

ASIA PACIFIC FORUM

Aotearoa . New Zealand . Australia . Hawali . Hong Kong . Japan . Philippines . Singapore
Bangladesh . Nepal . Indonesia . India . Malaysia . Thailand . China . Pakistan

a network of  communities

“IF SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME.”

“If someone had told me” I would be invested in a recovery process, I would have assumed they were out of their mind. Fourteen years later and I’m still clean and graced by a higher power that never ceases to amaze me. I’ve been doing service in NA for about 14 years and I know it works because of the love and commitment we have for each other.

I am always learning and that is how it has been with my involvement in the APF. I was first introduced to the APF in Hawaii then later at the world conference in 1997 where I attended an APF meeting. The members in that meeting educated me as to what the APF is. They explained that the APF is a group of NA members in the Pacific Basin who have a common interest of uniting NA in the Asian Communities. They meet once in a year Asia and exchange ideas, work on literature process and assist each other in any way they can. The APF is a place where members share information on how to stay clean and how to carry our message of recovery to those in Asia. This is important because the APF bridges that gap often experienced between World Services and remote NA Communities. NA resources are scarce and the freedom to participate in a recovery process is sometimes very limited.

Leaving things to a Higher Power, in that first APF meeting it was discovered that the previous treasurer had resigned and it became apparent a new treasurer was needed till the next meeting being held in Bangkok. The service bug that I am, I accepted the interim treasurer position and had yet to learn what an honor that would turn out to be. New doors opened into a world I was oblivious to before. I learned so much in that first meeting. In 1998 my husband and I attended

the first Japanese Convention in Nagoya. The convention was overwhelming. I actually spoke there with an interpreter and learned about the history of NA in Japan. By the time we left I had another group of people that would become part of my extended family. I met some women that enriched my life and challenged me to address my own humility in a way I never had before. I left Japan changed with an enhanced understanding of how we all fit together in NA and our differences become our similarities.

WOMAN'S SPECIAL

THIS ISSUE IS A
TRIBUTE TO ALL THE
WOMEN IN OUR
COMMUNITY WHO ARE
STAYING CLEAN AGAINST
ALL ODDS

I got the opportunity on my way to Bangkok in March of 99 to attend the Japan Convention/Learning Day. The World Service Office was there to help with translations, literature and a host of other things. One of the most significant events for me was the designing of the Japanese Key Chains. At that conference the entire fellowship got to see the first Japanese Key Chains on big screens. We cried out in excitement.

We then journeyed on to attend the APF meeting in Bangkok. It’s difficult to write this because the meaning is lost in the words but I will try. The meeting was opened with the serenity prayer read in Hindi and I felt goose bumps. World Service was there and gave up-dates on translations; distributed literature and one of their office workers became a key individual in assisting with an interpreter from English to Japanese. I made a wonderful friend that weekend, I trusted her the moment I met her. You know how we meet members who we just trust because it feels so safe. That was what I felt when I was around this women. She taught me a new word that helped me take the power out of negative thinking in regards to personality. I’ll tell you what the word was but it won’t make much sense, here goes,

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If someone had told me

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"Knucklehead." Well I told you. Anyway, it is that miracle of Higher Power putting the people in my life that become my teachers. Here are some of the highlights from the APF meeting; I'm sure there are more. We discussed culture sensitivity in reference to action as well as written language. Policy guidelines were developed and everyone felt a sense of unity. Resolution A was presented by Ron and he did an excellent job. I left understanding what Resolution A was and how important it is to our fellowship as a whole. The reports from the different countries were moving, sad at times but reinforced how great the need is to come together to share information to help NA grow. I learned how much I take NA for granted living in America. My whining about such things as the meetings getting stale, no women in NA, the business meeting taking too long, all those things became gifts. I listened to members share how addicts were dying on doorsteps trying to get clean, how women don't make it to the rooms because of the stigma and shame it brings to the family. Stories were shared by members who travel for hours, sometimes days just to get to a NA meeting. I made a silent amends to do whatever I can to remain teachable and honor my higher power's grace in getting me here at all. I realized the wonderful message we carry to each other and how much I have to be grateful for, really grateful for. Another highlight for me was the NA updates given from Korea and Katmandu. Plans were made to contact those new NA communities along with Nepal and Guam.

Did I mention we also had the Thailand convention after the APF meeting? Yippy Skippy, what a hoot! The Thailand fellowship hosted a wonderful convention. The members are expressive in their love for NA and it was truly felt by all. I was given the opportunity to host a women's meeting in our room. Seventeen women crowded into our small room from all over the world.

Women shared their struggle to get clean and stay clean. Women shared their stories and the hope that through NA their lives will and have changed. It didn't make me so sad as it gave me an awareness that there is service to do. Two social workers asked to attend the meeting, this would be the first time they attended a women's meeting and heard women share as addicts in a recovery process. This was a great meeting; the honesty shared was to the bone and gut retching. Courage filled the room, strength and the endurance to survive enhanced all that NA gives to us. Little did I know those women would change my life forever. In the moments when I forget how fortunate I am, those women have become my experience and remind me of how blessed and truly graced my life is. The social workers in that meeting were crying, their life had changed and became bigger. They now had a deeper meaning of what recovery is about and that it is not gender specific, it is for everyone. One social worker emailed me when I got home and told me she will make the commitment to reach out to women and I know that was Higher Power's answer.

And then another miracle. We were at the convention in Germany in June of 99 and I met a woman who had been in Bangkok at the women's meeting. It was so powerful, we were sisters and still clean. Our next APF meeting is in Japan and they will be celebrating 20 years of NA. What better way to celebrate than to have a convention? We are so blessed. I am a child of God and I know that today. The gifts received were never asked for but given so freely the moment I came to NA. I have no idea when or where my next lesson comes from but it will come from the rooms of NA. "If someone had told me these things," I would have assumed they were out of their mind. Experience has taught me all miracles happen in NA. Thank you for the blessings and the grace.

In loving service,

Tali, Hawaii.

from the desk of the APF Newsletter Committee

We thank all the women members who willingly contributed to this issue for women in our community. Initially we had planned to publish this issue in the second quarter of this year. There were promises to write and collect articles but none were received. However, what we did receive was a certain amount of criticism, for not getting the newsletter out on time. There is a certain irony in

this because the newsletter is only as good as the editorial contributions provided by the members. We rely on the leadership and members of the APF to share their stories and experiences or to help us collect this material. Finally, we asked Ron our ex-chairperson to help us collect articles from our sister members and to write an article on his APF experiences. We thank Ron for his effort.

From Mainland China

Hi, I'm Debs an loner addict living in isolation in China. It sounds scary but in reality it is ok! I ventured here to live and work on my own 4 years ago to take up my first teaching position. Now I'm here with my husband Geoff (whom I met overseas in the past 4 year) and who is also an addict and our new baby boy - Everest. NA hasn't made it to China for the Chinese yet, but hey we are hopeful considering NA's growth throughout Asia in recent years. Well done to you all.

Staying clean in isolation is not a problem, but sometimes staying sane can be. Fortunately I have a HP and a great sponsor whom I'm very grateful to for her communication by email, thanks Petra. Along with a loving group of sisters whom I share intimately with, also through email, and one very dear AA sister in a nearby city in China who I have phone contact with and sometimes meet for a meeting. With these women and our literature I am free from active addiction, maintain my recovery and have peace in my heart.

Living in China was a childhood dream. Once I started to earn my own money travelling became possible. At 21 I spent a year living in the UK and travelling around Europe then Canada. At the time I was heavily into 'partying', but once on my own I thought I would slow down, Ha ha ha. I have only vague memories of my time travelling through Europe. Knowingly I avoided travelling to destinations like Asia, I guess I knew if I went to Asia there was the likely chance I'd not come back. So the UK was a safe option with relatives as backup. I came back from that year and quietly promised myself I'd not travel overseas again until I had stopped 'partying'. Some 5 years later I cleaned up from more than just partying.

In 1994 my opportunity arrived! I was three and a half years clean, in my 3rd year of a 4 year teaching degree in Chinese Language, which by the way, I started the same year I cleaned up (does that give you hope? There were others were giving me hope at that time). A trip to China teaching was part of my university requirements. This was my first trip overseas Clean. It

was an amazing experience, which only compounded my desire to live and work in Asia, mainly China, with the option of travelling to other Asian countries. So I returned to China to fulfil that dream which is what I'm living today.

I am not on my own in this quest to explore. There are other women like me and I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you to them. It's women like this that give me hope to follow my dreams and to dare to dream of such things. People like Melinda from Australia who first gave me the hope of travelling. Jocasta & Josephine from London, and Betul from Turkey whom I met in India at an NA convention. Petra from Germany who showed me how to travel around the world and stay clean. Sue from London, Gail from Australia and Lisa from Paris who continue to give me the message that it is possible to live in India and stay clean. I am grateful to the women out there whom I've had the wonderful privilege of meeting through our women's meetings at NA conventions in India, some of you I've mentioned above.

To those of you who are also throwing on your backpacks fulfilling your dreams of living in foreign countries and seeing the world, 'enjoy'. I remember as I sat in my room at home in Australia back in 96 trying to pack my pack, what a mess, there I was putting in all the necessities for a 6 month trip though India, Vietnam and China. As I packed my pack there was certainly a handful of fear went into the side pockets along with some doubts and anxieties and of course some NA literature for hope, then before pulling the drawstring - a prayer. As I walked out the door I picked up a bucket of courage and off I went with one assurance, there would an NA member at the airport to met me and take me to the convention. Some 24 hours later I walk out of the airport in Calcutta and above all the heads was that welcomed NA sign. A sigh of relief and an overwhelming tear of gratitude.

Hey girlfriends my travels were and still are everything and more and a huge learning and discovery experience.

I continue to dare to dream and follow those dreams because NA will always be there with you or you will be guided to NA. It is really great to see NA growing throughout Asia, making it a safe place for someone like me to travel and live and for our Asian brothers and sisters to get clean the NA way.

Thanks for letting me share. Thank you for my recovery. Best wishes to you all.

Your sister in recovery.

China Debs

The Asian Pacific Forum Newsletter presents the experiences and opinions of individual members of Narcotics Anonymous. The opinions expressed are not to be attributed to Narcotics Anonymous as a whole, nor does publishing of any article imply endorsement by Narcotics Anonymous.

HELLO FROM BELLA – EX-APF NEWSLETTER EDITOR.

Australia has been a member of the APF since the beginning. We have attended the meetings, fund raised for the Forum and advocated for neighbouring NA communities at the World Service Conference as part of our work to assist addicts in our part of the world to recover from addiction.

When I was the RSR for Australia I was fortunate enough to go the APF meeting in Manila in 1997, not knowing what it would be like. I am not really a free spirited traveller - I prefer ritual and order and find that when I am in a foreign country I feel somewhat ill at ease, higher power or no higher power.

I had never been to the Philippines and was grateful to be told that a member I had shopped with when trying to relax at the Greensborough WSC would collect me at the airport. True to form I was picked up at the airport and taken to a large duty free shop where everyone in the car was able to buy duty free things on the strength of my airline ticket.

Fortunately I was taken under the wing of the local community and was shown the city and taken shopping at least 3 more times. As a result of the APF meeting in Manila I had the opportunity to recover from shopper-holism. I was taken to the largest Mall in the world and I am grateful to say that I reached my rock bottom in

this place where everything was incredibly lovely, incredibly cheap and nothing was my size. I lost the desire to shop and it has never really returned.

But I digress.

The APF meeting was great. What I liked was the informality of the meeting, the time to teach as we went though the business and the time to laugh at ourselves when we got serious. I felt that there was no real hierarchy, that we were truly equal. Some people from World services were there, however because they were visitors too, I did not think of them as experts, merely other addicts at a service meeting sharing their own experience strength and hope.

We were trying to ensure that the APF had continuity and experience so we could grow. Bob B from Hawaii took on the Chairperson's job and I took on the Newsletter editor position.

This job was one of the best service positions that I have ever had. My job was to tell the APF experience through the personal stories of members and an easy to understand explanation of APF service work. We hoped that we could get more support, financial as well as spiritual, if we told our stories and shared with each other and the rest of the world.

I contacted members and encouraged them to talk, we worked together to translate their words into English without losing the local flavour. I shared with other women, members of new communities and heard the stories of those members who had been around for a while and whose recoveries had been part of the foundation for their NA communities. I have remained in contact with some of these members since this time.

I thought that the best way to continue this work was to return home and set up fund raising activities to help pay for addicts from less financially sound communities to participate in the APF meetings. This way they could take their experience back home to continue to assist in the development of their NA community.

I was fortunate to have my husband Ron, ex-APF Chairperson, to assist me with this. (He holds the record for money raised by the Region to fund regional

activities when he was the Regional Activities Chair.) He had a lot of ideas for fundraising and we held events, sold second-hand goods, held raffles, collected money for literature and asked service committees for contributions. At the same time we talked about the APF at every opportunity and worked to encourage lots of local Australian support for the Forum.

The Newsletter Editor position was the only position that I have had to retire from without finishing my term. I was elected to the NA World Board and had to hand

over the newsletter to Ron. I believe that one of the reasons that I was elected to this position was because I had had some experience with the APF and could use this experience to add to the experience of the Board.

I am still extremely interested in the activities of the APF and miss my direct involvement. I have offered my assistance to the current Admin Committee and hope that they consider using me to help in any way I can to assist with the ongoing growth of NA in our part of the world.

A Grateful Addict in India

My name is Sonia, a grateful recovering addict from Bombay, India.

To start with I have been given so much in Narcotics Anonymous that I don't quite know where to begin. A week from now I will be completing 6 years in recovery. It's been a while and I have so much to live for and celebrate. I have finally found a life. 6 years ago, there was no direction, no future to look forward to, and no dreams to live for. This transformation has been due to NA.

I came into the fellowship when I was 18 with about a year clean, fresh out of rehab. At the rehab center, we were under lock and key so there was not much of a chance to use. I stayed there for 9 months and stayed clean on the outside for 3 months or so before I came to NA. I had just as much understanding of the program as any other newcomer. I got out of the rehab with a lot of fear and not really sure about whether I wanted to stop using or not. Those were slippery days and anything could have happened. It's by the grace of my higher power that I stayed clean. One of the things that touched me the most was a member giving me a chit of paper with his name and telephone number and the words "We Care" written on it. That has stayed with me to this day.

Soon after that I got into a relationship with a member and today we're married with a beautiful four-year-old daughter. The relationship part hasn't been easy and there were times I thought, "This is it. I'm out of it." But that was a time for growth as I see it now. I did not know how to live with myself and here I had to live with another person with the same disease and a little child. I was in pain because I did not want to accept my life the way it

was. One of the things I learnt from that phase of my life is that if I don't learn to deal with my issues they surface sooner or later with more intensity and frequency till I resolve it.

One of the other things I had to start working on was my relationship with my parents as I had severed all ties with them when I walked out of my house to be with my husband. It took almost two years to finally patch up and start building a relationship with them that was not based on resentments and anger. I'm still working on it. My family is very sick and I feel sad every time I visit them. I feel sad for them because they don't need to go through pain when they can avoid it. But I guess they will have to go through it till they become willing to change.

Today, my struggle is not with mind-altering or mood-changing substances. It's with learning to live life on life's terms. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's not but it's worth every moment at the end of the day. Today I have a more or less a healthy relationship with my husband, daughter and myself and it gets better all the time. I laugh, cry and get crazy; sometimes all in a day but life is wonderful. I have been given a reprieve, a day at a time from this disease. This is a gift and I am grateful for having been given a chance at life again. These years have also strengthened my belief in a Higher Power. I know that I am taken care of every moment or else I would not have lasted this long. Most of my dreams have come true and those that haven't will come true in time to come.

My message to all the women out there is to hang in there; God knows I've done enough of it. But the bottom line is **"It Works"**.

From Big Meetings to Small Meetings; *Kerry's Experience.*

I got clean in a big American fellowship and took it for granted that NA would always be there for me and I never worried too much about what made it work. Then 12 years ago my life turned upside down and I found myself travelling and living in Australia / Asia.

Australia was great because the fellowship had plenty of members and service was a priority with people. But when I started working in Asia all of the things I had taken for granted were suddenly gone. Those problems that seem so important in service, that cause all the arguments, don't seem to make much difference when you are one of three people in the fellowship.

I spent a couple of years in Indonesia and there was no NA there. For the first six months I went to the other fellowship's meetings (which were also small) and talked to as many people as I could about getting NA started. Lots of things slowed us down, politics, money, religion to name a few. But finally the day came that the door opened and in walked 25 young

Indonesian drug addicts. I have never known such a feeling of pure gratitude. Since that time the fellowship has continued to grow and the next APF meeting will be in Indonesia. It has been a priority for us to provide a local fellowship, not just one with westerners travelling through. A few months ago I moved to Hong Kong and found that the fellowship here had died down and there were no meetings. I could say that I started a meeting to help NA but the truth is I can't stay clean without meetings and I really started one for myself. There are not a lot of us but we are growing and just recently a local Chinese community group approached us to ask for help with young Chinese drug addicts.

NA has given me a reason and a way to live. I know that no matter how I feel there is always work to be done and a meeting to go to and someone else that needs a fellow addict to be there. I am never alone as a member of NA and I know that whatever else happens in my life, good or bad, this is the stuff that counts.
Kerry, Hong Kong

OUT-GOING APF CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Ivan has kindly asked me to write a report as the outgoing APF chairperson. In keeping with my philosophy that it is best to treasure the good bits and hand over the rest, I will share just a few of my good memories:

The warmth and humour of the Calcutta fellowship. Drinking chai for the first time during the break in a NA meeting in India. Playing guitar with Garth P in a sports stadium on the outskirts of Calcutta, trying to fend off mosquitos at the same time. Getting thrashed at cricket by some kids at the same stadium. Seeing members from NA communities making outside contact for the first time, like when I met Bokul from Bangladesh whose clean date was the day before mine.

Then there was playing in the band on the roof of the hotel in Bangkok, and on the same rooftop, watching the Thai traditional dancer (who worked in the local rehab) go straight into a Credence Clearwater song

while local Thai speaking members and other members from all around the world, yelled and howled into the night and had one of the best nights they will ever remember.

I was privileged to lead the first APF presentation to the WSC. Such was the openness and warmth of the members of the conference that it did not matter that I was not an official conference participant. Then, following the conference, my personal highlight was getting married to the lovely Bella with members from the APF, EDM and NAWs coming along to celebrate with us.

I could go on, and I will. I was always impressed at the untiring helpfulness of the members from NAWs at the APF meetings. They listened to problems, smoothed out translation difficulties, and always made themselves available to anybody anytime. To think that there was a

time not so long ago when there were moves to not invite NAWS to attend the APF.

In Japan we were looked after by some of the nicest people I have ever met. The food was great. I love fish and I was able to have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I think the highlight for me in Japan was being able to welcome the first Indonesian nationals to attend the APF. Mohammad, Dana, Reza, Robertus, Novel, Irciano and Bobby all somehow made it to Japan. I treasure the gifts I was presented with by the Indonesian guys and by some Japanese children following an address I gave about the APF. I was able to have my sponsor with me in Japan too, and it was just as well, because for me it turned out to be a stressful three-day meeting.

The challenges involved here for chairpersons can be quite frightening. Zonal Forums are a new and relatively untested type of service body and a lot of it is on the job training and a certain amount of creativity is needed in such uncharted waters. It fell to me in Calcutta to start putting together guidelines and in some cases these had to be written on the run, in order to deal with situations as they came up. I am grateful for the assistance of my wife Bella who had originally drafted the guidelines for the Manila APF meeting,

The APF is now rapidly evolving and perhaps it is time for all the guidelines to be re-examined to see if they are still relevant. Some parts need to be re-written for more clarity. The original guidelines have had bits tacked on here and there resulting in confusion and contradiction. References to 'sub-committees' now appear and my recollection is that there are no subcommittees in the APF. In Bangkok we actually changed the titles "newsletter chair" to and "website chair" to "newsletter editor" and "webservant" to avoid any connotation of subcommittees.

There was a proposal to create a "Development-trips sub-committee" at the Tokyo meeting. I hope that people will think this one through. Does the APF really need sub-committees? What kind of structure are we creating here? We elect trusted servants to leadership positions because we 'trust' in their experience and wisdom among other things. It has always been the job

of the APF leadership (the admin committee) to look after APF business between meetings. To create a separate sub-committee to do this work seems unnecessary, impractical, expensive and I believe would raise more problems than it solves.

We talk a lot about spiritual principles. I think that one of the most spiritual principles is "Keep it simple". I really hope that the APF can avoid complicating itself. Indeed perhaps it is time ask the question. "What is the role and purpose the APF or Zonal Forums in general and how should they function?"

I have experienced the APF moving from an informal discussion style group to something more akin to an ASC meeting that meets once a year, runs for three days and half the members have never been there before. Some participants do not share a common language, resulting in a lot of time spent with interpreters going over old ground. Add to these, there are cultural differences in application and attitude and you have to start wondering just what is effective and what is a waste of time. People commented to me about a lack of spiritual direction that they felt after the Tokyo meeting. Where are we heading? And what direction should we be heading in anyway?

It is good that the APF now has a voice at the WSC. But, are there those who still think that the APF should be seated at the WSC as a full participant? I believe that there are far more important things for us to do than spend our energy down that road.

One area where we can have great practical effect is to send experienced members to visit new and developing NA communities. The APF has the resources to organise and finance small to medium-scale development trips. I believe the effectiveness of sending a couple of people to share experience, strength and hope and information with a large number of members in a particular community, far outweighs the result of sending one person from that community to a workshop, convention or APF meeting. And yes, I sincerely believe that we squandered a golden opportunity by not visiting Bangladesh when we had the chance.

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OUT-GOING APF CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

(Continued on the following page)

Our meetings now follow much more formalised procedures. There are questions about “representation”. There are increasing amounts of motions for voting and backroom politics. (Sounds like the WSC) Is this where we want to go? Is this unavoidable? Or should we be aiming for some higher level than this?

A “Forum” by definition is “a place of discussion of questions of public (or common) interest” It is certainly not defined in my dictionary as a parliamentary or policy driven body. A forum is a place where issues, questions, information are shared, creativity should be encouraged, even the odd risks may be taken and, and a few mistakes allowed just to see what we can do. A forum is about information, assistance, about helping to carry the message to as many people as possible in our part of the world, but it should not be about empire building, opportunism or politics.

The Zonal Forums may not be service bodies in the traditional sense, but the ‘Concepts of Service’ are an indispensable and sadly under-utilised resource or guide. Another useful guide is the 5th Tradition, (look it up) A good question to keep on asking is “How does it relate to or serve our 5th Tradition?”

Fortunately for me there have been were plenty of

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people from whom I could draw experience and inspiration and run ideas by and I am very grateful because I hate doing things on my own. I first became a GSR over 11 years ago, and I have been involved service, be it area, regional or international NA service ever since. Sometimes it felt like my service positions were my “real” full time job and my other job was just something I did to pay the rent.

My only service position now is at group level. I am treasurer for our local Thursday night Newcomers meeting and I really enjoy the enthusiasm and freshness at this meeting. I am a member of another group on Tuesdays but I don’t even have a position there; I just turn up to be part of the meeting and help stack the chairs or wash dishes if needed. I can now spend more time doing activities that I got clean for, like playing music for instance. I don’t believe in the “service-led recovery” thing. I am just grateful for the opportunity. If it is true that you get out of service what you put into it, well, I must have put a lot in somewhere along the line. The other thing I have put in is my resume (yep, to the human resources pool) Maybe you should put yours in as well, especially if you live in Asia. You never know when your particular talents might be needed.

Special thanks to those from whom I received words of support and kindness, especially over the past year. You know who you are.

In service, Ron B. Chairperson APF (retired)

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3 April 2001 - 5 April 2000; APF meets at Jakarta, Indonesia.

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