

# CleanTimes

July - September 2004

*Serving the West Tennessee Area of Narcotics Anonymous*

**25th Anniversary of Narcotics Anonymous in Memphis!**

## WE DO GET BETTER!

Yesterday I celebrated my 35th birthday and can say for many reasons, it was one of the best ones I've had in many years. As I laid in bed yesterday morning, I realized that this would be the first birthday I would spend clean since I was 12 and that this would be the first birthday in a long time that my ultimate goal would not be getting so high that I wouldn't remember anything about it.

I moved out to California when I was 19 and celebrated my 20th out there. On the night of my 20th birthday something really horrible happened and from then on up until yesterday I let what happened truly make this one special day in my life a nightmare, a day I just wanted to cease to happen, a day I got so high, I NUMBER THE PAIN AND LIVED IN FANTASY LAND.

Yesterday was the exact opposite. I've been actively working my 4th step (*well I had been having problems writing lately until I sat down with my sponsor and talked about a few things, THANK YOU SPONSOR, YOU'RE THE BEST*) and yesterday instead of getting high over the past I can't change, I wrote about the past that I'll be able to let go of through the spiritual principle of surrender one day soon.

As for the rest of my day, I went to my parents for dinner and feasted on hot dogs and hamburgers, cake and ice cream. I got some really cool presents (especially my very own cordless phone from my sister I roommate with. Seems she finally got tired of me leaving her phone off the charger so she got me my own phone. LOVE YOU SIS!!!)

After I left my parents house I did H&I at St. Francis and although there may have been many other things I wanted to do, there was one thing I know I NEEDED to do: CARRY THE MESSAGE OF HOPE AND RECOVERY TO THE ADDICT STILL SUFFERING. As I left the hospital, I stopped for a cup of coffee at our new recovery/coffee shop and had a really great conversation with another addict. She didn't know just how much that little talk meant to me but I'll say this to her now, THANK YOU SO MUCH! I ended my night by calling my sponsor and told him of what I'd done all day. As we talked I heard his girlfriend (my sponsorette, sorry everyone, I'm just very lucky like that) singing HAPPY BIRTHDAY to me in the background. I realized I had 2 people on the phone with me that are my friends, true friends, I love with all my heart.

When I woke up today, I was filled with gratitude for so many things. NA has given me so much: like my life back, true friends and the power to have a choice. Yesterday I made the choice to celebrate my birthday, not run and hide from it. I just want to say THANK YOU to the many people who have freely showed me this new way to live, without all of you and the whole fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, I probably wouldn't be alive today.

Love ya bunches,  
Raymond M.

## THE BIG CHILI COOKOFF!

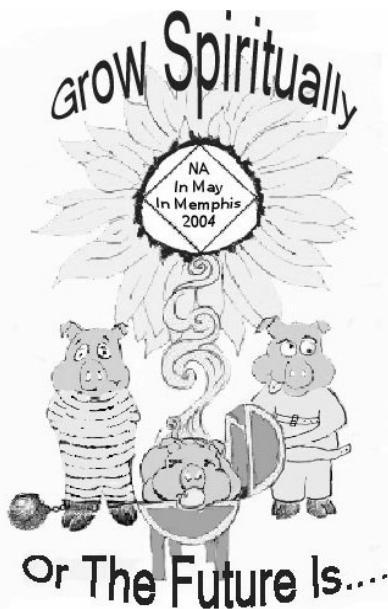
Every year we have two fund-raising events for the NA in May festival. In last years' Chili Cook-off, I entered a crock-pot full and finished in second place. I was rewarded, for my efforts, with a ribbon and an empty crock-pot. A lot of people at the event came up to me afterward and told me that they didn't even get to taste my chili so they couldn't vote for it. This is when I noticed that the person who won, had one of these super colossal, giant, mega crock-pots and it was the only container with chili in it. It was good chili, but truthfully it wasn't as good as mine. I knew that I had the answer to the chili championship of 2004. So..what was my solution? I went out and got me one of those super colossal, giant, mega crock-pots of my own. I wasn't going to be out eaten in this year's championship. I thought that I had made the perfect chili in the perfect pot. How could I lose! The event rolled around and we had a huge turn out with 14 entries in the contest. We had hot chili, sweet chili, spicy chili, deer meat chili, white chili, chilly chili, and plain chili chili. One of the fun parts of the tournament is to think up a catchie name for your chili. If I remember correctly, mine was Tennessee TNT Chili. We were given some voting tickets with our entry donation and started tasting. I think I ate about five bowls full of different chili and added a little cheese and onions to top them off! I wasn't worried about the outcome because I had used a super colossal, giant, mega, secret weapon! When the votes were tallied, Connie G. had won the championship, and I had placed a distant fifth or sixth. I'm blaming it all on that dad-burned new crock-pot, it wasn't seasoned properly. I'm already planning on next year's Chili Cook-Off, and I've got a whole year to polish up the perfect chili recipe and season that super colossal, giant, mega crock-pot. Next year's trophy is mine! mine! mine! Really folks, this is what it is all about, addicts socializing and having some good clean fun at the area's activities and events. Everyone I talked to had a great time and plenty of good chili to eat. The area really has a lot of different activities going on, from picnics, dinners and parties to NA in May, the new Spiritual Retreat in October, and the VRC in Chattanooga in November. So remember I may never win the chili cook-off, but we can have fun in recovery!

### Feeling "a part of"

*The get-togethers after our meetings are good opportunities to share things that we didn't get to discuss during the meeting."*

**Basic Text, p. 95**

## GOD'S EVENT



Since I have been in recovery, I have consistently heard that everything is done in God's time. This turned out to be more than true looking back on this year's NA-in-May. There was some controversy over who would chair the NA-in-May sub-committee and this delayed us a month or two. In the meantime, The Area Vice-Chair convened a sub-committee meeting sans Chair and formed a committee. This too created controversy. So after delays and struggles, the NA-in-May sub-committee held it's first meeting.

Internal controversy is mentioned in our readings about the Traditions for a reason. We sometimes deal with controversy in NA service. Controversy may have lost the first round but reared it's ugly head again in the second. The Area Chair pulled me aside after the meeting, which elected me to Chair the NA-in-May sub-committee. He insisted that two of his Executive Committee members be co-signers on the NA-in-May bank account: The Area Treasurer and Area Vice Treasurer. I was willing to comply since it was their money. I took the seed money they gave us and went with the Area Treasurer to open a

bank account. This created something of an uproar at our first meeting.

There was controversy over whether or not we should even have a bank account. Later there was even a motion at the Area to prohibit us from having one. It was voted down. Then there was even conflict over the guidelines.

The NA-in-May sub-committee had guidelines written by a previous NA-in-May Chair. The guidelines called for three people to be on the NA-in-May bank account: the NA-in-May Chair, the NA-in-May Vice Chair, and the NA-in-May Treasurer. These were written during a year when the NA-in-May sub-committee had no bank account. This previous NA-in-May chair wasn't my higher power or an oldtimer for whom I had considerable regard. He was my sponsee, now relocated to another city. I had regard for him but I thought we could be flexible about his guidelines. A slim majority of the committee thought otherwise. Actually, the committee itself was deadlocked but an NA member, who did nothing to serve on this committee, cast the deciding vote. Another committee member calmly rebuked me for complaining.

What could I do? I surrendered. I didn't like it, but you don't have to like something in order to accept it. From that point forward I did all I could to bring the NA-in-May bank account into compliance with the guidelines. After all, I was already on the wrong side of this and Unity is too important to sacrifice for my selfish point of view, no matter how justified.

After the dust settled, last year's NA-in-May Chair sidled up to me and confided that the Area Treasurer had been on their account. They had been the only other NA-in-May sub-committee to have a bank account. I just let it go.

I'd like to report that from there on it was all smooth sailing, but I'd be lying. It was a constant exercise in problem solving. Both my sponsor and my Vice Chair kept telling me, "You worry too much. This is God's event and he makes it happen." This sounded right to me, but my experience with the Third Step indicated that God does for us what we can't do for ourselves. We still have to do footwork.

The weekend of the event finally came. We had done all the footwork we possibly could: the shopping, the speakers, ad infinitum. What we couldn't do for ourselves, was make people come. We knew from the weather reports that it would rain and our committee had developed a reputation for controversy. Would they attend?

Friday the sun shined and they came. Saturday was a constant deluge and they still came. We had a full house for the Main Speaker Meeting Saturday night and everyone said how wonderful it was. I was exhausted Sunday. You have no idea how grateful I was for Leonard West's meditation workshop Sunday morning. I'd like to thank everyone who participated, especially Colleen S. for taking time out to come here to share an awesome message of recovery. So, despite controversy and that old enemy of all addicts everywhere "Self-Will", the event ended up being exactly what it was supposed to be.

Jamie and Trisha were right, it really is God's event.

# I Surrender! NA Is Not A Religion

## by Glen H.

First, let me say that I consider myself an agnostic as far as religion goes. An agnostic is defined as a person who holds the view that any ultimate reality (as God) is unknown and probably unknowable; broadly: one who is not committed to believing in either the existence or the nonexistence of God or a god.

As a child and teenager, I used church as a place to get away from a bad home environment. As I got older and learned more, I started rationalizing religion away until I suspected that there really was no God out there concerned with the outcome of planet Earth. I felt that we were just a lucky group of cells that evolved into life as we know it today.

When I was first exposed to Narcotics Anonymous 12 years ago, I needed a new way of life because mine wasn't working. My first NA meeting was at the old Solutions Group at Peabody & Bellevue. During that meeting, I read the 12 Steps and saw the word God 4 times. I interpreted the 12 Steps as further deifying God by using the words Him and His will; reminding me of my past brush with religion. That meeting closed with the Lord's Prayer sometimes and at other times the group version of the Serenity Prayer. I was faced with a dilemma. How could an agnostic use what seemed like a god-based program to stop using?

Back then, my employer required me to attend 12-Step meetings as a condition of my continued employment. I had to sign a contract stating that I would attend at least 8 12-Step meetings in a week for a year or be terminated. I was an Air Controller and I couldn't afford to lose that job, so I agreed to the contract under duress; while objecting to what I saw as forced attendance to a religious program. A main concept of NA seemed to be for me to develop a conscious contact with God, as I understood Him and the meetings always started and ended with a prayer. I was sunk!

NA wasn't going to work for me that time. And I was determined to fight back. I went to those NA meetings but closed the door to this early opportunity of recovery. After my year was up, I filed a complaint against the US Government based on religious discrimination. It took 6 years, but I finally won.

It was a shallow victory because my drug use continued escalating and by the time that decision came down, I was in rehab for the second time faced with the same religious paradox as above. I detoxed and continued my journey of self-destruction while not choosing the NA way of life once again. I still objected to the "religious" aspect of the program as I believed it to be and I used this as an excuse to keep using.

And finally, this January I was once again at a point where I had to change my behavior or maybe die this time. I was taken to the hospital with acute withdrawals and suicidal ideations. I was admitted to Lakeside. Their program included the same components I had objected to over the last 12 years and I struggled with this during my first week there. I was more hopeless than ever.

But, on the 8th day of treatment, I had an epiphany. The Twelve steps are not religious but spiritual in nature. Maybe this could work.

I learned that spiritually is the seeking of a higher moral path and doing the right thing. I can now admit that there is a higher power that can help keep me clean where I have failed miserably. To me, that higher power is not the God of my youth. It's not even a deity.

I have learned to respect other's religious beliefs and appreciate their acceptance of my lack of religion. But, I can never forget that I once forcefully rejected Narcotics Anonymous because of my closed minded views. Now, through the principle of open-mindedness I am able to overlook it when someone else wants to close with the Lord's Prayer or they have incorporated a theistic god as their higher power.

I only ask that those who close with the Lord's Prayer remember that there are those who may be turned away from this way of life; who may die because they are where I once was.

I am truly grateful for Narcotics Anonymous and my greater understanding of it.

*Editors Note: No anonymity was broken in this article. Patty has given her consent to use her first and last name.*

## Never Alone, Never Again

Some of you may remember Patty L. After she had been around NA for a little while, she started a Spanish language meeting. Patty is now working part of her Ninth step out of order. This happens sometimes when life-on-its-own-terms intrudes on our recovery. She is currently making a direct amends to the state of Texas.

You can imagine how lonely it is in jail. Some of us know first hand. I've heard some pretty tough guys grudgingly admit to getting lumps in their throats at Christmas. Remember when the mail came? We tried not to appear too eager and yet felt pride when we got mail. We mattered to someone! Little things take on greater value in jail; the law of supply and demand creates surreal proportions. I once saw a prisoner pay five dollars for a cigarette. You might minimize the importance of receiving a letter when you have your freedom but just try being incarcerated for a while.

Patty would love to get letters from her friends here in Memphis. She can't presently attend meetings in Memphis but anytime two addicts get together and share their recovery it's a meeting. If the exchange of sharing is as slow at the U.S. Mail does that mean it's not a meeting? Okay, so maybe that's stretching it a little. Here is her address:

Plane State  
Patricia Lara  
1218723 C2-01  
904FM686  
Dayton, TX 77535

Encouragement is a spiritual principle in Narcotics Anonymous. We find it in Tradition Three where we learn to encourage addicts to keep coming back. Patty needs your encouragement now. Do you have the compassion and willingness to share words of encouragement with her? This spirituality stuff boomerangs back on us sometimes. You may find yourself the principle beneficiary of your goodwill toward her.

Patty is up for parole soon. It would be helpful to her cause if those of us who are rooting for her were to write to the Parole Board recommending her for release. Letters of support are part of the review process. They are evidence that the offender will have a network of family and friends to help when she gets out. They show: *somebody knows the offender and cares, the offender has free world input while in prison, someone will help when she gets out, and there is a good side of the offender counter-balancing the bad side which appears in her criminal record.* It would be helpful to Patty if the Parole Board received independent confirmation that she is a good person despite her mistakes. Send your letters to:

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles  
8610 Shoal Creek Blvd.  
Austin, TX 78757

## HOPE

I shared the other night at a meeting about my promotion and moving into "the big office" this week. I'm advancing in my job, becoming a media contact person for some interviews, being commended by my boss, taking on new responsibilities, basically.. I'm kicking butt professionally. So when I got IN the office, and sat BEHIND the big desk...it hit me! That little voice in my head of low self-esteem, insecurity and dare I say..addiction?

The voice that says.."You don't deserve this and how long will it be before you screw it up?" The voice that tells me "When they find out who you really are..it will end?" My addiction is ever present in my life and does not want me to succeed, because in failure and desperation I have more reason to use.

Today I feel like I am very close to having my insides match my outsides. If you don't understand that statement..stick around.

For years in and out, of recovery I was trying to present an image to everyone around me - terrified that if they really knew me they would run screaming from the room. That fear kept me gridlocked in steps 1, 2 and 3. That fear kept me in relationships with men that lasted two to three months, before I bolted and ran. The same fear kept my friendships with women on a shallow and superficial level. Today, my life is more a case of "what you see is what you get". Sometimes that is not the prettiest picture, but at least it is a real reflection of who I am. As a result of having things matching up inside and out..I don't have that hollow feeling and distance from people. I I no longer have the fear of "if they really knew me.." I have become vulnerable.

Yes..people really know me and that means I can and do get hurt on occasion. People know me well enough to pass judgement and criticize. C'est la vie.

Time and time again in this fellowship I am amazed and overwhelmed by the amount of love and support that I have been so freely given. From day to day it may not be the same addicts in my life, but nonetheless, my life is full of people who openly show me that they love and care about me. Last night as WE celebrated the recovery process at my homegroup, I was showered with so many compliments and affirmations that to be honest, I was in a state of shock. I didn't cry then but it only took one email this morning to bring on the flood of grateful tears of joy. Not in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine a life like this. A life where people REALLY know me on an intimate level - and love me without abandon and without condition. I never imagined my life and my heart could be so full.

And to share this all with my home group, my best and dearest friends, my sponsor, my daughter, a friend from almost a thousand miles away and my parents...well, that's just cake!

The message I have today is hope. Hope is what has allowed me to persevere on a daily basis under whatever conditions LIFE is throwing at me. Hope helps me get out of the bed in the morning. I came to these rooms desperate, empty, confused and above all else...hopeless. I did not understand why I hurt so bad on the inside. Nothing I drank, smoked, swallowed, stole or did helped that feeling. I slept around because for that brief interlude someone was telling me that I was okay and that I was beautiful. Today though the love of the fellowship I have hope. And I don't have to prostitute myself emotionally or physically to get affirmations of the love that we are so freely share with each other.

Thank you for being a part of my life, my heart and my recovery. I am grateful to be home. Life is good.

Christine

## Jumbled Words

Unscramble the words. Then using the letters with the circles around them come up with the recovery word. Have fun!

D M E S (A) N \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

C Y N C O M C A L (P) \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

M F (E) R E O D \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

Y H L U (M) I Y T \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

N M E D I (T) T I A I \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

E O (H) P \_ \_ \_ \_

N S (Y) H T O E \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

*What addicts feel for each other!*

\_ \_ \_ \_ \_

*Answer at the bottom of the page*

**Don't miss out!  
Come be a part of!**

**25th Anniversary  
NA in Memphis**

**July 24, 2004**

Look for flyers with all the details!  
All Day Affair with Speakers,  
Workshops, Dance, Pot Luck and more!

Answer to Word Jumble: EMPATHY