**My Story**

 The Clean Times

Website: [www.na-org.org](http://www.na-org.org)

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**By: Marcus M.**

**Primary Purpose**

As far back as I could remember I always felt unique and different. I felt invisible and in the geek spotlight at the same time. I loved insects, science, comic books, Sesame Street. I was fascinated and absorbed everything and anything that popular average kids had. My addiction started around the same time as far back as I could remember. Me and the neighborhood kids would swim in Lake Olerwood out to the dock. I learned how to swim in gym class in the 9th grade. I always wanted to swim farther, faster and better to attempt to impress the rest of my friends. I nearly drowned twice. That's my disease. I always wanted to do more, above and beyond the rest, in order to gain attention and acceptance. I felt I never had that. I like the fact that it put me in danger or result in serious consequences.

 I was also very good student in school. My first crush was the little light skinned girl on the playground. She was absolutely gorgeous! Long hair, pretty eyes and a smile that blinded more than the sun that glared over the sandlot on the playground. I wanted her BAD! I wanted her to pay attention to me. I was

invisible to her or at least

that's how I felt. I chased that craving and obsession in every area of my life. From my first cigarette that I snuck out of my friend's Mom's pack when I spent the night over their house to my first swallow of beer that I snuck out of my Mom's boyfriend's 6 pack he kept in the veggie drawer at the bottom of our fridge, to my first love of cocaine I tried in my freshman year of college in the dorm room with my classmate who was a little more rebellious that I was to my first sexual experience when I was 16 after a high school dance in Sheila's bedroom while her parents were away that late Friday night to my absolute silver bullet – the one that I chased and obsessed over and above anything else.

 My first hit of crack, in Peter and Tommy's studio apartment. I was hooked almost immediately. It felt like no other feeling I ever experienced in my entire life. It took me to a place somewhere in the stratosphere. I loved it up there. I loved it so much, I didn't care how much it cost. It was the most expensive feeling I ever experienced. It cost me every dime I earned. It cost me my job. It cost me my close relationship with my mom, sister, brother, stepdad, aunt, cousins, coworkers, friends, girlfriend, my fiancée, my car, my home, my health, my hygiene, my weight, my sanity and almost my life.

 I tried to stop and couldn't. I needed help. I got it multiple times in the form of rehab, halfway houses, jail, psychiatric wards only to return back to the insanity of addiction time and time again. I tried to commit suicide. I couldn't find any other way out. I failed miserably and survived. There must be something out there that loves me more than I love myself because I'm still here. Today I believe. I believe I can recover not only from drugs, but a tumultuous childhood, bipolar disorder, suicide attempts, unhealthy relationships and a distorted perception of life because I have a second chance. A whole new one. I am 10 years clean thanks to Narcotics Anonymous and a will to live and not die.

**Step 5**

**By: Kathryn G.**

**Thursday**

**Nighters**

Step five states "We admitted to God to ourselves and do another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

 When I first got clean, this step freaked me out more than any other. The thought of having to tell another human being all the stuff in my inventory and that I had done in my using, absolutely horrified me. When I was in treatment and I was trying to find myself a sponsor, I kept this step in the back of my mind as I was looking. I knew I needed to find myself someone who I felt like I could be completely honest with so that when I got to my fifth step I would be comfortable or at least willing to be honest with her. After all, this was my life we were talking about and at the end of the day everything begins and ends with me and if I'm not willing to save my own life, no one else will. I felt like step five was the key to my future.

 Our literature states that step five is not just a reading of our fourth step inventory.  I can read the literature and write on my steps but it's not until it actually comes out of my mouth that it starts to become real and I can stop denying who and what I am.  In going over my inventory with my sponsor, we get down to the exact nature of my wrongs and any patterns in my behavior that present themselves over and over and continue to wreak havoc in my life.  It's so important to go over these things with another person because I am not capable of seeing them on my own. This is where I start, for the first time, to see what my defects of character are and that comes in handy for my remaining steps.

 Our literature also states that we run the risk of exaggerating our wrongs during this step. I remember feeling like I was the worst person in the world and that no one else was as horrible as I was. What I found when I went over this step was that I wasn't as horrible as I thought and that I had some assets too. I learned what humility was. I learned that I am no better and no worse than anyone else. I learned that I am not unique. I also learned that I don't have to be defined by my past behaviors. I have the opportunity now to learn from my mistakes and to behave better the next time. I remember feeling a huge weight being lifted off of me after my first fifth step. I had been holding onto all that baggage for years and it was such an amazing feeling to unload it and still feel love and acceptance from my sponsor.

 I used for years over a lot of that stuff and I learned I didn't have to use because of it anymore. I didn't have to use over anything anymore. There isn't anything in this world that I could do or could happen to me that I couldn't make it thru clean.  I choose to keep coming back, sharing with other addicts what I am going thru and continue to put in the work.  I have great appreciation for the fifth step. It isn't a step to be feared. Taking a look at ourselves and letting go of what causes us problems and hanging on to the good parts is one of the most loving things we can do for ourselves.  So I am going to keep coming back and I hope you do too.

**Tradition 5**

**By: Sherry W.**

**Desire**

 This tradition has many spiritual principles associated with it, and I always feel both “awed” and “humbled” when I read or hear about this tradition.

 My very first 12 step meeting that I attended on April 26th, 1993, I was scared to walk through the door. I was desperate and filled with shame, guilt, resentments and still in denial. I walked through the doors and all kinds of people came up and gave me hugs. They told me they were glad I was there. They made me feel welcome. I didn’t know any of these people, but they all knew me. They were practicing empathy.

 Next one by one they began practicing courage, honesty, and humility, by sharing their experience, strength, and hope with me, the new comer, the still suffering addict. I didn’t say a word during that meeting, but after the meeting I got more hugs, and they all said, “keep coming back.” I didn’t feel judged. I felt accepted and loved.

 After a few years later of keep coming back, a sponsee of mine told me how she could not stand this one lady who had several years clean. We talked about how none of us can do this alone. We need each other, and we never know who that other will be at any given time, so we can’t afford to burn bridges. This woman may be the one who carries the message she needs to hear, or she may be the one that carries the message this woman needs to hear. I suggested that my sponsee pray for this woman, and give her a hug and tell her she is glad to see her at every meeting they were both in.

 My sponsee followed that suggestion, and about a month later, my sponsee got to a meeting late one day, and this woman sitting on the curb in front of the meeting crying. No one had shown up to open the doors. My sponsee and this woman sat on the curb and had a meeting. My sponsee was able to carry the message to the addict that still suffers.

 The addict who still suffers doesn’t have to be the still using addict, the new comer, or even someone coming back from a relapse. It can be someone with years of clean time that needs the love, empathy and the experience, strength and hope of another addict or the group, after all WE NEED EACH OTHER! In loving Service, Sherry W.

**Concept 5**

**By: Lucy O.**

**Primary Purpose**

Concept Five: For each responsibility assigned to the service structure, a single point of decision and accountability should be clearly defined.

Until a year or 2 ago I was not one who looked to the concepts as having principles within them that were for the best interest of our service structure as a whole. I was not a fan of “delegation” as I felt this idea was often used to circumvent getting a group conscience, as in “home group” conscience. I felt they were used to diminish the value of our group, area and regional representatives in that they advocate for everyone getting an equal ‘voice’ in our service structure. Hence, many service bodies allow everyone a ‘vote’ not just the representatives, which means that some folks get 2 votes (but that’s a whole nother discussion for another day!).

While, I still feel strongly about the above 2 concepts, those were examples of me of throwing the baby out with the bath water. I gained a greater appreciation of the concepts after being asked at the last minute to speak on them the last time VRC was in Memphis. I read and studied and took notes and was all prepared – and not one person showed up! But I was grateful for my new understanding.

The concepts have some great principles to strive for in our service efforts. One of those can be found in concept 5. When there is a task that needs to be done, whether it is a part of a trusted servant’s duties and responsibilities, or a task for a newly formed temporary or ad hoc committee or workgroup, it is important to spell out several things. The task should be clearly defined. This could be in the form of guidelines for the position. Ideally, In the case of an ad hoc chair (or facilitator) when the chair is appointed, the expectations should be recorded in the minutes of the service body so that there is no confusion.

When an ad hoc chair is appointed, they are then the single point of accountability for the task at hand. The service body where the appointment takes place (Area Service Committee, Regional Service Committee, Zonal Forum, World Board, Subcommittee, etc) is free to and encouraged to ask any questions for clarity and to not be afraid to speak up in support of or with any concerns they may have. The chair normally forms a committee or workgroup to assist him or her in completing the task. The chair of the ad hoc makes regular reports to the service body as to the progress of the work on the task at hand. Likewise, during these reports, it is the responsibility of the service body to 1) ask for any clarification so as to be able to properly inform those they are accountable to. 2) if there is a lack of communication by the ad hoc chair (or whoever the single point of accountability is), then speak up. Ask about the status of the work being done. For instance, a GSR should be able to answer any questions in his/her home group’s business meetings (they are the single point of accountability to bring information back and forth from area to the group). The GSR should be prepared. Take notes during the ASC meeting. Ask questions at the ASC. Look over the minutes well in advance of the business meeting and if there is anything not explained or understood, ask the appropriate individuals ahead of time.

Maybe the principles laid out in the concepts seem to be common sense and something most would do anyway. But, it is so easy for things to get overlooked when sitting in a service committee meeting. One of the most important things to remember is – don’t be in a hurry – whether it is the ASC meeting or home group business meeting. Yes, the time of all members is important, but one of the responsibilities when most trusted servants are elected is to have the time and resources to fulfill the position – so take your time and do a good job. Communicate clearly and thoroughly. We should hold our trusted servants accountable. But we also need to show them trust and respect. Ask questions for clarification. Thank someone for their service. We can be an example of the importance and value of being service in Narcotics Anonymous. Or we can also be an example of why someone would not want to be of service. Which example do you want to be today?

**Honesty**

**By: James R.**

**Desire**

First of all, I will be honest in the fact that I completely forgot about writing this article until around a week before it was due. I have been sitting here (at work) thinking about honesty in recovery and what exactly to write about and have been staring at the computer screen for about ten minutes with nothing coming to mind. Of course, when I was using I was honest with no one. The person I spent probably the most time lying to was myself. I would tell myself constantly; “I got this.”, “This will be the last time.”, “My life is not that unmanageable.”, “I can quit any time I want!” and I really believed myself. For me, one of the biggest areas that I have seen growth in recovery wise is self honesty. Not to say I don’t lie to myself often or that I am some pious recovered addict, but the longer I stay clean and attempt to work a program of recovery, the harder it is to tell myself the same lies time and time again. The little voice in the back of my mind that used to cosign all of my lies has gotten softer and has been replaced with a louder and sterner voice that loves to call bullshit on me when I try to deceive myself. I started to work on being more honest with myself, finally starting to feel some relief, and then you guys told me that the work was far from being done. I had to become honest with others, including but not limited to, my sponsor! This became most important when it was time to work steps. If I can’t be honest with myself and my sponsor then what is the point of step work? If I am not working steps honestly then I will eventually just be an addict who is abstinent, which is a miserable way for me to live. Repeating all of the same behaviors and patterns that got me here in the first place leaves me with two options; relapse or have an unfulfilled life. I have seen the change in other addict’s lives around me who are striving to work an honest program, and that gives me hope today. I started seeing that true change in my life once I started *honestly* attempting to work, practice, and apply the steps in my daily life.

**Openmindedness**

**By: Dave K.**

**Something Different**

Honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness, are described as indispensable in our “It Works How and Why” reading. These 3 principles work together, and are all necessary to start us off on the journey of recovery. The focus of this article is on open-mindedness.

Open-mindedness is described in the literature as carefully listening to suggestions without prejudging them or jumping to conclusions. The literature describes open-mindedness as a state of mind that leads to willingness. Open-mindedness to me means not predetermining what is going to work for me.

When I first arrived in recovery, I had already tried “Dave’s program” of recovery. I had tried to think of, and implement my own solutions. I had tried many things that I thought would work, to try to make myself feel whole and happy. But none of these ended up working.

I was definitely in the habit of coming up with my own solutions, and had a very closed mind towards others. But here I was in the NA program which necessitates listening to sources other than me with an open mind. In order to learn new habits like open-mindedness, my sponsor suggested to me, to ask myself 3 times a day if I had been honest, open-minded and willing. If the answer was “yes”, I was probably not practicing honesty, and if the answer was “no”, I could learn where I needed improvement.

Open-mindedness is found through-out the steps. In step 3, I was not open-minded at first that I should turn my life over to a higher power. However, after reminding myself how I had tried to do everything on my own, it started to make sense to me that the solution would have to be a power greater than me. And it started to make sense for me that the God of my understanding could be a label, and not the same God as that which is defined by religion.

In step 4, I had to be open-minded, that writing an inventory - a process that seemed painful to me - would be beneficial for me overall. It was suggested to me that I include my assets as well as my liabilities, which increased my motivation to work this step and be more open-minded to the process.

I also find open-mindedness to be very important in step 11. At first I thought it was impossible that some “God of my understanding” would be listening to me as I pray. But I usually felt much better after I prayed. Prayer helps me start my day with gratitude and awareness that my higher power is with me. I am glad I was open-minded to this step, as today prayer is something I look forward to.

Open-mindedness slowly but surely has become one of my assets, although I still have to continuously work on it. Even though I do not completely understand everything about this program and my higher power, by remaining open-minded I can continue to learn and grow.

**Willingness**

**By: David T.**

**High On Life**

 I wasn’t planning on writing this so I don’t know what I have to say on Willingness. When I looked the meaning up it had two definitions of willing: inclined or ready to do something.

 What is willingness to me? I guess for me it’s to do… When I first got here it was going to meetings, finding a home group, getting a sponsor, etc. it wasn’t easy for me to do, like many of you I had many years of using to let go of and it took some time, but in the end I did these things and more. I stuck around long enough to learn that getting these things was just the beginning and that I had to do something with them. Eventually, I started setting up my home groups Informational Pamphlets (IP’s), I also called my sponsor. The thing is that when I did call him it was “Hey, I’m alive. Talk to you later.” And if he didn’t hear from me for weeks at a time he didn’t chase after me. He told me that I had to be willing to call him.

I remember that I didn’t say a word for that first year until I was forced to speak. I didn’t know what to say or if I had anything to say, what I said was “I’m David and I am an addict.” That was it. It was the first time I had said that out loud. It was at that time that I believe that willingness kicked in. Thank you Suzanne. At that point I started sharing in meetings, not a lot just where I was at or how I was feeling. I read the readings, especially the ,reading. I started calling my sponsor more often and we would talk for fifteen minutes at first and over time that grew into thirty and even longer and we talked about the steps and where I was at and how I was feeling. That’s right I even had the willingness to work the steps. I had the willingness to do what I had to to get clean.

 Five years ago with ten plus years clean I had to learn another lesson in willingness. I had to shut down my homegroup and find a new sponsor. I did both. At that time I had the willingness to step out of my safety zone thanks to my sponsor and I have been doing service work on multiple fronts.

 Today, I have been around long enough to realize that I have to be willing to others what was given to me by others in the program. See, for me with willingness comes honesty, open mindedness, trust, and humility.

 Today, I have the willingness to do whatever it takes not only to get clean but to stay clean. I hope you do too.

**Conventions**

FUACNA Winter Convention

Jan. 13-15, 2017

Searcy, AR

Arscna.org

22nd Annual Meditation Retreat

Jan, 13-15, 2017

Florien, LA

Larna.org

Texarkana Area Convention

Feb. 24-26, 2017

Texarkana, TX

arscna.org

Cabin Fever Prevention Convention

Feb. 3-5, 2017

Lake of the Ozarks, MO

cabinfeverconvention.org

New Meeting:

Memphis LGBTQ NA

Th. @ 7pm @Immaculate Conception at 1725 Central Ave.

**Birthdays**

Jan.:

Glen H. 13 yrs. @ Sat. Night Alive. TBA

Eric N. 9 yrs. 1/9 @ High On Life

Lucy O. 30 yrs. 1/22 @ Primary Purpose

Mary N. 12 yrs. @ High On Life

Feb.:

David T. 17 yrs. @ High On Life

Brooks S.15 yrs. @ Step Write In, TBA

Charles S. 1 yr. 2/12 @ Primary Purpose

Coni J. 31 yrs. @ Clean AIR, TBA

Rachel W. 1 yr. 2/20 @ High On Life

March:

Mark V.B. 11 yrs. @ Clean Air, TBA

Shannon T., 13 yrs. 3/9 @ Thursday Nighters

Terry F. 35 yrs. @ Clean Air, TBA

George P. 20 yrs. 3/20 @ Primary Purpose

Lewis J. 9 yrs. TBA

Chairpersons Note: Thanks to all of those who wrote articles for this newsletter. We are now looking for articles on Step, Tradition, and Concept 6. If you or a sponsee would like to write one let me know at thecleantimes@gmail.com of our Facebook page. ILS, David T.