

Message of Hope

My first introduction to twelve step meetings was one of confusion followed by disappointment and disbelief. I had been sent to the local community mental health agency for methadone maintenance; then to "The Red House" (AA intergroup office and meeting place) by the State Institution I had just been discharged from. I brought with me all my ignorance, prejudices and self-righteousness, of a clueless addict.

At first those old people seemed friendly enough, however after stating my problem was drugs and a couple of methadone nods, their demeanor shifted. I was instructed to clean ashtrays and coffee cups and be quiet. I was encouraged to translated my thoughts and experiences into a cocktail party dialogue, bathe and be polite. I did my best for about ten years never getting more than a few months of abstinence. The line "constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves" echoed in my brain. Eventually for many reasons, I was given yet another pamphlet entitled "Problems Other Than Alcohol" and shown the door, repeatedly.

The State Hospital had done their best, at that time, to offer what they could for an aftercare plan. In the late sixties there were less than 100 meeting of Narcotics Anonymous in the world. The closest was at Eagleville Hospital in Philadelphia 100 miles away. Sure I would drive that far to cop, but go to a meeting, you're kidding right? The alternative was methadone and AA.

The progression of my disease and fear of incarceration forced me to relocate. I moved north to Pennsylvania, the Amish Country to make another stand against addiction. I again attempted to fit this square peg into a round hole and drank the coffee and ate the cookies in AA. Again I was given the pamphlet "Problems Other Than Alcohol" and shown the door. On my way out an old timer said I might "find Hope in NA over at St Joes' Hospital across town."

The meeting had folded, in the basement of that hospital, however a footlocker containing a coffee pot, a basket and literature was left behind. I consider these treasure as spiritual bread crumbs, because it led me to my First NA meeting. I no longer had to twist; who I was, what I had done or how I thought to fit into a bottle, to recover. I found freedom, acceptance and identification in these rooms.

For year I held onto resentment for being asked to "go away" from the other fellowship, which threatened my life. The truth was actually revealed over time... Had I just read the pamphlet the people in AA gave me, I would have learned a Powerful, Spiritual Message. Bill W. wrote about the nature of AA and who they served. We cannot be all things to all people. AA is to carry their message to suffering alcoholics. My obnoxious presence in their meetings detracted from their unity, confused their newcomers and diluted their message. The cocktail party drunk could not relate to the lifestyle of a street junky and did not have to, according to their traditions. I kept going back there because I couldn't find another place to recover.

Today I have a choice. Today I better understand how important our Traditions are to our Unity. Not the unity of everyone and every organization in the universe, but in Narcotics Anonymous. When we embrace all treatment centers, self-help references, clubs, causes and political agenda; the addict, still sick, suffering and ignorant, gets confused and will not identify with Our Message of Hope and our Promise of Freedom. We need to always and in all ways meet the needs of the individual addict who has seen the meeting list with 250 meetings a week, but made the decision to go an NA meeting where they do not have to apologize for being an addict and find that we do recover.