

NEWSLETTER CALL FOR ARTICLES

The area staff at SFANA will be publishing a monthly newsletter and would like two things from you:

1. Sign in by filling out the form on the website so that you receive the SFANA Newsletter in your email the moment it is published.
2. Submit articles and stories to be published in the SFANA Newsletter to inspire others to stay clean and keep coming back.

Some topics that would be useful in the SFANA Newsletter are:

- What is your favorite recovery quote and why?
- What is your favorite spiritual principle and why?
- What does working the steps mean to you?
- Online meetings?
- How do you handle disruptions at your home group?
- What is your experience with children at meetings?
- How do you know it is God's will?
- Does being productive and responsible mean being boring?
- How do you develop healthy intimate relationships?
- What does it mean to be responsible and productive in NA and in society?
- How does your gratitude speak?
- How do you continue to make amends? Are you ever finished making amends?
- Are there any other requirements for membership?
- Rigidity: How did you learn to lighten up?

ENTER THE LOGO CONTEST

We are having a logo contest for the Sierra Foothills Area of Narcotics Anonymous! Get your creative hat on and submit a logo. To enter just fill out the comment field below – explain your logo and its meaning. Then upload your logo artwork using the file upload button. The winner will receive two tickets to the next activities event.

If you look at the home page you will notice the NA logo in the upper left of each picture in the slider. That is where the winning logo will be featured in the website. If you have what you think is a really good idea for a logo, but don't have the graphics ability, or the equipment, to create it, ask for help. That's what it is all about, one addict helping another.

Your logo artwork needs to be one of the following formats: PNG, GIF, JPG, and JPEG

ENTER THE PHOTO CONTEST

We are having a photo contest. The winners (three or four) will have their entered photo put on the landing page slider. If you look at the homepage now you will find there are a few images that fade in and out. Your photo could be one of these. If you wish your first name and last name initial will be included.

To submit a photo, just simply make a comment and include the photo. Your image needs to be one of the following formats: PNG, GIF, JPG, and JPEG

If you, or someone you know, has a problem with addiction please call the helpline at:

(530) 645-1635

Sierra Foothills Area of Narcotics Anonymous



Newsletter - May 2016

This month's SFANA Newsletter's theme is five. The Fifth Step and the Fifth Tradition and Service. Enjoy.

Integrity and the 5th Step

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Many newcomers to the Steps feel dismayed when they first see this Step. It's bad enough, they think, that the 4th Step requires them to beat themselves up for all the bad things they've done but now the 5th Step says they must shame themselves before someone else so he can beat them up, too! How can I do that? they ask. What purpose could such torture possibly serve?

Such doubt and dismay are understandable, even reasonable, given such mistaken ideas about the nature of the Steps. It's important to understand that the 5th Step is not about wallowing in guilt and shame over our past behavior. Instead, it is a practical and effective means of reconciling ourselves with the past and finally putting guilt and shame behind us where it belongs. It's also a critical step toward restoring our battered sense of honor and self-respect.

It helps to remember that in taking Step 5 we are discussing the actions of a person who no longer exists. We are talking about the man or woman we once were, someone who did the best they could under the circumstances, given what they believed at the time, and who did not know how distorted their thinking had become under the influence of a powerful addiction. That person in the past is not the same person ready to take a 5th Step

today, and not the same person he'll become through the continuing process of recovery.

But until we fully acknowledge that person from the past, and take responsibility for his actions, we cannot really shed that old skin and enter the freedom of our new lives. The road to that freedom lies through full disclosure. And only through full disclosure can we begin to heal our wounded spirits and develop the personal integrity that real peace of mind depends on.

We will never really be at peace with ourselves until we are completely, whole-heartedly okay with who we are-and that includes



being okay with who we were and what we have done in the past. Sharing our deepest secrets with a trusted soul who understands and

won't judge us is a necessary step to freeing ourselves from their power to damage our sense of self-worth. As the saying has it, we're only as sick as our secrets. If we would recover and get well, then we must give the secrets up-but not indiscriminately. Our 5th Step should only be shared with someone we can trust to be non-judgmental and discreet.

Only by revealing who we really are can we become the same person on the outside as we are on the inside. The 5th Step is the first of many we must take to become fully authentic human beings and to know what it means to be comfortable in our own skins. Theoretically it might be possible to achieve

this by becoming completely honest with ourselves—"admitting to ourselves," as the Step says, and to no one else. But practical experience has shown time and again that none of us can achieve the necessary level of honesty and integrity if we are not willing to come clean with someone else.

As for God, the third party to our "confession"—if God knows everything, then He already knows more about us than we know ourselves, including everything we've ever done. If so, then why, we might ask, must we admit our mistakes to Him?

The purpose of the Steps is to lead us to a spiritual awakening. The path to that awakening requires us to get right with ourselves, with other people, and with God. What matters is not whether God knows of our failings, but whether we can completely offer ourselves to Him, exactly as we are, with no false pride, no dissembling, and no BS. Only by surrendering ourselves wholly to Him can we dismantle the barriers of guilt, shame, and fear that we have erected between our flawed selves and His forgiving love.

How It Works:

12 Steps - Step Five

"We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Our inventory does not automatically deliver us from the bondage of addiction. There is a long way to go, but it certainly begins the process and gives us continued hope for the future. We gain acceptance of our natures with hope for positive change. We are often very surprised to find out exactly what we wrote when we share our Fifth Step. We often feel a great sense of freedom after doing our Fifth Step. We may still find fault with ourselves and de-

spair that we'll ever really recover.

Addiction surrounds our entire life with walls of fear that have kept us prisoners much of our lives. Working the Fifth Step exposes all our negative feelings and begins the demolition of these walls once and for all. We will finally be free to begin building a whole new life based on a solid foundation of truth, self-honesty and trust. The 12 Steps have helped us to find and trust God, ourselves and another human being, often for the first time in our lives. We cannot do this alone. Remember, this is a 'we' program and together, we find courage, hope and faith to share our inventory. We have to be vulnerable - it's a chance we must take. We learn that perfection is a unrealistic, fear-based idea. We don't have to be perfect.

Through writing and sharing we find forgiveness and acceptance. The Fifth Step can be upsetting for some of us. The bondage of our addiction has had a physical hold on us. This Step will be a positive affirmation of our new feelings of trust in our Higher Power and another human being.

One member shares, "Before I even began my 4th step, I had shared with my sponsor my fear of even admitting to anyone even some of the things I had done in my walls of fear. Whenever I think about working the Fifth Step, I think of the walls of fear that have kept me a prisoner of my own life. I think about working this step and ridding myself of all of the negative feelings that have ruled my life. These walls will finally be knocked down and I will be free to begin to build a whole new life based on a solid foundation of self-honesty, truth and freedom from fear. My entire life has been lived inside walls of fear. Negative feelings kept me back in the prison of my disease."

For some of us, building bonds of trust is one of the hardest things we have ever done. For as long as we can remember, we would never allow ourselves to trust any-

The still suffering addict is also an important focus of this Tradition. These addicts can be anyone inside or outside of the group. Our members would do well to insure a consistent application of anonymity to each member, allowing them to express themselves in an atmosphere free from judgment. Even a member with many years clean can be a suffering member of a group. Just as possible is the member who usually displays themselves in accordance with spiritual principles. Devastation knows no boundaries and desperation takes no prisoners. The suffering addict might be the one who was absent, or who has yet to show up. Our purpose is to help those that need us, even to seek them out if need be. This tradition actuates the collective application of our Twelfth Step. As we seek to help others, we strengthen our recovery and insure against relapse at the same time.

The message we carry as a group is the practice of principles toward these individuals, however troublesome they may be. The new members begin to admire our demonstration of acceptance, patience, and tolerance, and begin learning from the start that spiritual growth comes from within. It has been said that if we do not see a leader in the room we strive to be one. If we do not hear the spiritual message of recovery we try to carry it. If the suffering addict cannot share their pain, we share ours for them. If we do not carry the message to the still suffering addicts, NA will wither and die. Without NA, none of us has any chance to recover. It is said, time and time again, that the newcomer is the life blood of NA. Therefore, it is no coincidence that one of the main themes throughout our literature states, "We can only keep what we have by giving it away."

Service is Important

There is only one requirement for NA membership, "*a desire to stop using,*" but there are many benefits. One of these benefits is the privilege of service. We who have the disease of addiction spent years of our lives locked up in ourselves. We were cut off from the warmth and fellowship of other human beings; our lives revolved almost exclusively around "*getting and using and finding ways and means to get more.*" The love that connects one person to another to the next, the selfless service that feeds and houses and clothes and warms and nurtures humankind—of that love, of that selfless service we had no part. That's why it's such a privilege in our recovery to be able to serve others, for we come to know ourselves only in looking beyond ourselves and we keep what we have only by giving it away.

By empathizing with other members, by learning to appreciate their needs, by placing them ahead of our own—by these things we learn to love others, and in so doing we learn to love ourselves. The service we do in our recovery is many things. We take a more active role in our everyday lives, serving others as better friends, better family members, better workers, and better citizens.

When we find an NA meeting where we feel at home and NA friends with whom we identify, we've found a home group, a base for our own recovery and a place where we can serve other addicts by sharing our recovery with them. The time, the experience, the empathy we offer others in our home group we extend even further to those we serve in NA sponsorship.

All these ways of serving others demonstrate the spiritual awakening of our Twelfth Step, evidenced in our efforts "to

come overridden with issues outside the scope of our Fellowship's experience, Steps, and Traditions, they begin to lose their effectiveness. Our group members, on the other hand, may have personal familiarity in these issues; they will do best by sharing their own experience with these matters, trying not to affiliate such issues with Narcotics Anonymous or incorporate them into their group formats.

When we allow ourselves to be used as conduits of the love that originally attracted us to recovery, we are on safe ground. when we forget our role as care givers and instruments of a loving God, we are drawn out of our area of experience. We keep in mind the supreme, all powerful, all loving creator of the universe who is the one that is really protecting all of us. Going with God, we cannot lose. we are reminded where we come from and how much we wanted recovery in the beginning. We can forget the pain of withdrawal the same way women forget the pain of child birth. to stay clean, we help others who both remind us of our own pain and help us hear the solutions we ow have to offer.

In the active addiction, there was much pain and misery in our lives and the lives of most everyone we came in contact with. Many of us found it was the selfish, self-centered fear driving us into an isolated death of mind, body, and soul. It became evident that fear, manifested in our thoughts and feelings, created many of our problems. It was our lack of faith, not the drugs; using was only a symptom of our dilemma. We should always be vigilant that our decisions as individuals and groups are the expression of our faith. The atmosphere of the group, and the message we carry, ought always reflect the commitment we have to the principles embodied in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Tradition.

For our groups to be an effective vehi-

cle for carrying the message of recovery, it is thought necessary to develop an atmosphere of recovery in each meeting. All of our Steps and Traditions are comprised of spiritual principles just as NA is a spiritual program. We have found that we can exchange the phrase "atmosphere of recovery" with "atmosphere of spirituality," and agree that this is the message our groups should emanate. Complexity is not the key to doing better. We have seen many people new to recovery run around and try to fix all the things that have gone wrong with their lives. Simplicity and surrender offer us a better platform on which to rebuild our lives. This particularly applies to helping others get the help they need at our meetings. We care, we share, we know it works for us. We are the living proof that the program works. We pass on what has worked for us out of our own experience. We carry the message by living in the solution to the best of our ability. we welcome the addict to our group and we try to live, through our caring and sharing, the message of hope so the newcomers can say, "I am being accepted until I can accept myself. I am being loved until I can love myself." The message that we carrying says, "We love you. You are not alone. We will help you. You too can recover."

Ideally, the practice of spirituality lies in the application of spiritual principals. If true spiritual principals are never in conflict; any or all ought to fit the phrase "atmosphere of recovery," and define it accordingly. We can take an instance where the phrase "atmosphere of recovery" is sought and introduce a series of spiritual principals in place of the word "recovery" (i.e. an atmosphere of acceptance... an atmosphere of patience... an atmosphere of tolerance... of unconditional love, open-mindedness, willingness, surrender, compassion, empathy etc). In this way, a group's inventory will best reflect the spirit of our program without the vulnerability to our old ways of thinking.

one. To trust someone meant you had to get to know them and let them know you. Trust is an empty-handed leap into the void - we cannot prepare ourselves for trusting. There is no way to defend ourselves against the risk of acknowledging who we are and letting other people and the God of our understanding into our lives. To get to know them meant letting them get to know us and we always believed that once they got to know us they would reject us. The experience of sharing the contents of our Fourth Step inventory awakens us to the reality that we can change from the people we were into the people we want to be. Some of us heard when we were kids, "confession is good for the soul." Confession defined as 'telling everything' has nothing to do with the Fifth Step. Indeed, we seek to unblock the channel to God, to our own spirits, and to the rest of humanity that has been clogged up by our fear, denial and ego. Admitting who we are and what we've done doesn't amend the record, but it puts us on the record for owning our past decisions. The principle that we learn here is integrity and we must first accept that the disease had corrupted our personal morals.

By looking at and sharing our inventory, we seek to restore our fractured lives by trusting the healing process of the Steps. We find it easier to admit our wrongs because we no longer fear their return. We aren't the people we were but we aren't fully recovered either. For come, the fear of returning to our old ways motivates us in recovery but as we re-integrate our lives, Higher Power becomes a greater motivator than fear ever was. Trust comes from acceptance; remember that we learned this in the Second Step. With the self-acceptance we gain through the process of our Fourth Step inventory, we come to self-trust with the admission of our role in our difficulties of the past and our personality problems in the present.

Further, we act on our acceptance of

a loving, supportive God and grow to trust our Spirit in all areas of our lives. Best of all, the mutual acceptance that we experience from sharing our Fifth Step becomes mutual trust, as we grow to love and respect ourselves by loving others. That is what we mean when we say, "God, grant me the courage to be searching and fearless". The members of our Fellowship teach each other to care and trust. What we think we know about trust is flawed. Trust used to be an immediate thing in our active addiction: We trusted each other to an extent because we each got high. Today, we learn to let the process happen. We open ourselves to others knowing that trust is something that we need to practice. We give them the benefit of the doubt and see what they do with our trust.

No matter what the other person may choose to do with the things that we entrust to them is why we say, "Trust is earned and rightfully so." The way we earn it is by being ourselves so others know what they are dealing with. The fact that all addicts suffer from the same disease helps us build trust bonds.

There are no unique addicts. We have differences as people and degrees of sickness but underneath we have similarities that are far more remarkable. Acknowledging this helps us begin to trust one another. Our powerlessness and our defective personalities are a common bond. As we increase our understanding of ourselves, we understand others and our compassion grows. We don't have to get it right from the start. Sharing involves some skills and practice improves our ability to enlarge our world by sharing. Once we establish trust with even one person, we may have difficulty until we know what the 'rules' are.

Being able to give and receive with trust builds a bond between us. We gain much from this Step. Through prayer, willingness and our ability to share on this Step, we gained trust. We begin to feel like we ar-

en't alone. We see some of our worst fears removed. There were things we opened-up and choked-up and got out that we never thought we would share. We feel the benefit almost immediately afterward. We feel freedom through simply releasing the wreckage and garbage that we had kept pent-up inside. We found the willingness to share our deepest, darkest secrets with another human being. We gained insight to push aside the fear and walk through that opening.

A member shares, "The meaning of courage has changed as I have grown in Narcotics Anonymous. At first courage was an illusion that I put on. I never knew the exact meaning, only that the opposite of courage was cowardice. I remember how much of my life was full of fear, how I felt like a coward but could not let anyone know how terrified I was. I always put on an illusion of how courageous, uncaring, and ruthless I was. I always considered courage a physical quality. Today I am aware of the spiritual and emotional aspects of courage. I have learned that it can be easier to run away to avoid life's trials and tribulations but true courage is walking through the fear and learning to work through the pain and the problems. Courage today is walking through the fear, putting one foot in front of the other, working towards the solution, and having the courage to let fellow addicts help and guide me."

Paralyzing fear is a reality. Progress comes 'step by step.' We learn to trust ourselves and become vulnerable enough to walk through the terror. We had always thought that the only antidote to fear was courage. Not so! Fear dissolves under any spiritual principle! Spiritual principles are based on Faith and Faith kills fear. Sharing our inventory with another human being opens the door to sharing with others. This is a basic building block in our reconciliation with the human race. Human beings would have died out as a species if simple errors were ordi-

narily fatal. Most of our errors have the effect of curbing or preventing our growth, restricting us to limited pathways where there is seemingly little fear of failure. Fear of failure can 'lock us up' in permanent isolation and ineffectualness.

We need to reconcile ourselves with this reality if we are to go on with our lives as healthy people. Before we admit the exact nature of our wrongs, they still have great power over us. When the truth is out, we know the first moments of freedom. It is the end of our struggle to continue denial. It is resuming our emotional development that was stopped when the defect first appeared. Our inability to come to terms with something arrested our growth in that area. For recovering addicts, it may be helpful to say to ourselves, "It happened while I was using and that's not how I am clean." Our decision-making ability, our ability to see or hear clearly, our ability to react accurately to life in general, all these were hampered or disabled by our active addiction. Even today, our disease will try to make the pain of our recovery seem greater than the continual pain that we carried with us. Like the odd twist that allows freedom to come from surrender, when we are able to make ourselves vulnerable we will know an increase of life. To be vulnerable is to expose ourselves to the reality of another person. If they hurt us, it is on them and we will be able to go forward. We are not as fragile as our disease makes us feel. While we may experience failure repeatedly in finding those we can trust, God will reveal them to us as long as we continue to practice our part in trust. Our spiritual courage is a signal to others like ourselves.

We may feel a spirit when we share our Fifth Step. This is part of what changes our lives. Heightened awareness, sensitivity, interest and a sense of the miraculous may infuse us when the pain inside is set free. While our Fifth Step is a spiritual and emo-

tional reality, it has the effect of demolishing the walls we have erected to conceal our fear and terror from others. So strong is the hold of our pain that we fear to take action as if it will tear our flesh when we pull it away from the injury. We don't work the Steps to lose at life. We work them to win. The gains can be terrific but the ones that mean the most to us are the simple, everyday abilities that used to be beyond most of us. The blockage that has held us back so long has resulted in structures within our personalities that echo past pain, real or imagined. The pain replays itself in a similar situation and we react as if injured whether we are or not. The failure to respond accurately to our environment is one phase of insanity and the defects have to be relaxed and ironed-out to regain functional ability in that area. Peace begins when we find a way that allows us to feel safe enough to stop fighting. Forces that seem to have been working destructively in our lives slowly change into sources of strength rather than conflict. Our addiction set us at odds with the world around us in many ways. This is not to say the world is perfect and that all living problems dry-up when we start living life clean and working the Twelve Steps of recovery. It is through the Fifth Step that we re-unite with the world and the people around us. Who and what we are takes form as we share with others. Most of us are full of unshared feelings, hopes, fears and aspirations. When we are re-connected, this flows out of us and we regain a sense of purpose and balance.

Why It Works:

12 Traditions - TRADITION FIVE

"Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry the message to the addict who still suffers."

Though each group is welcomed to their diversity through autonomy, there is also a spiritual consistency throughout NA meetings all over the world: this is our message of recovery. NA offers a vision of hope and a promise of freedom from active addiction to any addict who passes through our doors. An addict, any addict, can stop using, lose the desire, and find a new way of life. Carrying our message is the primary purpose of our groups.

We have found it best that we do this one thing supremely well, which is to carry our message. Being all things to all people we would quickly lose our focus. If we engaged in many related multitask, our ability to carry out our primary group purpose would suffer. Mental health, treatment centers, politics, and legislation all help people in their own right but in association, they would quickly push aside many areas of sensitivity essential to NA recovery. Narcotics Anonymous only seeks to cooperate with professionals to the extent that they will be aware of our recovery program as a possible resource to their clients. We are careful that we never affiliate in any sense of the word.

When it comes to the personal matters of our members, we must also exercise restraint. Our purpose is to share, as individuals, groups, and as a Fellowship, how we found recovery through Narcotics Anonymous. Legal, social, medical, moral, and ethical issues, as shared by our members, are welcomed in our meetings. We do, however, want to make sure that our groups take no sides on these issues outside of NA's collective experience. Such actions could lessen our ability to carry our message. With so much at stake, we keep our focus on recovery.

The best way to keep our groups safe in this regard is to keep our meeting formats simple and focused. When our formats be-