

Clean Times

November/December 2015

www.tampa-na.org

How It Works (a Funcoast series on the steps and traditions)

Step 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."

Early in my recovery, any step after nine I considered 'next-level'; a completely untouchable process as no Higher Power really loved me. I was willing to do the steps as my sponsor suggested, but hoped that she would decide I was such an accomplished student, my work on previous steps would gain me extra credit, and I could gloss over this step. Yes, my uniqueness was deep, often comical, and always deadly.

But what happened through learning the importance of baby steps in

Step 11, I was taught that I was not alone and I began to practice the important art of conversation with my Higher Power.

When I had no concept of a Higher Power, I was told to go to where I felt safe and peaceful. That was a struggle since all the feelings I felt during any given hour on any given day, peace and contentment were a stretch. But being outside gave me joy, reminded me that I was small and was in no way responsible for its existence, movement. And as I walked through the breeze one day, I parked myself under a tree and began to listen. For what, I had no idea. But as I took a breath, I knew I was not responsible for that either. And many times over many years, my breaths were not guaranteed. In fact, they had been taken by my own accord. Then, I said Thank You to God and began to have a conversation.

When I seek, I am doing the work. When I consistently practice the work, I get better at the listening and the conversation and prayer. I am no longer confused of what God's will is for me. I absolutely know

what it is not: fear, anger, resentment. And what it is? Love. In its purest form. Unconditional: love of me, of you; no matter what you may do that I don't agree with. A wise woman told me years ago, that if it skips it's me, if it flows, it's God. I try to stay in the flow.

-Steph H. 4/9/2005

Step 12. "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Step 12 is in my daily life and likely yours too.. It's the text messages to and from other recovering addicts, it's the phone calls to and from sponsor/sponsees, it is the moments at work or out and about when someone asks me my opinion and I default to the principles you all have taught me. My opinion has become sharing of my experience and the art of sharing recovery has grown to often extend beyond my recovery network. My view of life has changed. What I needed was a change in attitude and with daily work, I continue to experience my attitude

adjusting and even get the honor of sharing those adjustments and changes. Life is amazing today and beyond my wildest dreams. The 12th Step helps to ensure I do not forget how vastly different life is today compared to a mere 5 years ago. The opportunity to share the dark days keeps them in the light. That pain and those choices no longer harm me and when shared can help another bring their dark secrets into the light. I no longer live in fear of being known (albeit it is often still uncomfortable). I know my HP guides me and I live to learn the lesson at hand.

The 12th Step is truly the center of the reciprocal nature of this program that saved my life and continues to do so on the daily. Every call from a newcomer provides me with as much as I could ever give. Every call or coffee or parking lot chat with my sponsor is full of exactly what I need to hear and places me back in the space of my personal responsibility. My sponsees give me more than I could have ever imagined. They keep me accountable and often times keep me connected when life is busy with blessings. I learn so much on this journey with them.

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From The Inside

Dear Reaching Out,

My name is TLF and I'm an addict. I'm back behind the walls again for trying to satisfy the appetite of my addiction, a task I've tried countless times. I keep looking for a way to use drugs successfully while managing a productive life, and I've come to the conclusion that it can't be done.

I attended my first NA meeting when I was paroled after my last incarceration. I had a list of meetings in my local area and thought it would be a good idea to start things out on a positive note, so I went. The warm welcome I received and the kindness that was shown to me were something I had never experienced. Because I had been around so much negativity in prison, it felt strange to be around people who genuinely cared about me staying clean.

When those old familiar feelings of wanting to use resurfaced, I remained silent and didn't tell anyone. My inability to share my true feelings and be honest with myself and others not only closed the door of recovery, it gave me a first-class ticket back to active addiction and prison.

I understand today that going to meetings regularly, getting a sponsor, and working the steps are fundamental keys to living a life of recovery. But I have also learned that it's important not to be afraid to share honestly and openly with my sponsor and NA family. I didn't know it at the

time, but there was a recovering addict in the NA program who saw something in me that I couldn't see in myself. This friend has remained in contact with me, sharing the NA message, for over five years since I've been locked up. Now that I'm being honest and open, working the Twelve Steps, and living a life of recovery on the inside, a sense of serenity and hope has reentered my life.

I'm eternally grateful to NA and to other addicts for reaching beyond the walls of incarceration and showing me that recovery is a reality. I thank God for directing me to NA, and thank NA for directing me back to God.

TLF, IL

Excerpt from:

The NA Way Magazine

Just Keep Coming

It's a suggestion that was always frustrating to me because of its vagueness. Just keep coming back—and what? But now I realize that that's the beauty of it: Just keep coming, and anything! When I keep coming back, one of the benefits is the opportunity to do the next positive thing for myself and my recovery—go to a meeting, call my sponsor, read some literature, say a prayer, go for a walk. If I'm not going anywhere for the moment, I might as well do something that might help ease the pain, clarify the confusion, or just help me not get high. I love that moment when I look back and see that I didn't get high and did the next right thing. I got through it and I felt better. It really does work if you work it. And then there are the long-term benefits when we just keep coming back—the millions of moments when I just didn't get high add up to years of experience and growth. I thought I would

never get over the guilt I felt in early recovery or the sadness of my mother's death. I thought my painful character defects would be with me forever. Changing jobs, losing a friend, or making a mistake at work would send me into a tailspin. So many things that seemed insurmountable in the moment became the foundation of who I am today. I learned to live in the moment, trust the process, and let the miracle happen.

And that's the real beauty of it. If I just keep coming back, I get to grow into the person I'm meant to be. I hate to scare people, but I had years of confusion and discontent in recovery. I had read the Fourth Step and I thought it said we were going to get rid of that stuff, so I was very frustrated to still have it. I thought there was something wrong with me. Well, I reread it and it says we're going to sort through it, and it doesn't say it's going to happen overnight. The steps and the tools of Narcotics Anonymous are the keys to my growth and change, but there's no quick fix. I have to keep coming; practice patience, trust, and acceptance; and allow the process to happen. I'm so glad I did (even though I was white-knuckling it at times) because I am mostly not confused and discontented anymore, even if it took years of sorting.

So the perspective of time is another benefit of "just keep coming back." Mountains become molehills. Things we thought would never change, whether they're outside situations or personality traits, do. We come in as kids (no matter what our age) and grow into mature adults. Not everything can be fixed by work and determination; some things just take time. So when I hear someone share in a meeting, "Why am I still like this?" "Why do I still feel so bad about myself?" "Why can I still not get along with my mother?" I tell them to just keep coming back. The change is slow and gradual and often painful, but it's also ongoing and rewarding and awe-inspiring.

Through all my highs and lows, I just kept coming back. I'm so proud that I stuck it out, so amazed with the results, and so lucky to be a part of Narcotics Anonymous. I hope you'll just keep coming back, too!

Nancy S, New York, USA

Writing Steps for Recovery (Behind the Walls)

Our vision is to carry the message that any addict can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way of life.

The Florida Region of Narcotics Anonymous has now helped introduce 23 self-sufficient NA meetings in FL and beyond; including, Coleman Federal Penn, Alabama, NW FL, Georgia, and South Carolina. The process began 6 years ago with the 'Pen Pal' project and developed into free-standing meetings; for inmates and by inmates. Many of these men and women are eager to work the steps and become involved in Narcotics Anonymous prior to release. The Florida Region of Narcotics Anonymous is working to realize our primary purpose by further implementing the "Writing Steps for Recovery (Behind the Walls)" initiative.

How can I help? Join the "Writing The Steps for Recovery (Behind the Walls)" project. This can be your next step in further carrying the message. Through "Writing The Steps for Recovery (Behind the Walls)", you have another opportunity to share your experience, strength, and hope; give back to an addict seeking recovery what NA has given to you.

If you are interested in gaining a State or Federal clearance or for more information and guidelines on the program, contact Gilbert O. at 813.245.5399.

BELONGING

Are you really there?
When it gets too much to bear
Can you hear my hopes and prayers?
And when I'm hurting
Do you care?

Is there something left to prove?
Some other path that I should choose?
Any mountains I can move?
That's why I'm on my knees, now
Asking you...

Do you belong to me or to them?
Are you the voice inside my head?
Tell me, what happens when we're dead?
Do you belong to me or to them?

Trying to please is an endless task
When a leap of faith is all you ask
But will you catch me if I crash?
Please catch me if I crash

That's why I'm on my knees, now
Asking you...

Do you belong to me or to them?
Are you the voice inside my head?
Tell me what happens when we're dead?
Do you belong to me or to them?

Are you real or just a dream?
Sometimes it gets so hard to see
What to hold and to set free?
Is it them or is it me?

So, are you really there
When it gets too much to bear?
Do you hear my hopes and prayers?
And when I'm hurting
Do you care?

Tell me, are you really there?

"At The Time"

"F you, I'm not paddling." The expression used when the ultimate battle over who would paddle the boat home began.

"Wanna wrestle?" The smiling and exciting beginning of a playful, post-boredom-sparring match, that erupted into a painful, tear-filled fistfight.

"Wanna go to the REC?" The challenge to a striker versus goaly face-off. An event that angrily

ended when one or the other kicks the ball as hard as they possibly could, in the opposite direction, before walking briskly off the field to force their victim to retrieve the ball, and walk home alone.

"Dude, don't take my bike without asking!" The lecture given after having taken the others' bike to the usual hangout in order to indulge in a super disappointing amount of drugs. Only to ride home having wished they never left.

My First Meeting

Anxiety.
Pure unadulterated panic.
Was I always this afraid?
Did it always hurt so much to try and talk?
Why does it feel like everyone is looking at me?
They are. I know it.
Why are they hugging me? They want something.
They always want something.
Why are we praying? What's a key.. what?
Who are they clapping for? What did they do?
Wait; why am I here?
Oh right because the house mom said I could.
What are they talking about? Why are they smiling?
I can't stop shaking,
Oh god it hurts.
They know.
Of course they know you idiot! Who do you think you're fooling?
You don't belong here.
They're just like everyone else.
Don't be so naive.
You know they only want one thing.
I can't get warm, it's like my bones are cold.
Why does it hurt so bad?
Make it stop.
I really need a cigarette.
What are they saying?
I can't understand a thing, it sounds fuzzy.
Where's the bathroom?
Where'd they get the coffee?
Oh you'll throw up if you drink that, don't even try it.
Why is it taking so long?
When is it over?
What are those things on the walls?
What are Steps? Why are there 12?
What do they need traditions for?
My head is killing me.
I should be high right now, not sitting here.
What's a drug of choice?

"Bro, calm down, what happened?" The consolatory beginning to a long discussion of how to make better decisions, so as to not allow our lives to get so tumultuous.

"Dude, I seriously cannot stop!" An admission that would eject itself from the depths of a shamed soaked straight-jacket, merely because of the sanctuary found on the other end

"Got a minute?" A verbal "passing GO" into the universe of bad

What's this pamphlet with numbers for?
I'm not calling these people!
I don't even know who they are.
Not like they'd answer anyway.
Oh what's happening now?
Why are we standing?
Sweet it's over.
Why are we in a circle.
Praying again! Seriously this is stupid.
Wow my bones don't hurt right now.
What's that? Why did it stop?
Now what do I do...?
"Hi what's your name?"
Why is she talking to me? I hate women.
"oh um, my name's Sarah"
Don't tell her that! You should've made something up!
"Hi, Sarah. Welcome!!"
Wait, what?!

Why are we hugging again?
Maybe this isn't so bad after all.
Don't listen to her. This is awful!
Shut up for a second would you!
The shaking stopped,
maybe it'll stop again.

"Hi...Thanks...."

relationship talks and assistance in finding hope for one another.

"Nice Job Man!" An openly shared pride, for one another successes in every day life.

"Goodnight buddy, I love you." a simple text message that displays the sacred, tangible bond between two souls.

Words, sounds and phonetics that connect emotion and ideas to another person. Many are trivial, some contain "I love yous," others are never said again in the same order.

Some are joined by pain, some are coupled with smiles, or tears. In some cases they are only ever understood by the two people who utilize them. In this case, two souls can experience a unity that is as important as it is unfathomable.

continued from pg 1...

We all do this together. And as much as I cannot comprehend why all this works... I no longer need to. I truly believe we keep what we have by giving it away. You guys not only saved my life, you taught me how to love unconditionally... a gift I will forever be grateful for and I will do my part to give that gift away also and continue to practice and learn how to be the best me possible with all my flaws and imperfections and assets and personality :) Thank you to my predecessors that held me up (even hugged me) when I couldn't see straight or stay awake in a meeting. Thank you for asking how you could help and telling me to keep coming back. I heard you and I promise to remember forever those moments and pray to be that predecessor for someone else.
-Deborah AN.

Tradition 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."

Tradition 12. "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

We often hear the twelfth tradition quoted – "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all of our traditions," but seldom reflect on what that means both to individuals and to our groups. Traditions 11 and 12 consider two very important kinds of anonymity; the first

has to do with personal anonymity in the public view outside of Narcotics Anonymous, and the second, with anonymity as it is practiced within our fellowship.

Anonymity is often defined as the state of bearing no name. We sometimes take that to mean "what we see here and hear here, stays here." While this kind of anonymity is certainly important in ensuring the safety and confidentiality of our members, Traditions 11 and 12 speak to broader forms of anonymity as well. At the end of some meetings, I have heard it said that "What you hear here and see here, don't take it out of here with a name or a face on it." Of course we pass on parts of what we hear in meetings as part of the therapeutic value of one addict helping another – this is how we pass on slogans, ideas about our literature, and bits of experience that we think may help one another. We do so, however, in a state of anonymity, perhaps saying something like "I heard once in a meeting that this fellowship runs on love," or, as I am prone to quote sometimes when I speak "I once heard an old-timer say that when his needs began to match his wants, he knew he was in his Higher Power's will." Passing along valuable experience is part of how we retain and spread recovery, and how we take full advantage of all of what the fellowship has to offer us.

In most of our daily lives, we do not regularly come in contact with "press, radio, and films," and are usually not in positions where we need to

immediately worry about this kind of personal anonymity.

Happily, as Tradition 11 tells us, we have a public relations policy to guide us. Although there is nothing to stop us from promoting Narcotics Anonymous to others, our traditions and much of our individual experience tell us that such promotion is ineffective. I know for me, nobody could have told me what Narcotics Anonymous was and how it works until I was able to experience it myself, and when I did, the fellowship showed me. Our fellowship is not interested in promoting our way of life, and the important work our public relations subcommittees do is involved in letting people who may need us know what and where we are. As individuals, we are free to do this as well, and many of us have learned that making this way of life attractive to the still-suffering addict is much more effective than trying to promote it. We as members can certainly work towards supporting a policy of attraction rather than promotion by greeting newcomers without judgment, providing warm, inviting atmospheres in our meetings, and by sharing honestly about our own experience.

We can also support the spiritual principle of anonymity Tradition 12 talks about in practicing it in all of our affairs within the fellowship. As members, and as groups, we should ask ourselves whether we really understand that every person who walks into our meetings is absolutely

equal and should thus be treated exactly the same in all areas of fellowship involvement? Do we practice this kind of anonymity in our business meetings? As a spiritual foundation, anonymity is the basis of every other tradition that guides us. For example, if we are thinking about our common welfare first, it must come before the needs of individuals and be considered in a state of namelessness in general. If we are formulating a group conscience, everyone who calls themselves a member should be able to contribute equally, especially since we do not place conditions on membership or judge its sole criteria, the desire to stop using. We do not have Narcotics Anonymous professionals, nor do we have any hierarchical leadership, ensuring that, at least in our service structure, we are all the same. If we truly practice this principle in all of our affairs in Narcotics Anonymous, we can internalize the idea that every person we meet in the fellowship suffers from the same disease, and is working towards a common solution.

What a miracle it is to be part of a fellowship that so richly values equality and, at its heart, love of every single addict who walks through our doors. The traditions as a whole and Tradition 12 specifically guarantee that this love carries on in all that we do and ensures us that, indeed, "all will be well."
-Liz K.

Why I stay after 20 years of Recovery

There is no question about the fact that I am truly an addict, but today I would like to say that I am a recovering addict. An addict that suffers from a fatal disease that can and will kill me if I don't continue to do the things that were suggested to me from the beginning on this journey. I have made it through a lot of challenges during my journey in recovery and I have not found a reason to use over any given situation that life's challenges had brought my way.

You see, as strange as it may sound, I have practically learned how to do everything in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. I first learned how to be a good student by learning to listen and listen to learn but more importantly knowing what to listen for and how to apply the information in all areas of my life.

I learned how to manage my finances in NA by participating in service as a treasurer at the group level which taught me to take care of my top priorities first so that everything else will flow. I learned how to take care of my home by having a home group. I learned how to be a parent by working the steps and the traditions and by knowing how to have healthy relationships with people in the rooms.

I found that by putting recovery first, no matter how much time I have, and staying involved with service, the program of Narcotics Anonymous continues to work in my life. This is because once I have thoroughly worked Step Three

and sincerely applied it to all of my affairs knowing that MY GOD is in charge, I am no longer fearful of the unknown. I embrace this spiritual journey and continue to maintain my spiritual growth so that I can continue to be free.

Recovery is what happens in our meetings so if I stop attending then I am no longer recovering. You see, Narcotics Anonymous gave me a life and the people that's in the rooms and the ones who haven't found their way to the rooms yet is my reason to continue on this journey. I want to be here when the Newcomer comes in and be that beacon of hope that they will desperately need and for the people that are still here and willing to listen to my stuff and not judge me but continue to hold me accountable to my actions.

Service is what keeps me coming back because in order for me to keep what I have is by giving it away.

If you don't believe me just ask anyone who had some time and relapsed?

In Loving Service,
Tammy W.
9/20/1990



Kintsugi

I have spent my entire recovery in the Tampa Funcoast, and I love what this area has given me since 1991. When I learned about the Japanese practice of Kintsugi, it resonated with me as a perfect metaphor for my recovery.

Kintsugi is a process in which a piece of pottery is repaired with lacquer mixed with gold dust... the idea being that the finished product is more beautiful and valuable than before it was broken.

When I arrived at the door of my first Narcotics Anonymous meeting, in March 1991, I was truly shattered. My spirit was in pieces from two decades of active addiction. I had been enslaved for so long; I had forgotten what it felt like to be free. As a result I had no expectation that I would ever again have a life of self-respect or joy.

Day after day, month after month, and year after year, Narcotics Anonymous tended to my wounds with compassion and love. My life evolved, slowly, from one that was fragile, empty and sad, into one filled with purpose, meaning, passion, and yes... Joy.

The men and women of the Tampa Funcoast of Narcotics Anonymous mended my damaged placed, replacing ugly bitterness and self-loathing with the golden hue of integrity and honor.

Through the simple, profound alchemy of the 12 steps, I was once again made whole, with my scars once so vivid, healed.

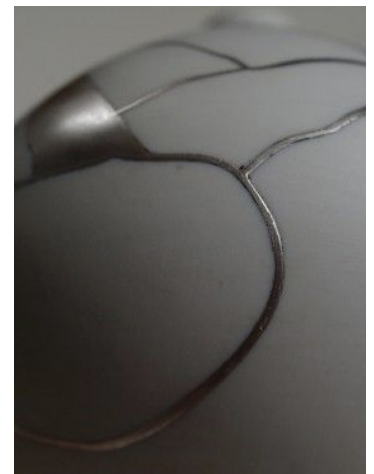
I believe, with my whole heart, that my life today, just like the mended Japanese pottery, is far more beautiful and valuable than before I was broken.

Kintsugi, indeed.

-Meredith D.

Reaching Out

Whether you are an NA member, a professional who works with recovering addicts, an incarcerated member, or a member who carries the message via service with Hospital and Institutions; the Reaching Out newsletter curated by NA World Services may be a resource for you. Reaching Out in its design helps incarcerated addicts connect to the NA program of recovery, enhances H&I efforts, and offers experience from members who have successfully transitioned from the 'inside' to be productive members of society. All are invited to share their experience, strength, and hope in the Reaching Out newsletter. The Reaching Out publication is seeking paid subscribers to assist in supporting our continued efforts to distribute the magazine to our members housed in state and federal facilities. Ask your home group to subscribe and help us carry the message. Contact Gilber O. at 813.245.5399 or via email at gbs92101@hotmail.com



Anniversaries - November & December

Breakfast Club		Quest For Serenity	
Toni G 12/7/2011	4	Aoife O 11/11/2012	3
Grow or Go		Angie H 12/1/2013	2
Stephen P 11/11/1987	28	Amy R 12/5/2012	3
Scott K 11/25/1984	31	Phoebe B 12/7/2005	10
Craig F 11/27/2007	8	Radical Recovery	
Kyle M 12/8/2009	6	Ron T 12/14/2011	4
Heights of NA		Recovery Central	
Mike F 11/29/2014	1	David J 11/17/2006	9
Hope In Lutz		Nick S 12/6/2013	2
Carrie L 11/2/2012	3	Nicole C 12/13/2013	2
Betty Ann 11/9/2007	8	Nicole P 5/23/2013	2
Melinda G 11/10/2013	2	Recovery In The Hood	
John R 11/15/1999	16	Eugene 11/18/1996	19
Ron S 11/16/1993	22	Squeaky Clean	
Richard B 12/21/2003	12	Jim F 12/3/1984	31
How It Works		Stepping Up	
Denise V 11/10/2012	3	Steve C 11/20/2001	14
Robert C 11/23/2012	3	Sunset Solutions	
Hyde Park NA		Lori G 11/3/1988	27
Michael B 11/2/2010	5	Bob J 12/12/1986	29
In The Middle		T.U.G.	
John T 11/8/1993	22	David L 11/9/2008	7
Life on Life's Terms		Jonathan C 11/17/2013	2
Kevin B 11/7/2001	14	The Truth	
Live or Die		Jonathan C 11/17/2013	2
Mike B 12/15/2009	6	Dane S 12/10/2013	2
Monday Meditation		The War Is Over	
Rachel B 11/23/2005	10	Cy K 11/19/2006	9
NA 180		Nancy H 11/21/2003	12
Dan N 11/1/2010	5	Mike B 11/21/2013	2
Jill S 11/13/2013	2	Daniel C 12/4/2010	5
Daniel W 11/15/2012	3	Johnny W 12/17/2012	3
Matthew L. 11/21/2013	2	Mike R 12/23/2013	2
Manny G 12/10/2011	4	Women Do Recover	
Linda R 12/27/2006	9	Deborah S 11/18/2001	14
Never Too Young		Chovonne W 12/10/1993	22
To Recover		Women's Hope	
Michael M 11/10/2013	2	Brittney 11/1/2010	5
Dane S 12/10/2013	2	Meghan S 11/1/2012	3
Kristan W 12/31/2011	4	Pauline G 11/4/1985	30
New Bite of Serenity		Monica G 11/7/2014	1
Barbara A 12/11/1986	29	Melissa W 11/8/2008	7
Tony W 12/26/1993	22	Marcy L 11/16/2004	11
New Life		Taryn T 11/21/2004	11
Jennifer P 12/1/1990	25	Jill L 11/22/2000	15
Andrew S 12/28/2012	3	Jennifer G 11/23/2007	8
New Tampa NA		Lucy L 12/25/2006	9
Jeff S 12/24/2003	12	Linda R 12/27/2006	9
Oldtimers			
Collette T 11/25/2010	5		
James W 11/27/1997	18		

The Tampa Funcoast Area of Narcotics Anonymous Newsletter Committee welcomes your comments, ideas, announcements, and articles. Your submissions must adhere to the spiritual principles of The 12 Traditions of NA and cannot be copyrighted material from 3rd party persons or publications. Submissions may be subject to editing in order to adhere to the spiritual principles of The 12 Traditions of NA and/or the space constraints or the group's conscience of the Clean Times Newsletter.