being as they were recovering fiends like me, I can identify with them and respect them for what they are doing. I'm an egotistical sort of person, and I took the attitude that if anybody could do it, I could; and I am, a day at a time.

RECOVERY IS MY RESPONSIBILITY

Like most addicts that I have met, I did not begin my addiction with the intention of making myself sick, physically and morally. As I had done all my life, I was seeking escape from the stresses and demands of living. In later life, I called this "having fun." Any pressure was too much to bear; and as my illness progressed, I retreated into a world of isolation and chemicals.

During my childhood, I found escape in pretending games. I was not like I thought

my friends were, so I sought the changes that were necessary for me to be acceptable. I tried new clothes, different hair styles, even different sets of friends. I wanted to be liked. It never occurred to me that I must change inside. As I became older, my opportunities to alter my external environment expanded. I could change residences, find new jobs, get married or get divorced. I did all of these. No extreme was too far reaching.

My introduction to chemicals came in the middle 1960's during my teen years. Along with my friends, I partied on weekends, drinking alcohol at every opportunity or occasion. While everyone seemed to be enjoying the party, I was hiding in the ice chest. Later in life, I became the perfect hostess, fixing everyone's drink from the kitchen or bar. It was always "everyone else" and then there was me, with no connection. I drank more than I served, I am sure.

My senior year of high school found me experimenting with amphetamines. My consumption of alcohol had begun to affect my grades, as were the late night hours. I believed that by taking uppers, I could improve my study habits. I continued to believe this even as my grades plummeted. Graduation prevented my failing at school or my dropping out all together. I came to the graduation ceremony drunk, much to the chagrin and disgust of my family. I had become argumentative with everyone. I couldn't even stand myself.

Luring the next fourteen years, my life decayed tragically. I tried changing everything but myself. After I was married, I joined a church, which strongly suggested that its members refrain from drinking. I so wanted to be accepted, I did not drink for a year. I was at war with myself. I felt as I had as a child, that I was different. Try as I would, want as I would, I was not, could not be like, those good people at church. They did not understand me any better than I they. That I had decided to refrain from any drinking or drugs had nothing to do with my inability to handle them. Even abstaining from chemicals, I did not "fit." It was not a new hurt. I began drinking again, feeling guilty as I had never dreamed that I was capable of. Because I was a housewife and had no outside income, I padded the grocery bill in order to pay the liquor store and doctors and pharmacists. I felt myself clever indeed; and also I believed that I "fit" at last.

The delivery of my first child was a learning day for me. After I was admitted into the labor and delivery area of the hospital, I was given a shot for a relief of pain and anxiety. I was never to forget; and I suffered pain and/or anxiety for another twelve years. There was always a drug for a symptom; and I learned quickly how to manipulate one to acquire the other. My life became one of appointments to doctors' offices, lies to them and to myself, prescriptions and trips to the hospital. I had many surgeries that could have been and should have been avoided. Tragically enough, I often believed that I was sick.

A few weeks after the birth of my second son in 1970, I suffered a total collapse. I was given tranquilizers; and later hospitalized, where I received shock treatments, for God only knows what purpose. This first hospital stay set me on a road of psychiatrists, mental health centers, and sure, certain ruin, although my symptoms were clearly drug related, I was treated with the very drugs that were killing me.

I took depressants and became depressed. I took diet pills and mood elevators and became edgy and wouldn't eat. My behavior became manic-depressive when I took both; and I became psychotic when I added the drug, alcohol. I had odd notions about life and I hated myself. I loathed my own body. In the face of all of these bizarre "symptoms," I was hospitalized innumerable times, where medications (drugs) were administered indiscriminately. Eventually, as I moved into a drug culture, I learned to "play the game." Copping prescription drugs was far easier than hustling, and somehow more respectable.

My personal life was a shambles. I prostituted my mind and body. Nothing mattered. I wanted to die. During these years, my family tried to warn me of my warped state of mind, I still hung on to the belief that they didn't "understand." When I told my doctors of the conflicts at home, I was advised that in fact the family did not understand. I was given a prescription for yet another panacea, and I went on my way. In the end, the only people who had any time for me at all were the mental health professionals. I had an army of paid "friends."

I don't blame doctors, or anyone else, for my addiction, for my addictive personality is and has always been a part of me. Certain individuals in the mental health and medical health profession who should know better did contribute to my addiction and allowed it to continue. I know that recovery is my responsibility, with the help of God. I manipulated the medical profession; and not knowing what else to do, they obliged with prescriptions for symptoms, as they are so trained. I share this tragedy with too many. Ironically, it was a psychologist that guided me into N.A. and another 12-Step Program. She had given up on me; and as a last resort, insisted that I attend these meetings. I went and have been clean since May, 1980.

At that first meeting I was hugged and made welcome. I "fit". I cried and found the road to a happy recovery. My world expanded and I began to grow. I had been "looking for myself" inside of myself, and had found myself empty. Coming into the Twelve Steps of N.A., I have found happiness outside of "me." I have made the discovery that I must share so that I might keep anything at all, and that in the giving there is joy and satisfaction. I have learned that to be free, I must surrender; and that surrendering brings comfort. I have learned that it was, as much as drugs and alcohol, my total sense of "self" that was seducing me into death.

The greatest discovery for me this past 20 months is that there is a power in the universe, as I know as God, who loves me. If I am to be a part of this world, I must always be aware of my Creator. If I seek out His will for me and endeavor to carry out this will, my recovery is secure.

The growth that I have enjoyed has not been without pain. I am continually made aware of my own character defects, and as I become willing, I rejoice in letting them go, as I turned my addiction to narcotics over to God. Growing up at age 34 still baffles me, but now my tears mean something. I have comfort in my hurts and a solution to my problems, whatever they might be. I have, today, something that will last.

RELAPSE AND RETURN

My marriage was on the rocks. My wife had sworn out a warrant on assault charges and had confronted me about my addiction. Although I admitted it to her, I was not ready to accept it myself. She told my other family members I was addicted and asked me to accept help. I was not ready for help, but during the hearing she told the judge she would drop charges if I would agree to go into a treatment program. Needless to say, I was more willing to go to treatment than to jail, so I did--for all the wrong reasons.

While in treatment, I decided to listen to what they had to say. I was soon admitting my addiction but had difficulty embracing the concepts of a Higher Power. Because of a series of spiritual experiences, I finally began to accept the idea of God. This enabled me to become very involved in my treatment effort and I tried to put aside all outside problems, investing myself totally in my recovery.

Treatment went by quickly and I really believed I was equipped to go back into society and pick up where I left off. It only took three days for my security and confidence to be shaken. Three days after my discharge my wife entered treatment. In the beginning I was happy she was admitting her own addiction. Soon she was requesting that we have no contact and I resented that. I became jealous when she told me she had been advised to get rid of her problem and that I was it. The feelings of rejection were a deep kind of pain and I was resentful over not having been given my second chance to put my family back together. The pain was unbearable and the only way I remembered to relieve it was to return to my immediate reliever--drugs.

In much less time than I thought possible, the reality of progression of the disease, as I had been taught in treatment, came true. In a period of five months I lost my family, all my material possessions except the clothes on my back, my job and all of my friends, and most certainly any control over my drug usage. I had married again, was heavily in debt and resorted to something I had never done before--stealing. The bottom I had hit before treatment was really nothing compared to this. I felt alone and desperate. I realized that I was no longer comfortable with the drug life.

I isolated myself in my apartment and withdrew myself to be rid of the drugs in the physical-self. The mental craving was still there after withdrawal. I finally decided I couldn't make it by myself. I began to pray again and make conscious contact with the Higher Power. For the first time, I got honest about my powerlessness and reached out for help. I called old acquaintances in the Fellowship and asked for help in getting transportation to meetings.

In the beginning of my return to the Fellowship, only the body was present, but at least I had the willingness to get the body there. I felt so hopeless and helpless that I considered going into treatment again. After a lengthy conversation with a member of the Fellowship, (who told me I knew what to do), my mind finally caught up with my body and I began to work the Steps.

I went to every meeting available, each week, and soon I began to feel differently. I was aware of a sense of peace. Some of the fear left and for the most part I had been relieved of the craving. Although my material world was still non-existent, I began to distinguish my needs from my wants and got comfortable with what I didn't have. The Higher Power seemed to be taking care of business for me, and many of my problems disappeared or resolved themselves.

I became involved in the Fellowship, spending all my time with recovering addicts. I knew I was getting clean and that I wanted to be clean. I became aware of how people cared about me and that if I listened to them, God would speak to me through them. Without any effort on my part, my world began to fall into place. I was soon employed again, reconciled with my parents and sister and was able to cope with the outside world just as it was.

My feelings of gratitude spilled over. I finally felt I had something to share with other recovering addicts and I couldn't wait to give it away. I became heavily involved in Twelve Step work and returned to the treatment center, where it all began, to offer myself as a volunteer for anything they needed me for. I drove van loads of patients to meetings, shared with the patients about my experience, strength and hope and became willing to be God's instrument to speak to others in any way He chose.

My life has taken on new meaning and I am able today, with the help of the Higher Power, to feel feelings I never allowed my self to feel before. I am more confident, but I know it is God-confidence. I am more reliant, but I know it is God-reliance. I am more independent, but I know it is God-dependency. Today I am free to be exactly who I am because I know "whose" I am.

Recognizing my dependency on God as I understand Him, continuing to work the Steps of the Program and my sincere desire to give away what I have, I can truthfully say I am a Happy Drug Addict!

RESENTMENT AT THE WORLD

I had living problems before I ever started using drugs. At an early age, I developed a strong resentment against alcohol. I was hit by a car and the driver was drunk. Later I had resentments towards gays, after I was raped. I had resentments towards my parents after I found out that I was born illegitimate. By the age of 13, I hated almost everyone.

I also started using at that age. My first experience with drugs was smoking pot and drinking alcohol; it relieved me of all my pain. Although I did get sick, that didn't matter. I loved it anyway and I set out to find ways not to get sick. I didn't drink very much after that. I started getting in trouble at home and at school. I was blaming my troubles on authority. I started rebelling at school and I refused to communicate in any way with my father. Things just kept getting worse. If I didn't have pot, I felt very lonely and left out.

At about this time, I lost my ability to think clearly and as a result I got thrown off the football team. I became very resentful over this. I blamed it on one of my teammates because he told the coach I was smoking pot. At about this time my parents decided to move because of my reputation. They thought if I moved away, I would get better. This, of course, didn't work. Wherever I went, my disease went with me.

In the new town, I was introduced to harder drugs and I got into them because they got me further away from reality. I started using acid and speed heavily and I also started dealing. After a short time I was busted dealing in school and I was sent to jail. This was the first of many times to come. I was repeatedly getting busted in school, so as soon as I could, I quit.

After that, I hit the streets. I was dealing acid and using it very heavily. The progression of the disease set in. I kept getting locked up. I had no one and I would do anything to get my drugs.

As time went on, I just kept getting more into acid. Everyone told me I was living in a fantasy world and I was. I wouldn't look at reality at all. I had no time for it in my world. My spirituality had changed from Roman Catholic, to Satanism. I felt like I had no place in any kind of good world.

I had tried to stop using many times, but it never worked because I couldn't deal with the world. I started to try suicide about this time. I didn't feel I had any reason to live, but I was too afraid of death to kill myself. I felt totally insane after my last suicide attempt. I tried to kill my brother. At that time my mother threw me out. When I was packing to leave, it hit me that I was really sick and I asked to be committed to a mental institution. I saw a psychiatrist and he recommended a drug detox. I wanted help, so I went.

When I was in detox, I was introduced to Narcotics Anonymous and I finally felt like I fit in somewhere. They showed me the 12 Steps of recovery and told me if I used them I'd get better. Having been beaten enough, I admitted to the First Step and I felt relieved.

The second step was hard for me to do at first, but I used the group as the Power greater than myself. To believe in God, I had to pray for faith and shortly the belief came to me. At this time I took a Third Step, which I followed by a Fourth and Fifth Step. At that time I experienced a relief and freedom as I hadn't experienced anytime in life. I used the rest of the Steps to keep my life in order, and a sponsor helped me do the Steps.

Now I go to meetings at least 6 times a week. In meetings, I found I can share with other people involved with recovery. We have a common bond.

A few months ago, I went to my first service conference, which gave me the faith to start new meetings in the area I lived. At the time, we only had one meeting a week and now there are 7 meetings. Being involved in service makes me feel worthwhile.

My whole life has completely turned around. I can love and be loved. I'm able to help people now. God has done for me what I could never do for myself. I have found a new way of life in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

SICK AND TIRED AT EIGHTEEN

I started drinking and using drugs when I was 13. From that point on, my whole life revolved around drugs and the people I used with. I went to any lengths to use. I slept with men for drugs, stole from my family and friends, lied to and conned everyone and anyone I could. Within a year, I was a prostitute.

At sixteen, I got married. We went to New York, to San Francisco and to Maine, but no geographics worked. Things only got progressively worse. My husband and I split up after ten months--he didn't want to use.

The next year of my life revolved around a series of bad relationships and a lot of drugs. I became a junkie. I used everything I could beg, borrow, or steal in one day; sometimes it was a lot, sometimes, it was nothing. I was deep into using and soon found myself deep into a new relationship. This is when my using was at its worst. We tried to clean up time after time, with no success. We got arrested a lot. He was doing burglaries and robberies, and when he was out, I was turning tricks and getting loaded. He was shot and killed. All my friends were either dead or in jail. I was completely alone. I was still seventeen, and had been getting released to my father every time I was arrested. My last arrest was one week before my eighteenth birthday. My family didn't want anything to do with me any more. I had nothing and no one left.

I hated myself for what I had become. I had attempted suicide, and even that didn't work. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired. I wanted to die. I wanted to live, I couldn't seem to do either.

I was on an outpatient program, and my probation officer sent me to N.A. with a court card. I started with one meeting a week, and went to five, after four "dirty" tests.

My probation officer wanted me to make it. She was on another "anonymous" program, and she had the faith that I didn't have. I remember how hard it was to stay clean. I had the "I wanna-want-to's."

I continued to associate with people who were using. I was still dealing pharmaceuticals, because I had the idea that heroin was my problem. I didn't use the pills, but the dealing put me in the position to be around heroin--and I still didn't know why I couldn't stay clean.

Eventually, I succeeded in staying clean for about eighty days. I had been in a bar, dealing again, and found myself loaded again. I sat there with my head on my chest, knowing this just wasn't any good any more. Nothing had changed out there.

Something had happened; I had finally hit that "bottom" I had heard so much about. I just couldn't do it any more. The next morning, I surrendered, totally with no reservations.

Shortly after that, I ran into an old connection at a meeting. She had about nine months of clean time. She gave me a lot of hope, she became my friend, she gave me love. I got a sponsor and followed directions. We went to two, three, and sometimes four meetings every day for my first six months. I started working, and continued to go to at least one meeting a day. I was the secretary of two N.A. meetings, and the G.S.R. of another. I took people to meetings, and got involved with the people in recovery houses. I made the Program my life.

It hasn't been all easy for me, since I've been here. There had been some real hard times. I wasn't one of those people who walked in the doors of N.A., and the obsession was immediately removed. I can remember sitting in my bath tub once, (it seemed like forever,) because it was all I could do to keep from getting loaded. I prayed for the obsession to be removed. I kept telling myself, "Just for today, I won't get loaded, this too shall pass, just for today, just for today..." It passed.

After a year clean, I lost my job, my roommate, my car, and my apartment, all in one week. I had the faith that God wasn't going to bring me that far just to drop me. God won't give me more than I can handle. I believed that anything taken away would be replaced by something better. They were.

The Fellowship has never failed to give me the support I've needed, even if it meant a phone call at 3:00 a.m. They've always been there for me. You keep what you have by giving it away, so I've been there for others too.

I work the Steps and use the principles of this Program in all my affairs. They work. I know that the Steps will work on anything. All of my experiences just reinforce that. Turning my will and my life over to the care of God today gives me such peace inside. Watching how the Steps work in my life, and watching someone I knew when they first came in grow into a beautiful individual is such a good feeling. Passing down what was given to me, and watching them pass it along is great. The love and caring in this Program is something that you will never find anywhere else, one addict helping another addict.

I have learned to live life on life's terms. Through the meetings, the fellowship, and the Steps, I have learned how to accept myself, and even love myself. I continually grow through this Program. I have found a Power greater than myself who is a loving God, not the punishing God that I grew up with. I have faith today. Complete faith that "my" God is taking care of me. All of my life I sought answers through my adventures, I finally found peace from within.

I no longer have to feel that total pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization. I never have to hate myself, or be alone and unwanted. Today I enjoy my life: program functions, picnics, parties, dances, campouts, and conventions. I have outside interests I never dreamed I'd be doing, skiing, raquetball, and horseback riding. I have a good job doing what I want to do. I go to school and do well.

I drive the car I always dreamed of owning. Things are good in my life today. My worst day clean is always better than my best day using. I'm 23 years old and I'll have 5 years of clean time this December. I found that it really isn't what we used, how much we used, or how long we used that gets us here. It's the feeling, the hopelessness and helplessness we felt. The Third tradition states: "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using." People loved me into this Program. They held my hand and told me it was okay, and they gave me that hard love of telling me to sit down, shut up, and listen when I needed that too. Narcotics Anonymous is a way of life for me today. I wouldn't give it up for anything, for without it I'd have nothing. Narcotics Anonymous gave me back my life, and for this I am eternally grateful.

SURRENLEREL

Hi folks! I'm powerless over alcohol and drugs. I am from the average middle class family, but I was different from my sister and brother. I was always a lot more sensitive and rebellious, this was noticed at an early age. I was the shy withdrawn one.

We moved around a bit. I was born in North Carolina and at the age of five we moved to South Carolina. We finally settled in Savannah, Georgia for several years. I did the biggest part of my so called "growing up" there. At the age of 12 or 13 my rebelliousness really started to come out in subtle ways--I was mainly rejecting the family. At 14 or 15 I started to learn about drugs--a girl friend and I were very curious. We started experimenting with some over the counter drugs. In 1968 the family moved to Columbia, S.C. In between the time I learned we were moving and we actually moved, I made three attempts on my life--the last one was the closest--this was the self-destructiveness finally coming out and it stayed out for a long time.

Well we moved--and things were alright for a while. I eventually found the drugs again just like an addict and it was downhill from there. In a short time, I was in deep. I would do anything I had to get what I wanted. As time went on, I wanted to die but I was too scared to. I thought I was crazy and getting worse. My parents and a doctor had tried to put me in the psychiatric ward of a hospital but I had resisted very strongly. I was kicked out of the house as the family could no longer cope with my escapades. I had tried in the past to stop using drugs, but to no avail. It finally hit the point that I was contemplating suicide again. What happened for me, is that during this time of wanting out, but not knowing how, I met some other people who were where I was. We all pulled together and helped each other.

During this time of not using drugs, a lot of things went on. I was drinking heavily off and on, there was no program that I was aware of. I also got married during this time; however, after the marriage started falling apart, five years later, --the inevitable happened. I crossed that invisible line between social and alcoholic drinking. Thank God I didn't have to stay there for years, as I would have died if I went much longer. I had a very close friend who was in a Twelve Step Fellowship. She very patiently worked with me for four and a half months before I finally became clean. Things got better for me and everything was going as to be expected. At

about four months clean, I hit a bad depression that went on for a month before I would reach out for help. The person I reached out to told me to meet them in Atlanta for the Ninth World Convention of Narcotics Anonymous. I was five months clean at the time. I found an identity factor that I needed very badly at that time. I kept coming back to Atlanta a lot because of the N. A. Program. I attempted to get an N. A. Group going in Columbia. Finally in 1979, I surrendered and moved to Atlanta.

The N. A. Program helped give me back my life, the identity factor that I couldn't find before, a reason to keep the recovery I was fighting to hang on to. I have found love and caring enough to slowly teach me that it's alright to return it. For years, I had been searching for what I have found here. My Higher Power led me here and I know he has plans for me even though I don't know what. This Program of N. A. has truly helped in my Recovery. I don't know that I can ever repay, but I'm willing to do what I can to help the still suffering addict. Thanks N. A.

PART OF THE SOLUTION

What it used to be like: Living on a farm as a child I felt inferior and was shy around other people. I was full of fear and became angry when things didn't go my way. This behavior continued during my adolescent years.

When I was 21 years old I married and still continued to try and change reality, wanting everyone to agree with me, thinking I was right and reacting with temper tantrums when people disagreed with me.

I became a mother of three children. With my first child I still felt in control, with my second I became overwhelmed, my third I felt desperate. I wanted somebody to take care of me rather than me taking care of others and being responsible as a mother frightened me. Wanting to be perfect made me feel more scared and angry.

One day my husband went to our minister hoping something could be done for me since I was so angry towards him and life in general. The minister didn't feel he could help me, so they found a psychologist in a city 200 miles from me to drive to and from for a weekly appointment. It was at this time a mild tranquilizer was prescribed for me by a doctor who was a friend of the psychologist. The psychologist was kind and tried to be helpful, thinking seeing him and taking medication would help me with my anger. Hopefully, I would start coping with reality better. It wasn't long until the psychologist thought I would be better if I were put on a different tranquilizer, so with the help of the doctor, my prescription was changed.

Still the results were not being seen in a change of attitude by me, so it was decided that our family should move to the city where the psychologist lived and this would solve our marital problems caused by my anger.

It was very early in my pill popping that I became dependent on them, thinking that I could not exist without their help.

We continued to move as my husband's jobs changed, living in the Midwest and even eventually I remember sitting in a rocking chair and the thought of suicide crossed my mind, yet I told myself my life wasn't that unmanageable. Today I believe that may have been when I crossed from dependency to addiction.

Continuing to use, abuse and overdosing my pills, I ended up in the hospital on the pshyc-ward. It was at this time the need for a psychiatrist to visit me in the hospital to help me with my problems became apparent. The psychiatrist came in and told me, "you don't like yourself very well, do you?" I said, "You aren't telling me anything I don't know." I left the hospital in a few days, came home with the understanding that I would see the psychiatrist weekly.

I would go to the psychiatrist's office and things didn't seem to get any better, being fearful he would take my prescriptions for my pills away from me because I was not taking them as prescribed.

Chaning my prescription from one brand of pills to another brand didn't seem to help. When I didn't have enough tranquilizers to take I would take the anti-depressants. I expected the pills to be a miracle cure for reality.

I went to great lengths to get attention during my addiction. One day I turned on the gas before my husband came home, making sure I turned it off before he came in the door, thinking he would be alarmed and caring what happened to me. He was alarmed and decided with the help of the minister and psychiatrist that I needed to go to the hospital for more help. I knew from past experience that psych-wards didn't seem to help me with my mental problems.

Things calmed down for a while with me changing brands again and seeing the psychiatrist to renew my prescription. In the meantime, I was visiting a social worker telling her when I was on one of the tranquilizers, taking it as prescribed, making the world OK, "I wonder why everybody wasn't taking this type of drug." Approximately 6 weeks later, the effects of the pills wore off and I began abusing them.

When the tranquilizers were running low, I'd overdose the anti-depressants and toss and turn in bed feeling terrible but still using, abusing and overdosing them. One night after taking several anti-depressants, I ended up in the hospital on the cardiac ward lying to the nurses which pills I had taken and being told that I, "should feel lucky to be going home so soon." However, I didn't feel lucky or care about living.

I was a pill counter, making sure I had enough for my drug of choice, tranquilizers. left in my cupboard, thinking this was the way to face reality - taking pills each day.

One evening dissolving 50 asprins in a glass of water, drinking it until my ears rang, then dumping the rest of it out, did cause attention to be focussed on me in a negative manner.

Eventually, my husband and I parted and I remarried. Less than a month into my second marriage I became angry, stood at the kitchen sink, pills in my hand,

thinking I have no reason to take them, swallowing the handful anyway. After sharing with my husband what I had done, he suggested I call a mutual friend we had in the other Fellowship. She shared with me I had a pill problem. It was revealed to me that I had a problem with tranquilizers.

I went to open meetings of the other Fellowship and sat back not wanting to level my pride and identify myself as a drug addict at N. A. or the other Fellowship.

After not being able to stay away from abusing pills from the medicine chest, and after my friend moved to another city, it became apparent if I wanted to live mind-altering drug free, I had to go to meetings and admit I was a drug addict.

When I started going to N. A. after 5 months of living drug-free, the obsession was lifted from me and a burning desire was given to me to stop using. I would look myself in the mirror and say out loud, "you are a drug addict," and between my first and second year, I was able to admit to my innermost self that all pills were a problem for me and not a select group.

The first half of the first step is the only part of the Twelve Steps I can work perfectly a-day-at-a-time. Today a free gift has been given to me that I am powerless over all mind-altering drugs.

For years, my pills were a power greater than myself. I took them for the effect they produced. Today, because of the grace of God, I have been restored to sanity. The insanity of the second step is the thinking that precedes the first fix, pill or drink.

My life is made up of daily situations which if I want to live a life of peace and serenity, I turn over to the care of God as I understand him. Being willing to do this has made my life more manageable for I am letting to of my own self-will run riot. Turning things over to a Higher Power who cares helps me with my faith and trust that there is a divine plan for my life. There is an acceptable place for me in society and the Program. I have taken this Step with another human being.

When I wrote my inventory, it was suggested that I write about my anger, my fear and my guilt. I wrote it as an autobiography, starting as far back as I could remember, before I started school as a child up to my time when I came off the drugs. I named the names of the people I resented, remembering I was taking my own inventory and not others.

The Fifth Step I took with my first sponsor. With her, I shared the dark side of my life and eventually relief and freedom have come into my life. My understanding is if I share the wrongs I have done then the good spiritual feelings will automatically become a part of my life.

The Sixth Step reminds me to become entirely ready to become honest, open-minded and willing to have my defects of character removed. I listed my defects in my inventory I wrote down and that in time more have been revealed to me a-day-at-a-time.

Through working the 12 Steps, the obsession and compulsion to use will be removed. Having my shortcomings removed is a goal to strive for the rest of my days. It's been shared that the 6th and 7th Steps are often the forgotten Steps of the Program. I ask each day today to have my anger removed from my life.

I made a list of the people I had harmed and have made direct amends to those I have, which includes my children. Each day, I don't use I am making amends in kind to my Higher Power, myself and society.

Today, I spot check myself when I'm off the spiritual beam and share my resentments with another human being so it will be cut in half.

Each day, I say "please" in the morning and "thank you" at night. It has been shared that those who sincerely say "please" (and if you don't think of it in the morning, say it when you think of it) won't go back to using. When I heard this, I started making a business each day of saying "Please." I read literature from both Fellowships and go to a Step meeting to help me to grow spiritually.

My way of living before I was an addict and after I became one didn't work, so I have had to work the Steps and try to practice them in my daily living so I can become useful and whole. Today I'm grateful to be part of the solution, rather than the problem.

TODAY I LIVE

I was born, got older without growing up and found out I was a dope friend. I enjoyed the woods as a child. Trees and vines, mysterious creeks and lakes fascinated me. I spent a lot of time alone. My family moved closer to the city, with less woods. I spent more time around people, without social skills equal to my age. I was forced to make my way the best I could. My first regular use of a substance to change my mood was homemade raisen jack wine, which I made myself on my window sill as a teenager.

I left home nine times between my 13th and 18th year. I was always good about acting at my fantasies. As I got older, it was increasingly apparent to me that whatever the world and life was about, either no one knew or they weren't telling. I saw people working without happiness, raising children without believing in life and the whole world driven by a "donkey chasing the carrot" inertia. When I was fifteen, I became Atlanta's youngest beatnik. The next four years of my life was centered around coffee houses in Atlanta and Miami. I read Jack Kerouac's On the Road and then went out and did all he had covered. I studied and painfully learned to play the guitar from the folksingers. My ghgh school principle told me I should be a writer and should go and join a Beatnik Colony for a couple of years to learn the arts. The coffee houses constituted my best colony. I could listen to the writers for hours, painters and musicians, drinking in the words. My first love was with a lady from the coffee houses and I spent the next day high on dexadrine listening to Stardust and Lreaming.

By eighteen, I had left home for good and lived in an old Baltimore Row house in

Atlanta called the "Baltimore Block." I was into painting, but it was the people I loved, people who seemed to be mysteriously in touch with what was happening. Peyote was my first major drug experience. We had been drinking a lot, but after nine months of living on the Block; a load of peyote came in from Texas. I had been hitching rides to high school, and painting signs to support myself in the evenings. My friends and I would stay up all night talking of many things. I'll say one thing for the "beats;" they didn't approve of my excessive drinking. The peyote opened the magic door for me. I remember in the gray light of the morning saying to a friend that I'd learned all that dope could teach me that night. Unfortunately, dope was seemingly the only medium for getting more of what I needed. I kept using on an ascending scale for the next seven years. A few weeks after the peyote, I sat on the window sill of my "beat" apartment and looked over the city. I thought to myself that I should travel and try to find some answers before I began to commit myself to any particular way of life. I went on the road for the first time. First to Lurham, N.C., then to Miami, Fla. In Miami, I lived on the coffee houses for nine months. I slept all day and stayed up all night. It was like being in heaven for awhile. I learned a lot, but finally, one night as I was taking a shower, I had this feeling of uselessness sweep over me. I was desperate to get my life moving again. I had stayed on the scene long enough to see the faces of the older guys coping buzzes off the vitality of the young. Their emptiness frightened me.

I returned home to Atlanta and got my high school diploma in a fine evening school and got accepted into college. I also got married for the first time. It was so hard being a square, but at least it was different. After awhile I got on a two week acid trip, and it broke up my marriage which had reached the stage of resignation. I kept on with college and wound up marrying the beatnik lady I'd first been with seven years ago. She was older and taught me a lot about living. She would get nervous and start crying if I so much as drank a beer. Her father had died of alcoholism. I didn't drink for about a year, but we smoked pot regularly. I was such a mess, she finally got rid of me. All along, my drug taking had been steadily increasing. I had experienced my first failures; failing high school and two marriages. The false feeling of importance and the lie of the high increased as time wore on. College speed to cram for exams spilled over into the rest of the quarter.

By 1968 I was using constantly. I didn't know anyone who was not high all the time. I got used to being on acid constantly with occasional speed. I used interpreters when I had to talk with straight people. I bought a two-hundred dollar pound of horse manure and smoked it two days before one of my less high friends got suspicious. He tried to get back the ounces I had sold my friends and they told me it was good stuff! Dig it.

I had a bad motorcycle wreck on the way to college one day and it effectively cut my college career short. I tried one horrible night to go back to classes after being laid up for a month but it was awful. I couldn't understand a thing they were saying - I never went back after that. This left more time to use, and finally I was just so weird, we beat up a guy who ripped us off for a fronted few pounds of

marijuana. I felt like an actor in a second rate movie. I got out of dealing by waiting until one day when all my connections happened to be in the same room. I introduced them to one another and told them I was out. As far as I know, no one ever called me a narc. I began to shoot a lot of chrystal methedrine. I was supposed to deal it, and everytime I ran out, this guy would front me some more. I shot it all day long as much as I could with an unlimited supply. After a few months, I would pass out on my bed and have visions. I took baths so hot my skin peeled. Sometimes during the visions, my whole body would buzz, and I would try to get up but my body was asleep. My mind felt totally awake, and I would have to wait and relax so I could go back to sleep and wake up .. I encountered ghosts which tried to take over my body and poltergeists. I called friends and had them exorsize the place one night. Eventually, the guy got tired of fronting me the speed and I had to move on. I lived with a gay guy until I finally got sick of the whole thing. I got the word that my best girlfriend ever had died of a heroin overdose in California. I cried and cried. I went from really feeling like I had it made to being totally burnt out in a flash. My innuendoes were not funny anymore. I could not reach normal ever. The death of the girl and seeing my beautiful friends fall apart and the growing suspicion that I didn't have it together anymore sank in. I felt betrayed and desperate. I had been an acid messiah for quite some time and had enormous blocks to admitting I had a drug problem. The pain of using grew, and I became angry at the dope on a deep level. I would try to use but each time was worse than the last. After a time, I called my parents to take me in. I remember telling my mom that I was sorry- that I had not meant to turn out to be such a mess. I laid low for a time until a friend came into town that I had gone to Old Mexico with when we were sixteen. We went out west for three months. We slept in the car and hit every town from Texas to San Francisco to Los Angeles. I visited a therapeutic community for recovery in Oakland and had at least an idea that people like me could get better. When I got back to Atlanta, I immediately got involved with some community service projects on the Strip between 10th and 14th streets in Atlanta. We helped people get jobs, took a street stand against dope and got medical attention for those we could. I could think and feel as well as I can now, but I would lose track of what I was saying, and I became fond of short sentences. My feeling drew comfort from the work I was doing helping others. My spirit stayed restless, especially at the puniness of our efforts against a problem which grew in size and complexity among the total population and was enhanced by the cultural upheaval in America. Still, we helped some and that helped wipe out some of the guilt we had from helping bring about the situation. Eventually, I married again for awhile. The Strip died and I moved on. I was feeling a lot better, but I still sought some solution for my addiction and something that would help others without letting them down. I first sought help from Narcotics Anonymous at this time. After great effort and some luck, I got hold of some N. A. literature and we held four weekly meetings. They didn't take it. After another marriage, I went to another 12 Step Program for help. My drinking now qualified me, and I didn't know where else to turn. A month later, a group of addicts seeking recovery formed a meeting of N. A. which I reluctantly attended. I got plenty of help from another 12 Step Program but most of them thought I was weird. I was. They knew I was sincere and never turned me away. I began working the Steps. Every time I got too comfortable, I would feel my addiction creeping up on me. I went to more than seven meetings a week for years. After about a year another N. A. group got started. Every time a new N. A. meeting was

started, I would attend it regularly. The groups' dynamics and growth problems were as nothing to me. It irritated me that some of us would even take them seriously. After all, we were clean, growing and increasingly free from the wreckage of our active addiction. Each series of mistakes led to a series of solutions. After three years, our groups had grown to seven a week, and I stopped going to the other 12 Step Program's meetings. I got very curious about N. A. as a whole. After lots of phone calls and letters, I felt driven to attend the 7th World Convention of N. A. in San Francisco. I wanted to know who was working on our book and what, if anything, we could do to help from Atlanta. I met some old-timers and stuck like glue. I asked a thousand questions and they graciously answered each one. I wound up in Los Angeles attending some of the original N. A. meetings and our World Service Office for the time. They made me feel very welcome, but I found there was no one working on a book for N. A.. I knew from my own experience that N. A. was a viable program of recovery in its own right. I knew from my beatnik experience that books were things which yielded to hard work over a sufficient period of time. I was outraged that such a basic task had not yet been undertaken even though some had tried. I knew N. A. had a strong spoken tradition and that writing it down was the place to begin. As material piled up, it could be arranged into a comprehensible whole and the rest would be finishing touches. With a lot of prayer and encouragement from Californians that I was not letting self-will run riot, I did what I could. After a few years no one said addicts in recovery can't write any more. My own recovery has seen great moments of suffering and joy, but I have never been alone. The last time I was alone, I was nine months clean and thinking about surrender. I knew a lot of the N. A. people had terrible, embarrassing problems and surrender to me meant to be a part of them all. I had to accept them all as members, totally without reservation. Then I thought, I'm really no better, and I surrendered. I felt the release from bondage of self. After that, I was willing to do whatever I could to help N. A. grow and spread. It was my Program. If someone criticized N. A., I felt it, and I learned to take up for the Program and myself. The Program is a set of Steps and Traditions which work for every sort of addiction if there aren't other non-addictive disorders and if an addict applies himself without using. I learned that it was OK to feel this way. My involvement with the literature made me think about the Program differently. As someone said, "it's hard to write down cobwebs." There are so many beautiful addicts living clean and helping others to find a way out of their addictions. Their bravery and spirit keep me out of self-pity and preoccupation with my self. I have been guided in my Steps by many members. Prayer has become a real action to me. Conscious contact has become continuous. I have seen many tragedies of ignorance and many glories of trust and faith. I have attended funerals of those who couldn't hear our message of hope and been present when seventy-five addicts wrote our book. Today, I can see miracles everywhere I look. I can love and be loved. I never feel alone, and I have hope for the future. Never in my wildest dreams did I figure on such lasting happiness not attached to outcomes or dependent on selfish desires.

I have found that when I keep my home group or some individual member such as my sponsor informed of my living situations, they can't get very big before something is done to keep them from getting bigger. If I cut myself off from this function of the group, my problems could get so big in my head that I would be unable

to share them or ask for help.

Today, I have problems with my marriage, my work and other areas of my life. Through applying what I have been able to learn so far from the Program of N. A., none of these concerns have the power over me that they once had. I can apply myself and expect improvement. I have great faith that the God of my understanding is protecting me and what I used to see as overwhelming difficulties are only the means to greater happiness. Recovery has improved my sense of pain to where I can ask for help and stop doing the things that cause me physical, mental or spiritual pain. The Program does not ask me to tolerate the intolerable.

THE WAR IS OVER

For me, it all started a long time ago. I was an abuser and user, and 17 years old. I got kicked out of my folks' house and I was staying with my brother. I was going nowhere in a hurry. So, I did what all American kids do, I joined the service. From the first day in, I felt different even though we all dressed alike and walked alike. I went Gung-Ho and all that there was to do, I did. I made squad leader in basic training; and went to Jump school. While there, I trained to be an Airborne Ranger. It was 1968, and when I finished I got orders to Vietnam. I wasn't scared, as I was a part of "America's Finest." I had a cause and a reason to live. I believed I was protecting my country, but after being there, I soon forgot that belief. It was not like on T.V. I felt fear. Raw-gut fear. People all around me were dying, so I was scared and lonely. I wouldn't make friends because the next day they would be dead or wounded. One day a guy said, "Here, try this, it's a cigarette with heroin in it." I never wanted to do heroin because I saw junkies in the States, and I disliked them. I like downers, speed and booze.

After that introduction, I found a new friend. It replaced my parents, girlfriend and buddies. It never let me down. I used on a daily basis and loved it. The Army gave us downers and speed, I was soon caught up in the insanity. I no longer cared about living, in fact, I had a death wish. I volunteered for all High Risk missions, I thought that if I came home a hero, dead in a box, I would show my family that I was somebody.

I remember asking God to watch over "the kid" one day. I don't know why. I was in Vietnam 28 months when I had a nervous breakdown and was sent home. One day I was in South East Asia, 23 hours later I was in California. I didn't know how to act.

I was sent to Alaska, 60 below zero, after being in Vietnam, 115 degrees.

Well, the Army there was different. I was an Artic-Airborne Ranger, 22 years old, scared and different. The Vietnam experiences that I had glorified in my mind were sickening to the men in the unit. They couldn't relate or understand, I was a baby killer and a drug crazed animal. That hurt my pride and ego. I got no "Hero's welcome" and I wasn't crippled. I wanted to lose an arm or a leg because all my friends in Nam had. I was "odd man" again.

I took to drinking heavily. The career men hated me, and my peer group resented my authority. I was an E-5 Sarge, so I drank alone and used alone. The town people disliked the servicemen and I wanted to die. I fought for 28 months for them to remain free and safe and they treated me like a dog.

I got busted and went to Washington and learned brick-laying. A marketable skill was the answer, as I had to deal drugs to live. On the construction site, there was as much drugs and alcohol as in the streets, so I was off and running. I never knew there was another way of life. I thought this is me. I didn't want to live, but God saw fit that I get a break.

I was busted again and sent to a drug program for a year. When I got out I had no outside support. I believe "An addict alone is in bad company."

My bubble burst and I was using harder than ever. I was ready to kill myself. I had an M-2 Automatic weapon and a voice in my head said, "Call for help. You deserve to live, you are worth it." I thought, who should I call? The army caused my problem, so I thought, and I called their hospital. A man on the program said "God loves you and so do I." In all the years of my life I never heard that before. No one ever said: "I love you, your life is worth living, you are somebody." I went into their program which is N.A. oriented. I learned that all Vets have the same problem. It wasn't the service that was at fault, but dealing with life on life's terms was my problem. I found out about myself and that I wasn't alone anymore.

At meetings, there were people just like me. It wasn't easy, but I went to meetings there and listened. I used to think I had all the answers, but today I am glad that I don't. N.A. taught me a new lifestyle. How to love myself and how to feel love. I owe all the gifts that I have received to this Program and to God. Today, I can be responsible and productive. I am forever grateful; I used to hear bells ring in my head and have nightmares that would keep me awake. I was very anti-social. I had an attitude of, "who cares."

Today, I know someone cares for me. I work the Steps and I have become a part of the N.A. Program. I used to be a taker, I have learned that I can now be as much, a giver. That's what is in this program for me now. It hasn't been all "hearts and flowers" for me, and to tell the truth, if it was, I probably wouldn't want it. TOLAY THE WAR IS OVER.

WHY ME? WHY NOT ME?

My god, what am I doing here? Why am I in so much trouble? What am I going to do? Nothing had gone right for me in such a long time. Was I going crazy? Was there no hope for me in this horrible existence I called life? The only words I could describe my life with at this time are fearful, desperate, aimless, and hopeless.

As I thought of my past with remorse and disgust, I tried to think of anything I had done or accomplished which was positive in any way. I had three beautiful children, a wife, two cars, a new house, and a good job. However, I could not think of a

single thing in my life to be grateful for. I felt as though I was a complete failure, with nothing left to live for.

For the past fourteen years, I had been drinking heavily, and had experienced numerous consequences due to drinking, but I thought that was part of the game of being a responsible adult. I never liked responsibility, and made it a point to avoid it whenever possible.

I was introduced to narcotics completely by accident. The accident was due to my drinking at 7:00 am, while driving. I suffered a broken neck in a head-on collision, and was taken to the hospital. I learned to enjoy the life of being waited on and having no responsibility. This was exactly what I thought I had been looking for; soap, operas and narcotics. I recall the hospital staff telling me I was an excellent patient. With all this encouragement, I devised many lies and cons to ensure a lengthy stay at their wonderful institution. Little did I know that I was setting a pattern of thinking that was to last many years, and that would be a very destructive force to my family and lifestyle.

After being released from the hospital, I returned to alcohol. I thought I missed all the benefits of having a good time, so I went after all the gusto I could handle; the countless days and nights I spent praying to the porcelain alter, the smashed fingers in car doors, the fights with my wife and family. All this, just to escape responsibility. As I continued to become more insecure with my actions and attitudes, I went even deeper into the bottle. I felt as though there was something horrible always ready to happen to me.

I was seemingly satisfied with my alcohol use, and only occasionally thought of drugs. I still thought about the wonderful treatment I had received at the hospital, and occasionally fantasized myself back there being a wonderful patient. For a period of six years, I had been unable to laugh and enjoy living. I was just a miserable human shell. My attitudes were negative, and I had started to suffer physically, acting out my fantasies, and looking for sympathy.

Recalling the thought of my treatment in the hospitals, I was impelled to seek medical help for my ailments. I had developed stomach ulcers, due to what I thought was a bad diet and a very demanding job. I had begun to have problems with my knees, because I seemed to fall down a lot. After playing a good con on the doctor, I was finally hospitalized for tests. This was the beginning of the end. I had been able to convince the doctors that I was suffering from incurable and painful diseases. When I was released from the hospital, I was given scripts for various kinds of narcotics and downers to help me eliminate my suffering. I continued drinking alcohol while taking my drugs. I became such an excellent patient, that I was hospitalized twenty-three times in four years. Luring this time, I had surgery after surgery - even to the point of having my stomach removed. All just to insure my drug supply.

I was becoming a physical, mental, and spiritual mess. The constant conflict inside of myself was more than I could deal with. With an ever increasing amount of narcotics, I was able to function as a human being. I would even convince my children to watch their dad use a needle with his medicine, so that they would

not fear the needle when it was their turn to get medicine.

In the fall of 1979, I had an accident at work, where my hand was caught in a machine. As it happened, I looked at the machine operator and told him, "It's a good thing I'm on drugs, or I'd be very mad." Nothing that was happening to me made any difference, as long as I was taking my medicine. I had no idea that I might have a problem with drugs. Many times, I thought I may be taking too many, but I never thought I would have any problem quitting whenever the pain was gone.

I was getting drugs from the drugstore, (writing my own scripts), at an alarming rate. It was quite a job to record and keep track of all the drugstores I'd used every day. There were times when I'd wish I would get caught, just so I could end the existence I was experiencing. Three days after my discharge from the hospital from my accident at work, my wish came true. In desperation, I tried to pass a bad script, which I had written with my hand in a cast. I can't describe the fear I felt when the druggist made her phone call. Before I knew what was happening, I was in serious trouble.

I considered running, suicide, insanity, anything to help me get out of this jam I was in. I recall the thoughts I had as I was talking to the police. They were the same thought I'd had many times before. Perhaps I could act very innocent and naive, after all, this was my first offense. I made a plea to see my doctor. The police would see I was terrified, and hurting as any drug addict hurts when he can't get drugs. I was told to see the doctor and get help. I instantly thought that I was going to get over on the law, if they saw I was serious about getting help.

Through the doctor and other friends, I was sent to a drug rehabilitation center, back in my home state. This was going to be my ticket out of trouble. I just had to comply with their program, and that's all the law would need to drop charges against me.

I went into the rehab, knowing that I took too many drugs. While I was doing my time, I was asked questions like; "Do you think you are an addict? Do you think you may have a problem with alcohol? How do you deal with anger?" I answered these questions with; "possibly, no, I've never been angry a day in my life." I knew I was in trouble when they diagnosed me as a pathological liar.

I had many problems facing me when I got out of rehab. The law didn't go away, my wife was very bitter about the fact that I could do anything like that all, my job was on the line because of my inability to function at work, and I didn't have very much money to pay the bills I had incurred.

Many things were happening to me, and I didn't know what to do. The rehab gave me the tools and knowledge of drug addiction, but I needed something to give me the tools I needed for my inability to cope with the things happening to me in my life.

One of the things I was told to do in the rehab was to go to N. A. meetings. Ninety meetings in ninety days. I didn't know what to expect, but I would try them anyway. What did I have to lose? The court also gave me their version of an aftercare plan.

It was attend a meeting every day for three-hundred sixty-five days. It was easy to comply with their plan. If I didn't, I was to go to jail for seven to ten years.

I was resigned to the fact that I was going to be going to meetings for a while, so I "may as well make the best of them." I did the things that were suggested to me. Now, I was going to be clean and serene. WRONG. Thank God I stayed clean, but in the last two years, serenity has been interrupted on many occasions.

After one year clean, my wife just couldn't understand why I was still going to meetings every day, and leaving her and the children alone so much. When I told her that I now planned to attend meetings of Narcotics Anonymous, even after my sentence was fulfilled, she just went absolutely off center with making sure I knew she didn't like that at all. I had picked a sponsor by now, and I was constantly crying to him with my problems. He told me to say the Serenity Prayer. I couldn't believe he would tell me something so idiotic. How could that help my situation? I was being very negative in all situations in my life. I was told to work the Steps of Recovery in N. A. One thing I had not done was to come to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. I had known all along that I was powerless over my addiction, and that my life was unmanageable, but I just didn't have the faith I needed to be restored.

The next few months were very tough for me. I got divorced. When I was able to look at the entire scope of my relationship with my wife, I found that we were married for all the wrong reasons. I had never known what love or true caring was all about. I was totally selfish in every relationship I had ever been in.

I was hurt. My ego had been crushed. I was humiliated. I have come to believe that humiliation is nothing more than being humbled against my own will. With this major trauma in my life, I found a Power greater than myself. I found through the Fellowship of N. A. that I could either be very miserable with my situation, or I could accept it and carry on. All these words still didn't stop the hurt. What finally did stop the hurt and pain I was feeling was the suggestion I took to get active in the Fellowship of N. A. Starting with picking up ash trays until now, where I have been able to serve the people that have saved my life in various ways.

One thing that was given to me from the beginning was, "Keep coming back--it works." Thank God for N. A.

Since that time, I have tried to be a little more caring and loving when I deal with people. The first relationship I had with another addict made me see even more how much of my pride, ego, self-centeredness, and lack of faith I still have. The program of N. A. is a new way of life for me, and it is taking me a long time to learn how to live. When I find myself thinking my old ways, I'm in trouble. You see, I'm as close to death as the person coming off the street, clean just one day. All I have to do is take any form of drug, and I'm dead.

Today, I am experiencing a freedom I have never had. This freedom is the idea that no matter what happens to me today, God and I can handle it, if I don't use drugs. Sometimes I still want to be a little crazy, (especially where women are

concerned), but it is getting better.

WHY ME? BECAUSE I'M AN ADDICT, AND GOD HAS BEEN
VERY VERY GOOD TO ME.

WHY NOT ME? BECAUSE THE LARGEST ROOM IN THE WORLD IS
THE ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.

UNMANAGEABLE

We are the same people cut from the same cut-of-cloth. I am a person who did a lot of time. I started drinking at first. I remember getting drunk at the age of fifteen and falling across the grass and knocking my front tooth out by the sidewalk. So I have never forgotten that I love to do anything that will keep me out of the "here and now."

I am nothing but another person "acting a part of Narcotics Anonymous;" nothing but another person trying to live clean and recovering. I know for a fact that the Program works and I know that because I am one of the miracles just like everyone in these rooms is one of the miracles.

I remember my bottom. The night was a typical night for someone without any money, any drugs or any friends. I was lying in a house where the people had gone to jail. They set out to score and they did not ever come back. I was left there. I was watching the house just waiting for someone to come, just waiting to score, so that I would just be able to get well. But God just saw fit for me not to have that happen. As I sat on the bed, and I pushed the cockroaches out of my face (and there were a lot of them) I had a war going on with those bugs. I would turn out the lights, my hand would catch a bunch of them and then I would put them down the toilet. And I was thinking, "is this all there is for me in life?" My arms were swollen from shooting drugs, my lips were red from drinking wine, and I felt like there was no hope. I remember I reached into my pocket and I had a twenty-five cents bus ticket left from the Welfare Office. I packed up a little bag of the little bit of clothes that I had left, and I caught the bus to the V. A. hospital. All the time I was riding my head was telling me, "I just want to go and lay there. Find a domicile or something. Just to lay down and die." But, that was the day of my spiritual awakening. I was at the V. A. with "spit creases" I had placed down the front of my pants, another notch I had put in my belt with an ice pick to hold them up; weighing 160 lbs., looking like a skeleton of my former self, with 30 years of using behind me. While trying to get in on the methadone program, I ran across a person on the program who was to become my sponsor. We had spent time in prison together. He asked me how was I doing? At first I told him, "I'm doing OK;" but I knew deep in my heart, I was not doing worth a damn. I remember feeling that of the words just coming out of my mouth, and I said I wanted to go into his recovery house. I wanted to try it "one more time and give it my best shot."

I had thought that I had had a heart-attack and I thought I was dying because I felt just like an empty shell. They took me into this hospital and got me back to health.

First, there was my health back in line, then my thinking got a little clearer. I remember when I first started going to meetings after being dry for about ninety days.

I remember seeing people at meetings. It sounds corny, but I wanted what they had. I wanted to be able to say: "My name is Bill and I am an addict. And that I am doing something about my life!" I used to think the people there were conning. That's what my head was saying, but deep in my heart I knew what they were saying was true.

Today, I have learned how to be more of a person. I have learned how to feel a lot better. When I was sitting in the rooms of N. A. meetings, I kept going back - kept doing what people said to do. I did my inventory, took a 4th Step and a 5th Step. Then I took a look at my character defects and then I could understand what people had meant and talked about.

I never will forget when the lights flipped on and I knew that this was all about living. After that, I went right into the Steps to the best of my ability. I started because I knew for a fact that my life was unmanageable, because I was! Unmanageable...this was where drugs and alcohol had brought me to, and left me. I knew that if I stayed around this Program, followed directions, and if I prayed, then maybe God would restore me to sanity. I am not wrapped too tight now, but I realize that some are sicker than others. I know for a fact that it works when I ask that my will be removed and I just do the will of God, this is the 3rd Step.

It's hard - it is hard to work his will inside of my own, but I do it to the best of my ability today. And, then when I took my 4th Step and wrote out all those little things - those little things that make me think I am lesser than someone else.

My 5th Step was one of the hardest for me because I did not want to share with another human being those things that made my character defects so glaring. Yet sharing with another human being and God is another action Step. It has taken me 1-1/2 years to really understand what a 6th Step was because I was clean and recovering and just becoming aware of my character defects. But the willingness that I had learned from my 3rd Step and the knowledge that I have obtained through my 4th and 5th Steps gave me strength to ask God to remove these defects (which I have to do every day). I did my 5th and 7th Steps together not really knowing the difference between character defects and shortcomings, which I am not too sure about today. Working the 8th Step was not too difficult because of my awareness of the 4th through 7th Steps.

I remember when I made my first amends. God, how I felt, but when I made my last one, I felt all the weight of the world being lifted off of me. One night I was speaking at an N. A. meeting when I looked over and there was my crime partner's sister. The very girl who I owed my last amends to. God gave me the willingness and the courage and the opportunity to complete my 9th Step. I knew then that I never had to go back out again because of snitching on someone. You can't go back to the ghetto where you came from. I realized it was all over and I felt good. I am one of those for whom taking a 10th Step at night was not hard. That fear and that guilt I had inside of me is gone!

Something that was difficult for me was the 11th Step. It took a "spiritual lady" and other things I won't get into now, to learn to meditate and I am grateful for those experiences because after that conscious contact, I review and look over each Step each day.

I love the 12th Step like I love the Program. Like I love my God and my life today. The 12th Step had given me a way to go. I work with others, sharing at meetings, supporting N. A. as a whole, by being active and am just so, so grateful that God has seen fit to let me live again. For the people who have been put into my life.

When I started working the Steps, I was in my 2nd year going into my 3rd year of being clean and just like the miracle of the Program, I am finishing my 3rd and going into my 4th year.

I never would have thought while going into the V. A. hospital one rainy morning that my life would become so rich and so full. I have more friends than I ever thought I would have. I have more things - not only materially, but things like respectability - like love - like willingness to share and care. I can safely say that I have an "attitude of gratitude" to God today. I have gratitude for the rehabilitation center I came out of, my sponsors, for my fiancée who I love and to the Program of N. A. - to whom I owe my life. All I can say to the newcomer is that the Program works, the promises are there if you work the Program - give yourself a break. For a person who was a complete 'stomp-down dope-fiend' addict - in jail or out of jail - I just want to thank my God for letting me be a survivor.

HE IS IN CHARGE, AND I AM RESPONSIBLE

It's been a year, through the grace of God, that I have been drug free. After a period of using for almost 10 years, I had truly thought that I'd never be straight, nor did I think I'd ever want to be. I used for all the reasons people who use did; feelings, how do I deal with these emotions of hurt, anger, jealousy, 100% insecurity, guilt, total and absolute fear of what was and is and how was I to make them go away and leave me alone? Drugs and the legal drug, alcohol solved my problems. I was accepted, I was tough, "cool," and non-feeling. The drugs buried inside me everything I was afraid to deal with. I could say "no" and not feel afraid of the remarks that would come afterward. I didn't feel like I had to justify myself to anyone. Today, I still don't have to justify myself, the difference is that I know I have that choice. And yes, I liked the "highs" - I loved them, but there still was something missing but I wasn't sure of what it was. I needed fulfillment, and drugs gave that to me temporarily. Relationships broke up but "it didn't hurt me." I was too tough and I had drugs to lift me to wherever I wanted to be. Friends were disappearing fast, but "I didn't care;" I had drugs. I didn't need people. I didn't know anything but drugs, when, where and how. But, deep down inside myself I was scared, lonely, depressed and sometimes suicidal. I didn't trust anybody because I figured they were all out for something and I didn't want to be hurt any more. The worst part of all was that I didn't trust myself and I hated myself worse than my enemies could hate me. Only through the Program, did I realize that all this time I had been scared and running from myself, I was hurting myself and blaming everyone else for it. I didn't want the responsibility.

Through the Steps and principles of the Program and with the support of the people, I grew to know a Power greater than myself. The power of prayer has been a great comfort for me but without the Program, I'd still be unfulfilled. I have learned to accept myself and others, I have learned to be grateful to feel again and to deal with emotions head-on. I don't run anymore and I'm finally reaching true security and I'm not so afraid of what's out there any more. What a comfort it is for me to know that my Higher Power never leaves me alone - there are people who honestly care and love me at face value. I've been told that everything after abstinence is a benefit and because of the Steps and principles, I have learned to enjoy life and myself; not to mention other people as well. I know that unless I had become willing enough to take responsibility for myself, I never would have made it this far. I'm grateful to my Higher Power for the strength, the wisdom, the knowledge and the power He has instilled in me to go through life, trusting that he is in charge and I am only responsible. What a blessing it is to know that I don't have to be different and what a blessing it is to know that these people do understand. Truly, it has all done for me what I could not do for myself.

A LONG WAY DOWN

This is my story of what addiction is about, based on my own experience. From childhood, I was a problem person, in conflict with others constantly. I know today that I have always had the disease of addiction. I did not catch it from anyone along the way, regardless of what others may think.

I am the oldest son in my family, I have two younger brothers and an older sister. At this writing, my mom is still alive, and has remarried. We lost my pop to alcoholism in 1960. He had twenty years sober in another Twelve Step Program, drank again, and committed suicide. I was nine when this happened, we went from being a middle class family to a slum family very quickly. We lived in a middle sized town in Pennsylvania that was a good example of the "Industrial North."

The disease was already at work in my life. I was in trouble a lot, and attended at least fifteen different schools during grammar school and junior high. I couldn't seem to get along with others.

My older sister married a guy from South Carolina and she moved down there. We were a pretty close knit family, and my mom thought the kids would have a better chance in the country, so we moved down there also. Talk about culture shock! From industrial north to the rural south was a huge change for me. I was a ring leader up north, but here in South Carolina, I was a Yankee outsider. I was the one who talked funny and got laughed at. Needless to say, I worked hard at regaining my status as "troublemaker number one!"

It is now 1963 and I am in the seventh grade, going on thirteen years old. We moved to a larger city still in South Carolina, and here, my addiction became active. I had my first using experience in '63. At thirteen, I had a great deal to prove. There was a place nearby that had pool tables, beer and a slack policy on serving minors. Needless to say, the police took me home that night. My friends told me later that I had drank twelve beers. That was my first usage. There were more times after that when it would happen again.

I began to know what drunk tanks looked like. I met some people who really impressed me, they were long haired, weirdly dressed people and I knew that I had found my place with them. My hair grew long and I began hanging out with my new friends at the local hangout. The place had live bands, freaks and lots of other mind trips. New music and new highs. I used cough syrup, glue, ether and all the other drug store highs. Then marijuana, methadrine, L.S.L. and other chemicals. I quit school because I felt I was being brain-washed and I resented it. I sought newer and more exciting experiences. The world became a drag with its status quo and politics, its wars and restrictive governments, etc.. I learned to be free and thought I was. Rock music, getting loaded, rooms full of incense, long discussions on tearing down the society, free love..., these were the things that filled my days. I am now fourteen years old, one year into my addiction.

About this time, home and family became a torment. Mom's suggestions about how I should live my life were making me miserable. I decided that home was not for me, and I told her that I felt this way. Looking back, I can see that she had no choice, she had to let me go. She loved me, but she couldn't control me so she gave me her blessing. I know it took all her love to do that.

I went to New York city to lead the hip life. By now, I'm dealing drugs, and know enough about survival to get by. The street was exciting to me. You meet a wide variety of people, interesting people like pimps, whores, pushers, bikers, all sorts of people. I got quite an education out there. I learned to shoot heroin in New York city. I became a hustler and all the things that addiction drives you to become. I lied, cheated, stole and conived my way across the country and back several times. Sleeping in crash pads, jails, shooting galleries, skid rows, emptiness, loneliness, deals in the night, using, dying, the whole horror story of addiction in bloom. I'm now eighteen.

I hit Atlanta in the summer of '68, just when hard drugs were hitting the street, and I made some contacts. I began a downward slide; the needle in my arm, more deals, con jobs, women to keep up my habit, jail, cops, busts, fear, insanity, despair, etc.. By now, I'm in a wasted state, physically, mentally and spiritually, and yet I still defended my actions! After all, it was my life, wasn't it? Why don't they leave me alone? These questions ran through my head, but I shut them out with the oblivion of narcotics. In 1969 I got busted for possession and sales of dangerous drugs and violation of the Georgia State Drug Abuse Law. This was where I hit my bottom. I went to jail, had a preliminary hearing and was bound over to the superior court in Atlanta. I sat in a haze in the county jail, unable to eat or sleep. Like waking from a dream, reality came to me. I could see my life in hind sight. I believe God began exerting His will in my life at this point. I could see my future, death in some crummy apartment, a life of emptiness and fear; the past too, wreckage and destruction as far back as I could remember. I believe I prayed to God to not let me continue this way of life if I got back out on the streets, I prayed for another chance.

I sat eight months, all told, because my records had been misplaced or something. I finally went to trial in 1970. Talk about God working in an addict's life! With my record, I should have got hung. The minimum sentence was two to five years,

but the judge gave me two years on probation! Can you believe that? Two years probation! I was on the street again with no idea what to do with myself. I went back to the old playmates and playgrounds, but something had changed. I even tried using again, but it was different. What I think happened was that my surrender in jail changed my spiritual life.

I left Atlanta in '72, touring all over and searching for peace of mind. I hitchhiked from one coast to the other in despair. Insane and alone, I wanted to die, but was too cowardly to do myself in. On one swing through Atlanta I stopped, it was raining, about 6:30 in the afternoon. I had no friends, no family and no hope. I began hitchhiking downtown, a car pulled up and I hopped in. I knew the guy driving the car! I knew him from the streets, but his hair was shorter and he was different somehow. We talked a while about the past and then he said he was going to a meeting, did I want to come? I said "no", and he said, "O.K., wait here and I'll be back in an hour." While we had been talking, he told me that I could stay at his house and decide what I wanted to do from there. I waited, and sure enough, he came back and got me. He asked me the next morning to come and work for him and I said, "Sure, but only to get enough money to move on with." He said he understood. Finally, one day a few weeks later, I went to a meeting with him. It was a meeting of another Twelve Step Program, and they welcomed me with open arms. This guy only had ten days without a drink, yet he helped me find many things that helped me. We made twelve meetings a week for a while. We didn't drink or use. Then one day, we talked about starting N.A. in Atlanta. Narcotics Anonymous was for dope addicts. Our first meeting in Atlanta was at a treatment center, and eight people showed up for it. We talked, and decided all right, this N.A. is for us. We attended our little meeting, wrote long letters to California where the founders lived and found out all we could about Narcotics Anonymous.

I moved my tent and sleeping bag to the banks of the Chattahoochee River and lived there in order to be self-supporting. I didn't believe in paying rent; some old ideas do die hard!

I was coffee chairman of our little group, and faithfully hitchhiked with a cardboard box containing our coffee pot, coffee and supplies. The group trusted me with two dollars a week to buy cookies. I was so proud! This was my first service work for N.A. Our meetings were disorderly and rowdy, but we all loved each other and supported each other! I worked my Steps by half measures and got bad results, but I worked them. The Fellowship began expanding, new meetings started and we were off! I served the group in varying ways, from coffee chairman, group chairman, secretary, treasurer, g.s.r., to telling my story at prisons, hospitals, etc. 12th Step work at the group level always gets me off the most; working with the new people who feel so lost and desperate. All these things have helped me grow in closeness to others.

There were times when denial prompted me to visit old playgrounds, but my commitment to N.A. and to my recovery was stronger. Self-will and old thinking were cropping up at an alarming rate, and pain became constant. I nearly gave up several times, but I knew that to use was to lose everything! Then I figured out that marriage was what I needed to straighten me out, so I married a girl who was

using a quart of whisky a day. Real good thinking! I called it God's will, but in reality, it was self-will. As a result of this, I went through more pain and suffering. I discovered the Twelve Steps in a new light. I learned what it was to surrender myself totally to a Power greater than myself in areas of dependancy and fear. I got some phony ideas about how responsible I was and how sick other people were. These too had to be surrendered to God. I felt at times, as helpless as a child. I went to the group with these problems and defects, asked for their help, and got it. Always, the group remained constant and solid. The group was, and in some ways still is, a power greater than myself. My attitudes about co-operation with others underwent drastic revision, and I began to realize that I needed others. I stayed clean by God's grace through these growth experiences every time.

In 1978 I got divorced and she went back to using. This was the last straw as far as I was concerned. Consumed with self-pity, I decided to use. Again, I was faced with three alternatives; use, commit suicide or work the Program. I chose to work the Program, not because I'm good or noble, but because the other two choices meant death. The Fourth Step inventory revealed a bunch of defects, and I found myself calling people at three o'clock in the morning to do a Fifth Step. Asking God to remove these defects in Steps Six and Seven, amends in Steps Eight and Nine and maintenance Ten, Eleven and Twelve, gave me comfort and peace.

This was 1979, and it was the year that Atlanta hosted the World Convention. I attended and was totally blown away. At the time, there were forty or so groups in Atlanta, and the turnout was staggering. All those faces, all those people, my people together and clean! My life took a big turn at that point, and I finally began to get the message--GIVE IT AWAY TO KEEP IT!!

My first efforts at sponsorship were disastrous, and I made a great many mistakes. Playing God, treating dope addicts like non-people, there was no compassion in my message at all. I learned that sharing and caring was just that. I learned to love myself and others. I came to know my disease as terminal, progressive and fatal. I began my involvement all over again on a new footing. Change seems to be the name of the game in N. A.

This brings me to 1980 and involvement with N. A.'s growth in some new ways, helping with our book, and being involved with the literature effort in small ways. However, personal service at the group level seems to be the answer for me.

It is now the end of 1981. I have just celebrated my seventh clean Christmas and I am together with a lovely woman, to whom also this Program has meant a new life. I am pretty comfortable in my work, I am attending school, God is becoming more and more my strength and guidance, and all of it is based on the principles of N. A.

The Twelfth Step says to practice these principles in all of our affairs and I try to do just that each day. God has been very good to this old derelict, and you can believe that! My clean date is in July of 1974, and at this writing, that seems a

miracle. I hope to continue, one day at a time, to be of service to this Fellowship in some small way if God sees fit.

To those of you who read this story, know that I love you and God loves you too. There is hope for all of us. It is called Narcotics Anonymous. May it stand in service and loving Fellowship forever.

UP FROM DOWN UNDER

My name is Melvin, and I am an addict. I believe that I was born an addict, and that whatever I did, it was not with the intention of becoming addicted to drugs. I was brought up in Cheshire, England, of working class parents, and went to school like everyone else. But I wasn't like everyone else, I felt different. It is a hard feeling to describe, but as far back as I can remember in my childhood, I had always felt out of it. Somehow I didn't belong. At school I soon realized that I was not going to be successful. So I stopped trying, set my expectations to zero, and was at the bottom of the class from when I started into grammar school, to when I finished. But as long as I didn't try then, in my mind, I couldn't fail. I spent my class time inside my head, living in a fantasy world of my own making. There, I was always feeling good. Even on holidays I stayed in my world of fantasy, not getting up until lunch time each day. By the time I started to look for other kids, they were already off somewhere, and I was left alone to make-believe by myself.

I left school having failed all my examinations, not having a clue to what I should do with my life. At this time, I tried two things which I thought might help me - I became a probationary local preacher with a protestant church, and I started drinking. I soon realized that preparing the Sunday sermon in the pub Saturday night was not really the right kind of action for a budding local preacher. So gave away preaching and did more drinking. But life still wasn't working out, so I joined the Royal Navy, starting a geographical that was to last for over 10 years and 40 different countries.

I joined the Royal Navy for nine years and lasted three. The first drink had me beat. No matter what I resolved, after my tot of rum at lunch-time, I was looking for more. I was always borrowing money and clothes so I could get ashore, (I was always broke and my uniform was always still dirty from the night before). When I went ashore, I never knew where I would end up, when I would get back to ship, or what I had done. Blackouts were with me from the start.

After I was kicked out of the Navy at the age of 20, I wandered around Europe for many months, working where I could, sleeping out, begging, picking up cigarette butts, and still drinking whenever I could. I remember once getting drunk in Moscow, urinating over Stalin's tomb, smashing a toilet bowl (it rocked when I sat on it), and getting lost on the Underground. If there was a drug scene in Europe in those days (1963), I didn't come across it. In fact, I didn't come across drugs until five years later in Singapore. I had spent the previous two years in Australia, travelling around, working in mining camps and city offices. My drinking had gotten me into such a state that I could no longer use public transportation to work, I had to travel by taxi, I was frightened of everyone, I sometimes trembled so

much I could not walk or hold things. I was in a mess. Whatever a man was supposed to be, and I wasn't quite sure what a man was, I obviously wasn't one. So in my sickness, I decided to prove that I was a man by going to Vietnam. I had already tried to get to Vietnam in 1966 by applying to join the Australian Army, but because of my record in the Navy, they rejected me.

In Singapore, I was introduced to marijuana, and I liked it. It distorted my perception of time, space and hearing, not aggressively like alcohol, but gently. When I got to Saigon, I managed to get a job with the British Medical team who working at the Children's Hospital in Cholon. There I continued drinking and smoking dope and eventually my sanity got somewhat affected. For kicks, I used to drive my ex-Army truck out into the countryside surrounding Saigon in the middle of the night. One night when I was stoned, I took an English reporter with me, and he was terrified the whole trip. I figured it was great fun and that nothing could hurt me. One night I drove past the President's palace, didn't stop when told to, and ended up with a barbed wire barricade wrapped around my back axle, leaving some ARVN soldiers some explaining to do. I lasted six months in Saigon, then one night I drove my truck into a jeep, pushed it into the side of a house, squashed it, the side of the house collapsed, and I didn't stop. The following morning the British Embassy, the British Medical team, the owner of the house I'd smashed, the owner of the jeep I'd smashed and the American pilots who lived in the house, were all looking for me. As a result I stopped drinking for life, which lasted five weeks, when one drink set me off again.

At the end of 1969 I was in England, broke as usual, no money and no job. I decided to try and get back to Australia, and got enough money together so that, provided I slept out and didn't spend any money on food or drugs, I might make it. My thinking was so off by this time that I decided to go via North Africa, a place I had never been to before. So off I set, and made it to Spain alright, not spending any money but getting drunk a few times. Just south of Barcelona the compulsion to drink hit me, and I went off on a bender that lasted about a week, leaving me in a little room in Algeciras. There I dried out, or tried to, but was very lonely and miserable. For the first time in my life, by my standards, I had failed. I knew I wasn't going to Australia. They wouldn't even let me buy a ticket for the Tangier ferry, because I smelt so much. (At this period I went for a month without washing. When I was in Asia I always made sure I was clean when getting tickets and visas, now I was unable even to do this). I managed to get off the booze, but then went on to the dope. I arranged with some guys to smuggle hashish from Morocco, but the dope was freaking me out so much I shot through. I'll never forget that journey back through Europe - complete failure and depression - I couldn't even be successful as a bum, and that really hurt.

I eventually managed to get to Australia, but I could never keep a job very long because of my drinking. There came the time when I literally couldn't move because of all the unknown fears that I had. So I went to see a doctor, and as a result I got on the alcohol and pills way of life - pills during the day at work, and rum at night at home. This was great for a while, but as usual, the good times didn't last. I found that I still couldn't keep a job, and the fears started coming back as

well. M mother had been saying for years, "why don't you get married and settle down?" So, in a last desperate measure to sort myself out I decided to get married. I didn't even have a girl friend at the time, my drug use had always taken a priority over girls, and my sex life was a fantasy. So I got married, and my life immediately got worse. Ever since I had left home at 17, I had had only myself to think about, now I had a wife, and it was a responsibility that I could not handle. My lies and cheating got worse, and it was all reflected back at me by my wife. When I got married, I thought that at least my sex problems would be resolved. They weren't - they got worse. I still preferred using drugs to going to bed with my wife. I thought perhaps I was homosexual. So I decided to seduce a friend that I knew was homosexual. I did, and discovered that I wasn't homosexual. So in the end, I couldn't make it with women, and I certainly couldn't make it with men, so I was more screwed up than ever before. It was now 1974 and I had a good job as a computer programmer/analyst, I had a house and a car. In spite of all this, I was mentally, emotionally and spiritually finished. I could go down no further. I hit my rock-bottom one afternoon in November 1974, in a forest near me. Luring a quiet afternoon's drinking I had gone berserk, and tried to run off the edge of the world. I had had enough, I wanted to get off. Eventually, I collapsed and passed out. When I came to, I knew that I had to stop drinking and using drugs. Since Vietnam, I sometimes drove on the right hand side of the road when intoxicated, in Australia one drives on the left hand side of the road. That night I drove on the right again, and had cars going everywhere, tried to run over a police-woman twice, and ended the night in cells.

There was no Narcotics Anonymous in Melbourne at that time, but I got myself to another 12-Step Program which dealt with alcohol. To me, alcohol was just another drug, so I didn't have any problems identifying with that Program. I was told that if I put my recovery before everything else, then I could stay clean for the rest of my life. That was what I wanted. In my withdrawal, I was violent, and my wife left me. All this did was to clear the way for me to go to as many meetings as possible and concentrate on my recovery without being concerned about her.

I did not pick up the first drug, and I listened to people who had recovery. I did not associate with people who had come into the Program at the same time or later than me, they could not help me. I only talked to those who had been in the Program for years, and had something I wanted. I learned to listen and be guided by others, something I had never done before. I remember being told there was no value in a sick mind consulting a sick mind about a sick mind. During my first weeks in the Program, I was told to stay away from the first drink or drug, to stay away from the old environment, to contact other members daily, and be constantly aware that I was an addict. I used to walk around, from getting up to going to bed, with the words - I am an addict - circulating in my head.

I learned that when the compulsion to use something hit me, I should take steps in the opposite direction, that I shouldn't dwell upon the compulsion, but that if I did something positive, its hold on me would be lessened. I think someone once said

that "you can't stop a bird from crapping on your head, but you can stop it from building a nest there!" In the same way, I can't stop the thought of using coming into my mind, but I can stop it from dwelling there and taking charge of me.

My wife came back after a few months, but it still didn't work out. I was very sick, not only from my addiction, but I also had tuberculosis, which the doctors didn't diagnose until I had been coughing up blood for six months. When I went into the hospital, my left leg for good. Since I came out of the hospital in 1976 I have continued to concentrate on my recovery. I was involved in the starting of N.A. in Melbourne, and as a result I have been able to relate to addicts, and not just alcoholics.

For two years, I didn't go out with a girl, I just worked the Steps and did what I could about my defects of character. I found that I had problems of sexual fantasy, impotence and compulsive eating, and television watching to get over. I learned to talk to girls and not be frightened of them. I learned to handle rejection, knowing that it is O.K. to be rejected. I found that I could accept myself, defects and all, and that is a wonderful thing.

After a couple of years in the Program I started to cry, spontaneously. All of a sudden, tears would come streaming down my face and I would start sobbing. I discovered that the emotional barriers that I had built over the years to protect myself were coming down - simply by me working the Program. I was learning to really feel, and I found that I could handle my feelings.

My spiritual progress has been somewhat different from what I expected. As I have matured in the Program, and learned to think for myself, I have examined the principles upon which I base my life. In doing this, I found out that I do not believe in any kind of God, and that my Higher Power is the power of the Program. Today I am an atheist. I still concentrate on my own recovery, because if I am well, then I can be of value to others, but if I am sick, then I am of no use to anyone, not even myself.

Being an atheist does not stop me from working the Program. The only thing I do not do, of course, is pray. The main thing is that I do what is possible with what I have got. No one can do more. The advice that I was given at my first meeting still holds good today - "don't pick up the first drink or drug, go to meetings and work the Steps."

IT WASN'T ALWAYS LIKE THIS

When my drug use began at the age of 12, I would never have thought that, five years later, I would be driven to surrender in the face of my addiction.

My name is Sapphire and I am an addict. Today, I have a full and happy life, but it wasn't always like this.

I am an only child, white, middle class, and raised in a Midwest city by my mother and grandmother. Although my father, an alcoholic, had left when I was very young, the effects his disease had on my family lingered on. There constantly seemed to be fighting and the atmosphere was very critical. I was beaten frequently. My family and people outside my family seemed very frightening. At an early age, I was a loner, full of guilt, anger, resentment, and fear.

Then, I discovered the wonders of drugs. At first, I used alcohol - it helped me to forget my past, made me feel happy and outgoing; it was an instant 'cure' for all my problems. Within a few months, blackouts and hangovers became a way of life, and soon it became impossible to get the amount of alcohol I needed to satisfy my constant cravings. It was then that I turned to dry drugs for my escape. Starting with marijuana, I worked my way through to downs, hallucinogen, tranquilizers, and finally to shooting speed, PCP, morphine, and heroin. As my addiction progressed, the effects became more and more serious. At school, my grades dropped from A's to F's and I eventually dropped out. Many times, I would come to in a hospital emergency room being treated for overdoses, broken bones, and other assorted injuries. My mental and spiritual deterioration led me to violence; I would 'flip out', and go crazy, tearing up anything or anyone I could get my hands on. My family life had turned to total chaos and much of those years was spent as a runaway. I went to any lengths to get drugs, up to and including drug dealing and prostitution. Now, instead of using drugs to feel good, I needed them to blot out the hatred, fear and desperation that filled me. I was 16 years old, and I was dying.

I went into a psychiatric ward, but they gave me more drugs instead of attempting to detox me. Then, I went into treatment, but I didn't want help. My strong denial and closed mind kept me from using the tools they gave me, but deep down, I knew they were right; that I was an addict. Throughout the next year, I tried to turn off the little voice that kept telling me to get help, but I couldn't. The drugs didn't kill the pain any more - all they were killing was me! Again, I went into treatment, but with three things that were missing before: honesty, openmindedness, and a willingness to try.

For 7 months after treatment, I went to another 12-Step Program, and for the first time, began to feel better about myself and my life. My life was slowly becoming liveable, but something seemed to be missing - I felt isolated and didn't think these people really understood me. Old feelings came rushing back, and instead of calling someone or letting go of them, I used again.

A few days later, a friend who had heard about my relapse, gave me a list of nearby N.A. meetings. That first meeting was incredible - many of the people there were close to my age and I knew that this was what I had been looking for. They had done and felt as I had and were recovering the N.A. way. I found a sponsor very quickly, and called her often. We are now the best of friends and she has made a great difference in my recovery. Soon after my first meeting, I was chairing and giving leads (telling my story and sharing experiences, strength, and hope with others). The 12 Steps became very important, and through working them thoroughly and honestly, my life is being filled with love, hope and serenity.

Now, each day in my recovery is a miracle, and for this I am very grateful to the N.A. Program. They really made it happen!

LONG DISTANCE RECOVERY

My name is Jim, and I'm a junkie. When I was about nine years old, my dad, who was a truck driver, turned me on to speed and juice. I started using these heavily and got into glue. I was mostly looking for some camaraderie, and I spent most of my early teens just hanging out.

I got into cough syrup and inhalers. I really cut back on the booze, because I did not like the hangovers. I started to think that there might be something wrong with me, and I asked my parents to get me some kind of help from a psychologist or psychiatrist. They told me that I was all right, and that this was just a stage I was going through.

I was working by this time and I was a hard worker. I would always throw myself into anything I did.

When I was 16, I was jailed for the first time. I had done a hit and run while I was loaded. I started devoting my time to raising hell.

When I was about 17 or 18, I killed an old man in a car wreck while I was loaded. This didn't affect me too much at the time. I just thought it was some thing that happened and was just a bit of bad luck for both of us.

I started making excuses for my behavior, and that turned into my main occupation when I drank. I would drink to black out. I first started thinking about stopping everything and just killing myself.

Though I was a good worker, I tended to miss days and go in loaded. So, I changed jobs often. In one year, I had 13 W-2 forms. It was when I was about 19 that I first hit "skid row". I did odd jobs, panhandled and occasionally rode the rails. I owned what I had on and nothing else.

After doing this for a bit, I decided to clean up. So, I took a bath, got some clothes and a job. I managed to stop using for about 18 months. I met a lady during this time that I married. She was an epileptic and I started eating her barbs and coping extra scripts.

We had a child and I thought that I was finally going to be able to stay under control.

I had an accident while working that landed me in the hospital for about two months. I got introduced to Darvon and other pain killers there.

When I got out, the bills were really piled up. I decided that I was going to pay them all fast. I got a second full time job and started using speed to keep me going. I would get up at 10:00 P.M. and do some speed to get me up. I would work until

7:00 A.M. and then eat, some more speed and go to a bar until 8:00 A.M. when I went back to work. I went back to the bar with the guys for lunch. I went home at 4:00 P.M., ate dinner, drank some whiskey to pass out so I could get some sleep.

After about six months of this, I was doing so much drugs, my wife and I separated.

I was drafted shortly after that and wound up in the Army. In the Army, I did booze, drugs, LSL, mushrooms, peyote, pot, anything to keep me screwed up.

I hated people. I thought that I had been shit on and I was going to shit on them back.

I started dealing, and other crimes to support my habit. I had no motivation at all.

I had no motivation at all. I started to run with some "peace freaks." I was just another low life with high ideals.

I hit the stockade a few times. I got sent to the Army shrinks, who were no help. I was having a lot of trouble and went to see a priest, even though I ranked God somewhere between Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny.

I got boosted out of the Army with an honorable discharge. I got that only because of the people that would have come down with me otherwise.

In the Army, I had been called "Joe Shit the Rag Man." I had no self-respect. People treated me like I was crazy and I did my best to live up to their expectations.

I got into cheap thrills. I did a lot of using and abusing the ladies. I was really screwed up.

I was still legally married, which I had done because of my son. My wife finally sued for divorce. That hurt really bad, even though I had been living with this girl for a year. She walked out on me about the same time, and that hurt a lot too.

I was always drunk and had booze nearby, so when I got picked up, the cops wouldn't look for anything else. After a long series of LWI's, public drunk charges and other alcohol-related offenses, I was paroled to A. A. for one year.

In A. A., I found a little hope. I was able to identify with the alcoholics there, somewhat, but it was not perfect. After about six months in A. A., I found N. A. There I could talk freely about my drug experiences, which I wasn't allowed to do at A. A.

It was at that first N. A. meeting that I felt really at home.

I was deep in debt and had no resources, but I stayed clean. I was still going from job to job and even tended bar for a while. I would still work the streets for a buck. I couldn't put two sentences together. I didn't know anything about prayer. All I could say was, "If there's anything up there, and I don't think there is--then help!" Eventually, from this beginning I was to get comfortable with my own Higher Power.

My ego continued to get me in trouble. I was either super high or super low--on some kind of ego trip. I was still hurting people and getting hurt by them. I had lady troubles. I finally got divorced. My girl friend moved out and then got killed. I got very depressed, but I didn't use. My attitude was, "I'll show you, you S.O.B.'s."

I finally found a N. A. meeting and got a copy of the "White Book," and started reading it. I was really beginning to feel at home in the meeting. There was one other junkie in town that was staying clean, and he got loaded. After that, I felt that N. A. had let me down.

I moved to Iowa and experienced the same problems I had in Kansas. I tried to get the local drug council interested in N. A., but they were too interested in their own program, when they weren't arguing over money problems.

I heard a couple of good Fifth Steps during that time, however, and that inspired me and taught me to be more open about myself.

I had a lot of telephone contact with W.S.O. in California. When I couldn't take it any more, I would call W.S.O. and just talk.

I went to A.A. meetings in town and sat quietly in the back. I tried to get as much out of those meetings as I could.

I heard there was good A. A. and some N. A. in Lincoln, Nebraska, so I moved there. In those early days, there was only four or five of us in that first N. A. meeting in Lincoln. That group is still going today.

I learned to live just one day at a time. I started learning to be responsible. I did a lot of service work and did a lot of praying.

I was running with a new girl, and she got cleaned up and got some education. Life started to get a little easier. The financial problems started going away. There were still some hard times. I would get depressed and sometimes, I thought about getting loaded. Sometimes I just had to stand still and hurt.

N. A. in Lincoln would start to grow and build up, and then it would drop to one or two clean addicts. But it got better each time when I stuck it out.

I now had enough money to travel a little and could get to new meetings outside Lincoln. I started attending N. A. conventions which were a real shot in the arm.

I enjoy helping junkies trying to recover. I try to do what I can so they won't die loaded. I have been to a lot of funerals.

Early on in A. A., I picked up the slogan KISS--Keep It Simple, Stupid. I try to work a simple program.

The Fellowship in Lincoln began to grow. Today, we are active in world service.

I am more comfortable with God and myself today. I have all kinds of mood changes; sometimes I was a lazy, no good SOB; sometimes I was Okay; sometimes it seemed I was back-sliding. No matter what, however, I haven't had to use.

It is still a struggle, at times. But the longer I am clean, the more responsible I am. The longer I am clean, the more I am somebody. Today, I do live one day at a time. Today, I care. I try to live and love somebody. Today, I can dream and make plans. But most importantly, I accept it as it is today. I thank God for both the good and the bad. I try to handle my fears as they come up.

Today, I am not lonely. I have learned to be myself. I can let others get close.

I have learned that I am not unique. I have learned that I am not strange. I am just a junkie doing whatever I need to do in order to recover.

I have been reunited with my family. My ex-wife and I are on speaking terms. We are friends. My parents accept, respect and admire me. My son accepts me as I am.

I have changed my attitude to one of gratitude. My serenity is taxed from time to time, but I know more serenity is just around the corner. There is always hope.

I have learned that I grow by studying the Steps and traditions and putting them into practice in my life to the best of my ability. I grow by going to meetings.

I am especially grateful for the principles of spirituality and anonymity. Today, I am part of a large and growing, beautiful Fellowship. I have hopes for it to grow even more. I feel we best grow when we are most anonymous working the program and working with others. I look for a larger Fellowship so that we can all become more anonymous in our service work.

MID-PACIFIC SERENITY

I am a happy, grateful drug addict, clean by the grace of God and the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. Life today is fulfilling, and there is joy in my heart.

It wasn't always this way. I drank and used drugs for twelve years, on a daily basis for ten of them. I was an addict of the hopeless variety. It really seems to me that I was born this way.

I was born and raised in Southern California, in a loving middle class family. Both my sister and I were wanted, loved children and were shown that in every way. As far back as I can remember, I have felt separate from this family, and all of life. Of course, I am talking of an intense fear of life, I cannot remember feeling the simplicity of being a child.

I had the addict's personality growing up, self-will run riot. I always wanted my own way, and if I didn't get it, I sure let everyone know.

Growing up in Southern California, I seemed to get into all the normal things,

going to the beach, getting into sports, yet always, the fears and feelings of inadequacy never let me live up to my potential.

I was an average student through out school, had lots of friends, yet I withdrew, dominated by the fear. I guess I was about fifteen when I tried my first drug, alcohol. From the first drink it was oblivion. Finally I had found freedom from fear, or so I had thought. From the beginning, I identified with the rejects, the people who slept on the beach, under the piers.

As I look back over these 12 years, I see how I loved each new drug I tried, alcohol was only the beginning; if it got you loaded, I wanted to try it and I always wanted more. It didn't matter if it was sniffing glue or shooting the best coke or heroine, I wasn't a rich, choosy addict, I just needed to stay high and all my energy was put into that direction.

I quit school in the 12th grade, surfing had become part of my life, so it was off to Hawaii. My parents were very confused concerning their son who didn't do a very good job of hiding his desperation. To all who were sane and living life, I appeared very lost and unhappy. You see, it was a very short time after I started using that the alcohol and drugs quit doing for me what they did in the beginning. The fear had returned, only much worse than before.

This first trip to Hawaii in 1962 was only the beginning of many more to come, trying to run from myself. Hawaii was, and is, a paradise, but I only saw it through the eyes of being loaded. Thanks to the warm weather, it was easy to pursue the only life I knew, the way of life was to wander the streets and sleep in parked cars or other available shelters. At the age of 19, I was back in Hawaii for the 3rd time, a full-blown addict and so lost and confused, I only knew I had to drink and use drugs and there was no other way.

Returning to California at the end of the summer in 1963, I found myself joining the Navy. Being lose, that seemed to be the easiest thing to do, just sign my name, it was easier than looking for a job. I was so burned out already and wanted something different, yet didn't even know how to ask for help. The Navy, of course, was not the answer, the drugs continued and after two years I was discharged. The psychiatrist said my mind had become disordered from the use of marijuana and LSD, plus I had jumped overboard in rage at the Navy.

I had convinced myself that once I got out of the Navy things would be different, no one would be telling me what to do, yet I met a new friend at this point... the world of fixing. This was in 1965, and the next six years were the worst six years of my life, and yet, as I see it today, they played the part to get me in this Program, today.

After getting out of the Navy, I got married. How and why this woman married me is a mystery even today; even on our wedding night, I shot some dope and slept on Venice Beach with my dogs, this is the type of behavior a selfish, self-centered addict has, concerned only with himself and getting loaded.

The way I was able to stay loaded was by dealing, always being the middle man. The house we lived in was being watched, it was on the Venice canal in Venice, California.

My parents knew all that was going on, so with my wife four months pregnant they helped us get out of there and it was back to Hawaii. We lived on the north shore, it was a more isolated part of Oahu, lots of young people lived there. This was in the year 1967 and at this time, L.S.D. was real popular and everyone was into the Spiritual thing; Eastern Religion and gurus. There were two Harvard professors who were taking L.S.D. and saying that you could find God, so I thought all that love, peace and joy sounded good. I wanted out of the feelings that I was having. Fear dominated my life. I had been shooting a lot of speed in California the past year. I decided to clean up my life in Hawaii, so I took psychedelics, smoked hashish and tried to meditate.

Somewhere I had read that when the student was ready, the teacher would appear. Little did I know that the Program of Narcotics Anonymous was about to be introduced to me, and that it would become my teacher.

I was able to stay away from shooting dope that year. My wife and I had a baby girl and were on welfare, living in the country. I seemed to be fitting right into the movement of the time; flower children, the everything is beautiful consciousness. Yet still, inside, everything wasn't beautiful.

There was a four-bedroom house next door to us for rent, and one day this woman appeared and told us that God had told her that she was supposed to live there. She was in her fifties, had long gral hair to her waist and wore a bikini most of the time. She had no money, but said she was led to this house.

This woman seemed to radiate a feeling of love and joy that I had never felt from anyone else before. Immediately upon meeting her, I felt as if I had known her forever. Something in me was drawn to her. Little did I know that she was to become my sponsor, and play such a big part in my life! This was the beginning of a journey that even today amazes me. It is a way of life, a way of learning complete trust in a Higher Power. Through a series of miracles, which I now have come to see as quite normal in my life, this woman ended up in this house with the rent paid every month. Needless to say, this house became a Program house.

A meeting was started at this house, it was called The Beachcombers Spiritual Progress Traveling Group and through the years it has traveled throughout the United States from Hawaii to the East coast and through Europe twice, always attracting the addict who still suffers, offering a way up and out.

I remember my first meeting at this house in 1968. For the first time, I felt as if I really belonged. Not so much because I heard people talk of using drugs as I had, but because they spoke of what was going on inside, for the first time I found out that other people had fears also. Yet with all the hope this meeting brought me, it was only the beginning of a three year period that I would not want to live through again.

I identified from that first meeting and wanted a new way of life. I would stay clean for a short period and then I would use again. First I would just pick up a beer or smoke a joint, but I would always end up shooting dope again. I can't understand today why I had reservations. There was still that thought that I still could use.

In the year 1970 I stayed clean for three months, two different times. The last time was right before Christmas, I smoked two joints and went into convulsions. After that, I took two downs once and that was it. For almost the entire next year I didn't know what it was to be clean again. I drank, took pills, and shot cocaine and heroin daily.

Living on the North Shore made it easy to stay out of trouble. There wasn't too many police in that area. I stayed loaded, my wife left and I knew that I would never stay clean again. One time I ran out of dope and I shot several hundred milligrams of caffeine tablets and went into the shakes for hours. I seemed to be so desperate to die. Although I never woke up in the gutter or on skid row, I woke up on the beach, under a palm tree, with my face in the sand. The feelings were the same, skid row is in the mind.

I really feel that it doesn't matter what or how much we use, where we live or how much money we have, it's what is going on inside that counts. For me, I knew I was dying but still couldn't stop. I'd given up on N.A., everyone I knew in the Program had left. My sponsor and a group of clean addicts were in Europe and one of the other clean addicts was living on another island and would call every so often to see if I was still alive.

On the morning of October 20, 1971 I woke up with dope in the house and for some reason I walked out to the beach and didn't get loaded the moment I opened my eyes. I remember it was a gray overcast day and I was feeling hopeless. I just sat on the beach crying, just wanting to die; I couldn't go on. A feeling went through me I had never experienced before in my life. I felt warm and peaceful inside. A voice said, "It's over, you never have to use again." I felt a peace I had never felt before.

I returned to the house, packed some stuff and headed for the airport. I was going to the Island of Maui, where my friend who was clean was. My recovery started with miracles, I had no money, yet I was led to the right places at the right times and I got to Maui. I walked in and told him that I was ready to go to any lengths to stay clean. Staying clean today goes a long way beyond not taking that first fix, pill or drink, it is a way of life, a life that I call an adventure.

I have an outline for living, it is the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. I either practice and live these Steps or I die! I really believe that a person who stays clean for any amount of time is staying clean through periods when it seems to make no sense to stay clean. I feel we all have felt like that at one time or another.

I've stayed clean by the grace of God. The Steps have become my life. I've had to take many inventories, the Fourth and Fifth Steps, and I will continue to have

to write down what is going on inside me and giving it away.

For me, this is the way it works; keep giving away the old and making room for the new. For me, it never gets real easy to do, usually, I have to be backed up against the wall and humiliated and then I share. They say this is a Program of action and that you can't keep it without giving it away; how true it is. In the beginning, I thought I had to say all the right things and save everyone, today I realize I only have what's in my heart to share. Today, I can walk into a meeting and if I am full of the Father's love, then I share it, yet there are times that I walk into a meeting and want to throw the coffee pot through the window, yet I have to stay honest for that's the way I stay clean.

I know today that staying clean and having a relationship with God as I understand Him is the most important thing in my life. When I do that and carry the message to the ones who still suffer, then all else is provided in my life. I really believe that I don't have to prove anything to anybody. I carry the message by letting the newcomer know who I am inside and sharing how I work the Steps one day at a time.

Since getting clean in 1971, life has been anything but boring. I have traveled all over. My sponsor was an able example of following your heart, and that wherever we went, N. A. was alive. Our houses were always open, with a coffee pot going. We started meetings wherever we arrived. Sometimes, we had no money, but we went out to do our primary purpose, and God always showed us the way.

My sponsor died three years ago with eighteen years clean. Most of the group has family now, and we are scattered around the United States, learning different lessons, yet N. A. always comes first. Today, I am married and pursue different things than during the first seven years of my recovery, yet I know that the only way I can have any outside gifts is to put this program and God first. We really have found a way up and out, and so long as we keep giving it away, no matter if it is love and joy or tears and fears, it will be allright.

Today, I live because people are there who care and will listen. I really believe in magic, for my life is full of it.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N. A. unity.
2. For our Group purpose there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience, our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.
4. Each Group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other Groups, or N. A., as a whole.
5. Each Group has but one primary purpose - to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.
6. An N. A. Group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N. A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every N. A. Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Narcotics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our Service Centers may employ special workers.
9. N. A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. N. A. has no opinion on outside issues; hence the N. A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions,

1953 and 1982. When did N.A. start up in your area, region or state? Specific dates and places would be very useful in piecing together the still-clouded picture of our growth. Details relating to your first meeting, your first Area Services Committee meeting, and your first Regional Services Committee meeting would be a good place to start in tracing your history. As a historical record of reference, check old minutes from these early meetings. Then, read through the minutes from these earliest meetings and continue through to the minutes of subsequent meetings, and so on, right up to the present time. As you read through these minutes, take special note of motions carried, (or motions 'passed'); this way, it should become clear what major decisions were reached by the Group Consciences, and the picture of N.A. growth in your area, region or state should open up and become more clear to you, as it has others who have already begun to do this. We suggest that members who have been around for awhile, or who have been instrumental in getting N.A. started in their area, get together and start to compile your history. We request that you send it in to us as soon as you have it completed, so that it may be included in the history of N.A. as a whole. We need your support in order for our History to be an all-inclusive one. So don't exclude yourself. Be a part of.

If you have any questions concerning how to go about compiling your history, please contact us so we can help. We are here to serve you, as always. The need for your input on the History of N.A. is an urgent one. We would like to stress that, the sooner you get in it to us, the sooner we'll be able to piece the whole picture together. There is not much time so, please, don't procrastinate or hesitate, get together today and help make the history of N.A. a complete and accurate account of where we came from, what happened, and how we got to where we are today.

Your Trusted Servants in Love and Fellowship,

W. S. C. - Literature Subcommittee
P.O. Box 3585
Lawrence, KS 66644