

THE CONNECTION

\$1⁰⁰

vol. one

SHARING WORLDWIDE RECOVERY

number 4

LIFE BEGINS AT FORTY

The story of a 40-year-old addict/alcoholic who desperately wanted to be "good".

I am 40 years old, and I feel younger and more alive than I have for a great many years.

I'm the oldest of three kids; we were raised by my mother in a home (?) devoid of a father ... he was/is a practicing alcoholic and addict who would drop in like a visiting uncle every so often only to leave again for day, weeks, and sometimes months. Actually, we had many "homes"; we moved around a lot (I never lived in the same place for more than two years until I was 33). Neither my brother nor my sister became addicts, oddly enough, even though they were raised in the same environment as I was and they drank and used a lot of drugs, too (I know — I got them started).

I truly believe that I was physically an addict/alcoholic right from the start. I vividly remember (fondly!) the ether that put me under when I had my tonsils removed at age four ... I remember getting mildly drunk on the wine at my bar mitzvah which, aside from the presents, was the only part of the affair that I enjoyed. Even the presents weren't all that terrific. (How many 13-year-old boys need 10 pairs of cuff links?)

When I was a kid, I recall that my mind was constantly wandering. Maybe *wandering* is the wrong word ... *trying to escape* is more like it. When I got intentionally drunk for the first time at the age of 14 or 15 (the earlier bar mitzvah epi-

sode, although significant, was unintentional), I discovered three things; one, that I needed some practice (I drank about a pint and half of bourbon in about two hours and got sicker than a dog); two, that I didn't like bourbon; and three (and most important), that for a brief interval of time before I got sick, my mind was not trying to run anywhere, and I was at peace.

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2nd East Coast CA Conference

The Second Annual East Coast Conference of Cocaine Anonymous is scheduled to be held October 31- November 2, in the foothills of the Berkshires, Holiday Hills in Pawling, NY.

Activities for this year's conference include meetings, workshops, guest speakers, tennis, recreation, pumpkin carving, unity, sharing and caring. "Bring your costumes, but leave your masks at home ..." for the banquet and dance Saturday evening.

Weekend package prices range from \$140 dollars for deluxe accommodations to \$120 for standard room per person, double occupancy.

Attendees are encouraged to make their reservations prior to September

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Correspondents Added To Staff In Six Regions

The Editor is pleased to announce the appointment of six Regional Correspondents to the staff of *The Connection*, effective immediately. These six individuals will be responsible for the solicitation of editorial material for publication in our national newsletter, in addition to coordinating a network of distribution for *The Connection* in their respective regions. They are:

Debra L., Seattle, WA

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If you would like to contribute your own personal story of recovery, or a news item of interest to the Fellowship, or a joke, or a cartoon, or something you've experienced in Sobriety, some lesson you've learned, something you'd like to pass on to the rest of us, whatever, contact the Regional Correspondent nearest you.

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My Friend, Ed

Let me tell you about my friend, Ed.

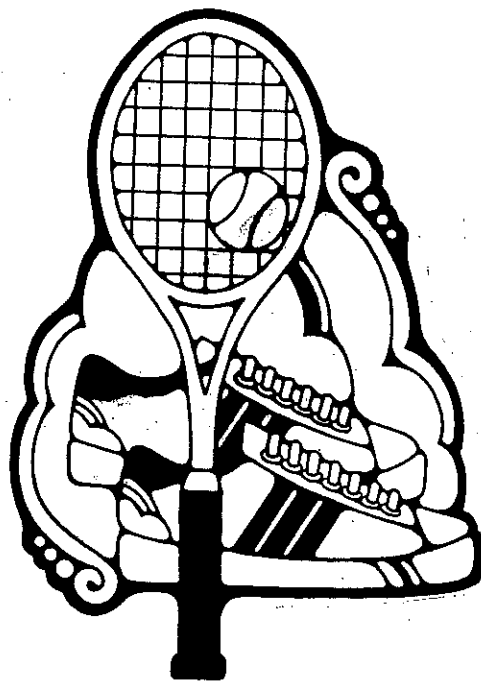
Ed's been going to meetings for about as long as I've known him. And in all that time he's never been able to put together more than two weeks of continuous sobriety.

About six months ago, after going through one more job and one more car one more time, Ed's doctor put him on Antabuse, so he couldn't drink anymore. The result? Ed's consumption of cocaine escalated to a point where the valium he was taking to balance out all the cocaine he was using wasn't working any longer. So, he found a doctor to prescribe some Xanax for him. And then another doctor. And then another.

This went on for a couple of weeks until the three doctors found out about each other and cut off his supply. No problem. Ed simply assumed the identity of a fifth doctor and started prescribing Xanax for himself over the telephone. At one point he was driving two to three hundred miles a day in his wife's car picking up prescriptions for himself all over town. And then the inevitable happened. He got busted one afternoon at a pharmacy about sixty miles from home and spent the night in jail. A week later, he went into convulsions outside a meeting and almost died.

"I think I got a problem," he admitted when he was released from the hospital. "I think I'd better get myself into a detox."

Trouble was, Ed had allowed his medical and hospitalization to lapse and couldn't afford it. Enter Ed's parents in



upstate New York. They had a savings account. If they paid for his stay in a local drug rehab, would he really "try" this time?

Ed said he would, and for a while it looked as if things had finally turned around for him. He "graduated" from the rehab with 29 days of sobriety, flew back to Los Angeles and managed to stay clean and sober for another couple of weeks.

And then an old commission check arrived in the mail and Ed was off and running *one more time*. One more time he was back into the coke and Xanax. One more time he was beating up his wife and terrorizing their four-year-old daughter. One more time he was demolishing the family car. One more time he was out of work. One more time he had let his parents down.

One more time he was out there doing it *his way*.

The last time I heard from him he had just been released from the lockup in Palm Springs. I don't know what he was doing there and I don't know where he is today. I can only carry the message. I can't carry Ed.

As his former sponsor told me, "He's gotta do what he's gotta do." And I guess he does. I'm just grateful I don't have to. Thank God.

The Editor

2nd Annual Greater LA CA Convention in Palm Springs to feature Sun, Fun, Run, and Sobriety!

The Greater Los Angeles Chapter of Cocaine Anonymous will be holding its 2nd Annual CA Convention in Palm Springs, September 19-21. Entitled "Peace & Serenity '86," it promises to be an action-packed, fun-filled, informative 48-hour event. Featured speakers include Joan W., Bob M. and John J. Jim N's 4th Step Workshop has been extended to four hours and, for the first time ever, there will be a 5K/10K Run "One Step At A Time."

In addition to the usual 'round the clock meetings and workshops on Meditation, Relationships and Sex in Sobriety, there will be a Banquet, Saturday nite, followed by a Main Speaker and a dance.

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30th. For those unable to spend the entire weekend, there are a limited number of reservations available for the Saturday Nite banquet and dance. A check for \$30 must accompany your application.

Applications and deposits of \$70 payable to Cocaine Anonymous should be forwarded to: Jack Perry, 203 Southport Woods Drive, Southport, CT 06490. For further information contact Barbara G. at (718) 417-3526 or Anne G. at (212) 826-6495.

MY TOUGHEST AMENDS...

The Eighth and Ninth Steps are crucial to the growth of our Sobriety. Only by becoming willing and making amends are we able to overcome our feelings of guilt and build self-worth. This is what I've always been told, and I believe it. Some amends were made even before my Fourth Step was completed (some easy ones). There were others, though, that took a long time to surface in my consciousness, and even longer to approach willingly.

And there was one particular amend that was so demoralizing that it took until my third year of Sobriety to deal with it.

During my last year of using, when things were really bad, a friend asked me to housesit her apartment for a weekend when she would be out of town. Seeing golden opportunity to get out of the house, away from my wife, and get high with reckless abandon, I accepted. I had long since stopped having fun through drugs, but at least I could get messed up, and not have to pretend that I wasn't high. I went prepared with 50 codeines and 16 'ludes.

Having been addicted to heroin and codeine for the past couple of years running, there wasn't much more than a pain-killing effect from the codeine pills. But when I took Quaaludes along with the codeines, there were results. One of the unfortunate side-effects was that I got extremely belligerent and aggressive. My friend had two kittens, and in my awful condition, I killed one of them. Horrified, I disposed of the animal, and invented a story that it had escaped from the apartment and had been run over by a speeding car. My trusting friend believed this scenario, and even felt sorry for me, that I had had to deal with such an unpleasant task. I knew then that this event would plague my subconscious mind for years to come.

Time passed, I got sober. When I got to the Eighth Step, making a list, I couldn't even include this incident. It was too terrible. Later, after my second Sobriety birthday, I felt strong enough emotionally to include this amend in my list. Finally the day came when I could

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Mr. Cool

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NEWSFRONT

"CRACK" LEADS TO RAPID ADDICTION

Summit, N.J. — Addiction to "crack", a potent form of cocaine that is sweeping the country, can occur in less than six months, according to researchers at the National 800-COCAINE Helpline.

A recent sampling of 458 consecutive Helpline callers, age 20 and over, showed that one-third (33%) used crack as their drug of choice. Nearly half the callers experienced serious drug-related problems in less than six months.

Addiction to cocaine occurs far more quickly by smoking crack than by snorting the drug in its powdered form," says Dr. Arnold M. Washton, Director of Research for 800-COCAINE. "Crack is cheap, it's readily available and the high wears off in only a few minutes, leaving the user wanting to use it again and again.

"Nine months ago we had not ever heard of crack. Today, nearly one-third of cocaine-related helpline calls are for assistance in overcoming this dangerous addiction," Dr. Washton adds.

Calls came from urban and rural areas across the U.S., and the overwhelming majority of users were males under age 30. Most callers (81%) said they had occasionally snorted cocaine powder before they had changed to crack and felt their addiction escalated rapidly upon switching. Eighty-two percent of the callers reported a compulsion to use the drug again as soon as the high wore off, and 54 percent of the callers said that they had "fallen in love" with crack the first time they used it.

"This highly addictive form of

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IT FEELS GOOD ALL OVER

*My sponsor then proceeded to ask me the question
I feared most.*

My experience over the Fourth of July Weekend at the 2nd World Service Convention of Cocaine Anonymous in San Diego, CA, afforded me the greatest Spiritual Awakening I have ever had. To this day when I reflect back on the evening of July 5th, when I *finally* relieved myself of a decade of spiritual, emotional and physical illness, my body tingles all over and I get this huge smile on my face that just will not quit.

It all began at the 4th Step Workshop. I was overwhelmed when I saw all of us addicts gathered together with some glimmer of hope to sort out tainted fragment of our lives, honestly and fearlessly. We then courageously shared tragic events of despair to another person at our side, most likely a complete stranger. But, by some miracle, when this sharing of our innermost secrets occurred, the healing process within began to take effect.

The *real* miracle took place when my sponsor walked into the Workshop. I had no idea she was coming to San Diego, and neither did she. It just kinda happened. So, when I saw her walk into the room, I *knew* that this was the day to unmask myself and let God in through you people.

Immediately after the workshop ended, I practically *ran* across the room and grabbed her. I didn't want to let her go. Thoughts ran through my head of what I should tell her and what I should not tell her about me and my past. Up until then I had been avoiding my sponsor like the plague; we weren't that close — yet.

We had lunch and decided she would temporarily put her luggage in my hotel room, which was two blocks away from the convention site.

It was during that walk to the room that my lips finally came unsealed and my heart began to speak. I told her I had relapsed on May 5th, after 88 days of

clean time, and had kept it a secret as a kind of torture tactic that would keep me from using cocaine again. I had not used cocaine since, but with that unhealthy attitude I continued to drink.

My sponsor then proceeded to ask me the question I feared most: "When was the last time you drank?"

"One week ago," I replied. Pause. "Well ... I guess, *yesterday*, but I only drank one beer!"

With a much lesser look of disappointment in her eyes than I had anticipated, she said, "Beth, I think we had better go back to the first step."

Later that day we went to one of the marathon meetings, which was entitled "Be Good To Yourself." It was at that meeting that I shared my cocaine relapse, that I had only been without alcohol for 28 hours. And then the biggest secret of my whole life came out — a secret I had hung on to for 10 years. I knew that if I didn't let it go my chances of recovery would be slim, indeed. After sharing my secret, which is an eating disorder, those beautiful people in the meeting applauded me.

I was trembling, and very tearful when I returned to my seat.

"That took a lot of guts, Beth," my sponsor whispered in my ear as she put her arms around me. "I am so proud of you. You have a lot of courage."

Fortunately, that courage stayed with me throughout the evening. During the Saturday Nite Banquet, I realized that I had to reveal my new sobriety date of just one day publicly because of the sobriety countdown. My sponsor and I were seated with two other people from Chicago whom I have a great deal of respect and admiration for. I needed to tell them my story before the countdown. After I shared *everything* with them, they offered me love and words of encouragement and then shared their moments of growth with me.

The moment of truth finally arrived — the sobriety countdown. It was a spine tingler and a tear jerker. Getting up in front of all those people and getting honest was the most courageous thing I have ever done. The reward was the loving way in which the Fellowship of CA embraced me after the evening ended.

I have always wanted to love, be loved and feel as if I belonged somewhere. And thanks to the Fellowship, and the principles of the program, I feel just that way today. I am proud and grateful to belong to CA.

Beth, Chicago

To The Ones That Made The Choice

Life is the choice you made
The decision to be saved and
Not the grave that is
destiny for people
Such as you and I.

This choice - not an easy one
Was forced upon us and advised
That we protect it
For it is the only way we
May have life

The choice of life came with years
Of tears, yours and mine and many
Who felt for us
All praises to the Higher One - He
Allowed this choice only
when we asked.

That too - asking, is a hard task
For people such as you and I.
We sometimes choose to die than
Ask for it.

My choice today is life and all
That comes with it - my cup
Runneth over. May that
also be yours
For it is hard for people
Such as you and I.

Claire R., Los Angeles

Southern California's Flake & Powder Society Takes On The Upper Rucky Chucky

What it's like to go white water rafting sober, what happened, and why they want to do it again.

How do you throw 23 recovering addicts and five "civilians" together for 300 miles in a cramped bus for nine hours and avoid a confrontation or even mayhem? Impossible, you say? Well, recently, I witnessed such a miracle and lived to tell about it.

Since this was to be my first white water rafting experience, it was with more than a little trepidation that on June 3, I boarded the bus that was to deliver me to the center fork of the American River near Sacramento, California. I was reasonably certain of having a good time, as this was to be my fourth outing with the infamous "Southern California Flake and Powder Society." Our previous three ski trips proved to be nothing less than sensational.

We arrived at our destination around midnight. We were about six hundred yards and a seven-iron from the river, roughly 50 miles from Sacramento.

After about five hours of ... who can sleep at a moment like this ... followed by a perilous trip down the narrow, windy road, in a vehicle that was much too large, we finally see the American River. My God! She's beautiful! She's powerful. She's positively *awesome*! Be still my queazy stomach! I hope I don't wet my pants.

It's difficult to put into words all the emotions and feelings that rush into my mind and body those next few moments, as we enter the water. *Rush*, that's it! I'd never experienced a *rush* like that in all my days of using. The exhilaration of riding that initial bit of white water makes me absolutely *giddy*. The group just ahead of us is screaming the Serenity Prayer as they raise their paddles skyward in a High-5 posture.

Was it exhilaration or sheer terror that I felt as I was being tossed out of the raft

with our trusty guide, Phil? We were less than 50 yards from the jaws of the raging "Tunnel Chute." *Swim! Swim! Swim!* my brain screams. The currents too fast. The water's too cold. I'll surely be dashed among the rocks. How can I swim and hold onto this damned paddle? What will people think of me if I lose it? Damn you, Ego! I can picture them dragging my lifeless corpse out of the river and prying the paddle from my fingers.

HELPING YOU — HELPED ME

They Were Helping Me Without my Knowing It!

Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail.

These are the opening two sentences of Chapter 7, "Working with Others," from the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* and a major factor in keeping me sober these past two-and-a-half years.

When I first came to CA, I wanted to feel a part of the fellowship, but I didn't know how. Going to meetings and not knowing how to share made me very uncomfortable. Finally, somebody with some time told me, "If you can't carry the message to the addict, carry the addict to the message." In other words, be of service to others by offering rides to and from meetings.

Well, I did just that and what a great experience it was for me and my self-esteem! By giving rides to other newcomers we got to know one another. We shared our past, present and dreams

Nothing in my 46 years on this planet ever prepared me for *this* experience.

People are screaming at my from both banks. Maybe they think I'm not aware of the presence of the Chute. Ha! I can literally *feel* the rapids dragging me towards it. I wonder what Johnny Weismuller would do in a situation like this. I smile. I hope no one knows I am absolutely *scared* to death!

I wonder if Sally will pray for me at the funeral. Oh God, I prayed, give me a sign. I settle for a rope. (Later, Phil told me he let go of his paddle because it's easier to swim without it.)

The river calms down after the Tunnel Chute. Much of the time we lose sight of everyone. These quiet times lend themselves to much soul searching and some nice mini-meetings. Thank you, Barbara, Bud, Sue and Steve for putting up with me. It was nice sharing with you.

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with each other. I started learning to care about myself by caring about others. We watched each other take chips and supported one another in times of confusion and loneliness. We'd even go for coffee afterwards to laugh and take people's inventories from the meetings we had just come from. This for me was the best part of the meeting.

I soon took a clean-up commitment at a meeting. That was great, because I got to meet more people after the meetings. The ones that stuck around were usually in pain and we'd talk until late at night. Boy! Would I feel great! When I took on the literature commitment next, that helped me meet even more newcomers and I'd give them my phone number and, surprisingly, a lot of them called me. They were helping me without my knowing it.

My sponsor told me this is a program of Love and Service and, most of all, feeling good about myself. The key to

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE WHITE HOUSE

*How Tina's parents were affected by her addiction, and
what this 19-year-old did to turn it around.*

DEAR MRS. REAGAN

My wife and I, knowing of your great concern about drug abuse in our country, especially among young people, would like for you to read an open letter from our daughter, Christine.

To begin with, Tina, as we call her, is now 19 years old. This young girl had her first encounter with drugs as the age of 13. Her drug of choice was cocaine.

Almost immediately her personality changed from that of a bright, happy child into someone we didn't know. Her grades in school were failing, she lost all of her friends, she became moody and depressed, and she wouldn't listen to anyone. She was a teenager who knew all the answers to everything.

She left our home to be on her own at the age of 15.

Over the next four years we did everything humanly possible to help our daughter. We went to family therapy and "rap sessions," we consulted with local support groups and we learned as much as we could about drugs and their effects on the mind and body and the family, feeling so helpless and afraid for one of our children.

Drugs *do* make the entire family ill, not just the child!

In June of last year, the company transferred our family from Danville, CA, to Seattle, WA. We weren't terribly pleased with the move but in many ways it turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for three months later we received a telephone call from California. It was Tina. She wanted to come home.

Our child finally admitted that she was a drug addict and would probably die if she didn't receive help. Tina had become a \$500-a-day cocaine abuser, with a large hole through her nose membrane. She was mentally depressed, her health was failing and most of the time she just wanted to die and live in her own personal hell.

Western Airlines, the company that employs my husband, helped us immensely by getting Tina admitted for treatment at Monroe General Hospital in Washington, which has an outstanding drug rehabilitation program.

Today, five months later, the daughter we lost for close to six years is a joy to be around. She gives freely of herself to local support groups, and she even worked New Year's Eve answering the telephone for those who had had too much to drink to drive home.

I could go on and on with praise for our recovered daughter - we love her so much - but what is important is that she's alive, she's well and she loves the world around her.

If there is a message we could convey to other parents it would be to never give up on your children, always be there and have an open mind because they truly need our love and understanding. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully yours,

Max & Bunny R.

Every day, terror was what she lived in, not knowing whether she'd survive through the hour. The glamour was over, sooner than she expected, the disease was in effect. The picture wasn't clear. What was missing? The Tina that really was had gone away. All her dreams, her goals, her life was slowly flashing before her. A magnetic force drew her to those who did her no good. She lived for one and only one thing, that magical high of drugs. Any chemical, be it powder, liquid or pill, like a human garbage can, she'd consume it. Her body no longer the Temple of God had become the Dungeon of the Devil. She lived only for that powerful high, striving never to let it down, continuously sacrificing her life, selfishly seeking only her way. Trying to contest the usage of this trash proved to be the insanity of the one-way dead end. Not her Mother, Father or her best friend for years, but the dealers, the drug buddies, the pipe and the drugs. She never ran out of lies. With such a sneaky, devious mind she'd always come up with more. So her jobs she lost, got fired or walked-off. Money was always scarce.

She watched herself die.

No money for food or shampoo or toothpaste or even toilet paper; only enough for booze, cigarettes, baking soda, gas to score and, of course, drugs. Going to bed and waking up became Hope, and each day became more a survival than a wonderful experience. She'd wish not even to awake the next afternoon, because of the desperate struggle to get through for her next high to continue her endless survival. Solo was her way, isolating herself from the outside world. The little space she chose to play her games in looked like it had been hit by a war, and stayed that way. Dead bugs, mold and algae growing in the bathroom and kitchen, not a centimeter of clean space, her place to enjoy her daily activities, a routine of never-ending finale, like a standing ovation of people not clapping but reaching out their hands. The curtain was drawn, always drawn, no sunshine was ever let in, only by the grace of God, though God's grace was never appreciated. Nor were the damn birds, who began when she was ending. She

was always off schedule, she just had to be different. But she was not unique.

The mirror was her worst enemy, occasionally forcing herself to look into it, to reassure herself she was alive. She dreaded every moment of it; a reflection of a nobody, only a version of a slowly dying soul. The pain was increasing. The only validation of her unbalanced life was physical deterioration. Twenty pounds lighter than her height required, she lost her strength, she lost her appetite, she lost her mental awareness. Her life was controlled by two things, drugs and people. She didn't have a mind of her own. People dictated right and wrong, now or later, yes or no, always obligated to others, lowering herself, even on hands and knees. To continue the habit of using she was used as a slave, offering what was left of her body, mind and spirit to survive her daily triangle of terror.

She watched herself die, every day continuing to kill herself, not caring one single bit. She couldn't stop, couldn't control the power the drugs had over her. When she was high, she was somebody, and like always she fought to get that higher high. Until one day, the mirror cracked and the pieces wouldn't go back together. She was lost. Lost in an unfamiliar world, despising herself, full of shame and guilt. And too much pride.

Putting herself through years of agony and suffering somehow slowly a fear set in. But a strength was soon given to her to break down and cry an honest cry. That was the most important cry, which saved her Life. By help of an

Almighty power, which must have chosen her to live, a hand was reached down and, hanging by a thread, grasped it just in time.

*Every day to my ability,
I would travel to the extent
Pushing my frail body
And reaching for that content.
How was it?
I couldn't understand.
I was confused
and frustrated,
And way out of my command.
Controlled by a power
Too impossible to explain.
Oh Please God I cry out to you
How my heart is in such pain.
Hypocritical of my nature,
I would call to Him with a sigh.
What was really in my mind was
How I could get that higher high.*

It is so difficult now to sit back and see myself living that unmanageable life. When I began using, I never imagined it would ever have gotten that out of control. It was a sneaky life, living every day in complete restless paranoia. My living space was nothing but filth and unsanitary isolation, not like my normal nature being very neat and clean. All of my decency as a human being was thrown out the window when using, and I became a very self-centered, selfish animal. Sober life now is fresh and meaningful, and I look forward to what every day has to offer me as a new experience. Why waste away to a negative uncertain clammed up soul, when you could be tasting an everyday delicate freedom? To soar like a bird, with endless wings, to fly look and listen.

If you completely give up, surrender, and let go, you win!

Tina G., Seattle

THE WHITE HOUSE

March 26, 1986

Dear Mr. and Mrs. R., and Tina:

Thank you very much for your message. I was very moved by your experiences with drug abuse, and that you have placed your confidence in me by writing.

I receive countless letters from families across the nation who have had similar experiences with their children. Each one is uniquely tragic. But when I hear of recovery, and of young people starting over again with renewed hope, my heart is lifted. I hope you do all you can to give other families your support. With your first hand knowledge and compassion, you will be able to contribute a great deal to the lives of others.

Thank you again for sharing your story with me. And Tina, your poem was very touching. I wish you luck as you continue your struggle. My prayers are with you.

Sincerely,

Barack Obama

I CAN CHANGE MYSELF

My role as a helper is not to *do* things for the person I am trying to help, but to *be* things; not to try and control and change *their* actions, but through understanding and awareness, to change *my* reactions. I will change my negatives to positives; my fear to faith; contempt for what they do to respect for the potential within them; hostility to understanding; manipulation or over-protectiveness to release with love, not trying to make them fit my personal standard or my image, but giving them an opportunity to pursue their *own* destiny, regardless of what their choice may be.

I will change my dominance to encouragement; panic to serenity; the inertia of despair to the energy of my own personal growth; and self-justification to self-understanding.

Self-pity blocks effective action. The more I indulge in it, the more I feel that the answer to my problems is a change in others and in society, not in myself. Thus, I become a hopeless case.

Exhaustion is the result when I use my

energy mulling over the past with regret, or trying to figure ways to escape a future that has yet to arrive. Projecting an image of the future and anxiously hovering over it, for fear that it will or won't come true, uses all my energy and leaves me unable to live today. Yet, living *today* is the only way to have a life.

I will have no thought for the future actions of others, neither expecting them to be better or worse as time goes on, for in having such expectations I am really trying to Create. I will love and let be, live and let live.

All people are always changing. If I try to judge them, I do so only on what I think I know of them, failing to realize that there is much I do not know. I will give others credit for *attempts* at progress and for achieving many unknown victories.

I, too, am always changing, and I can make that change a constructive one, if I am willing. I CAN CHANGE MYSELF. Others, I can only love.

Unknown

Life Begins at 20? 30? 40!

Living in an unstable family, and growing up in the Hippie-Sixties when "turn on, tune in and drop-out" was our battlecry, I found the world of drugs quite attractive. Despite misgivings (fear and guilt), I took the plunge. I discovered that pot, LSD, methedrine and heroin made my head relax even better than alcohol, and I was off and running. (Cocaine at that time was little more than an occasional, expensive treat which I always used in conjunction with other drugs.)

For a while I led a double life; running around the beachfront hangouts in Venice until I got a little burned-out, then running home to Momma, who didn't know what to do about me and soon gave up trying. I couldn't keep up the pace for long, though, and little things started happening that weren't part of my plans — like getting busted, getting hepatitis, getting beat up, getting sexually abused, and worst of all, getting abandoned by the few people I had thought were my friends. (My priorities were a little screwed up in those days, too.)

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self-worth, he said, was to do worthy things. He told me what he respected on the program most were the commitments people had. Like the guy with over eight years of sobriety who still makes coffee before the meeting. And the greeter who gets there early every week to help clean up after the meeting. Or all the men and women who work the phones at the Central Office when nobody else wants to.

Well, that hit me where I live. I wanted that. I went down to Central Office and took a phone commitment. I've been working the same shift now for over 20 months and I wouldn't trade the wonderful feelings I've experienced for all the tea in China.

To give you an example of what I'm talking about, one night at a meeting a girl came up to me and asked me if I was the Richard who worked the phones on

Wednesdays. When I told her I was, her whole face lit up.

"I always wanted to meet you and thank you for helping me," she said. "You were the first person I ever spoke to and I have 28 days today!"

What a rush I got! Freebase never got me *that* high.

I watched her take chip after chip and even gave her a cake at one year. Things like that have happened to me almost a dozen times now and I wouldn't let go of my phone commitment at Central Office for anything. You don't have to sponsor people in order to work with others. These people help me probably more than I help them.

I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of CA always to be there. And for that, I am responsible.

Richard L., Venice

My double life soon became increasingly unmanageable. I would spend time in jail or prison, then get out and try in all sincerity to "go straight" (let me point out that all my criminal offenses had to do with drugs and getting high, so I knew even then that "going straight," for me, meant not getting high), but I wouldn't last long. I couldn't stand anything about the "straight" world — the people, the activities, and especially not getting high. I wanted desperately to be "good" (which equalled being "straight"), but more and more I became convinced that I was destined to be "bad."

Little things started happening that weren't part of my plans.

After a marriage (during a "good" period) and a divorce (during a "bad" period), I wound up checking into a well-known communal drug rehabilitation center in 1975. I stayed for just under two years, then split. Within a month I was more strung out than before. I wound up in a detox hospital in Kansas City, in late 1977, where I attended my first AA meeting. I didn't stay clean and sober right away, but a seed was planted. I kept going to meetings. After a few jump-starts of precarious periods of sobriety, I decided I needed to move back to California (I had something like 37 days of sobriety at the time). When I got back to L.A. I started checking out the meetings, and decided they weren't to my liking. I went, anyway, primarily because I was afraid *not* to. I managed to abstain from drugs and alcohol for a little over four years, and I even found a few meetings I liked, but I wasn't the least bit happy. I now know that's because I wasn't honest with myself (I certainly wasn't honest with anybody else) and I was more interested in people-pleasing than in staying sober.

I didn't need the "crutch" of the program, anymore.

Miraculously (one of the side-effects of sobriety for people with our disease), my external world got better in spite of me. I completed a couple of years of school, got a good job, and started culti-

vating some friendships with "normal" people outside the Fellowship.

So, I stopped going to meetings. I stopped praying. (I didn't have to stop working steps because I had forsaken them long before.) I didn't need the "crutch" of the program anymore. You see, my life was "good" now. I had finally gone "straight." Coincidentally (if you believe in "coincidences"), I had a knee injury and needed surgery. Half-heartedly, I informed the surgeon that I had a "history" of drug abuse, and he should use "discretion" in prescribing any pain medication for me. He ended up giving me Tylenol-3 tablets (which contain codeine) and told *me* to use discretion. Which, of course, I didn't.

I didn't tell anyone about my slip (since I wasn't going to meetings, who was there to tell?) because it wasn't a problem. After all, wasn't I "good" now? A momentary weakness could be overlooked. As a matter of fact, I was now so "good" that I could enjoy some of the finer things in life the way "normal" people did. Like a little wine with dinner, perhaps a splash of Amaretto in my coffee, an occasional joint with good friends, a social line or two.

As long as I stayed away from needles, I knew I'd be alright. (Does anyone detect a progression here?)

The rest is predictable ("It couldn't happen to me." But it did). I lost my job. I spent all my money. I went deeper into debt. I broke all ties with my "normal" friends and family. I became a recluse. I nearly died from respiratory arrest. And I *wanted* to die, because I had lost the most precious thing in the world — my self-respect.

As smart as I had been (Dean's honor student at a major university), I had outsmarted myself. I couldn't (or wouldn't) allow myself to grasp some very simple facts — facts which today my life and the lives of countless others absolutely depend upon:

1. Addiction is a disease, not a moral issue. (I'm not a *bad* person; I'm a *sick* person when I'm in the throes of my disease).
2. My disease is incurable, but arrestable, *one day at a time*, provided I take the prescribed remedy for it

(daily application of the Spiritual principles embodied in the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of the program, along with continued work and fellowship with other recovering addicts — for my *own* sobriety's sake).

3. Honesty, Openmindedness and Willingness are vital essentials to recovery. Without them, there is no hope and no future.
4. Once I surrendered, completely, to the first step (and here was the turning point for me), the rest of the steps became possible, as did a life of happiness and purpose. But until I made the *total* submission, I mean *really* threw in the towel, I could find no peace.

Today, I am grateful to be alive, with almost five months of continuous sobriety, a growing appreciation for life, a love for Cocaine Anonymous and other 12-step programs like never before, and a whole new family of friends (clean and sober recovering addicts like me) who understand me and love me in a way no one else can.

Addiction is a disease, not a moral issue.

I am working the steps eagerly to the best of my ability, with the guidance of a friend I choose to call my sponsor, at a pace appropriate to my own recovery. I go to a great many meetings (two or three a day while I'm not working) and I *enjoy* them! I am on the phone many times daily with sober friends, and I socialize with them outside of meetings. I have found joy in the Fellowship I didn't believe was possible.

After nine years of lonely half-measures, dishonesty and pain (through all of which my Higher Power was waiting, ready when I was), I finally saw that when I fight myself, I am bound to lose; when I stop fighting, everybody wins. One day at a time, I no longer choose to fight, run, drink or get loaded.

The 12 Steps and the Fellowship are doing for me what I could never do for myself, and they will continue to do so as long as I get out of my own way and let them.

For this addict, life truly has begun at 40.
Larry P., Los Angeles



God does nice work. Tears of joy well up in my eyes as I reflect on the absolute freedom that the river and the program have brought about for me. Being at One with the river brings to mind quite vividly an analogy about the power of water that somebody shared at a meeting recently. Water is surely the most powerful force on Earth. Did it not carve the Grand Canyon? Yet, it seems to slip harmlessly through one's fingers.

Maybe it's *not* a sign of weakness to bend and be flexible ...

I'd rather set my hair on fire than let anybody know I'm afraid.

We're informed that the van transporting our gear to the lunch site has been waylaid and lunch will be late. No problem. We don't eat until 4:00 pm. Once again, a miracle occurs. Practically no one is angry. Is there nothing we can't or won't endure *sober*?

The "S'more" meeting under the stars that evening was unlike any I'd ever attended. Gratitude was the prevalent theme. Later that night I had a wonderful conversation with God and for the first time I'm positive He heard me.

Sunday morning. We're on the river again. Everyone seems to be talking about "Rucky Chucky," whatever *that* is. And we're about to find out all too soon. Close up and personal.

Why has everyone stopped? There seems to be an impasse in the river. Scores of boats are lined up along the banks on both side of the river. The rocks up ahead are dotted colorfully with the orange of many life vests of the now pedestrian paddlers. Suddenly, we can hear the dull, ominous rumbling of the Upper Rucky Chucky.

Why is no one challenging the ol'

R.C.? Maybe everyone is merely building up their nerve. Phil informs us that Rucky Chucky just might be impassable today.

After a brief conference, our guides decide that fortuitous thing to do is for us to walk around the river and let the experts negotiate the snarling rapids. *Wait a minute* What's Phil saying? I think my lads are up to it," he says. "how about it, Mick? Are you lads game?"

"ABSOLUTELY!" a voice, not my own, answers from my throat. My hand simultaneously shoots up to complete the betrayal. I'd rather set my hair on fire than let anyone know I'm the only one who's afraid.

There seems to be an uneasy calm in the air as we push as we push away from the shore. Suddenly, somebody turns up the volume on R.C.'s voice. I swear the roar almost sounds like a chortle. My rowing becomes mechanical. My leaden paddle is taxing my galvanized arms.

It's not a sign of weakness to bend and be flexible...

Over the cheers of the people perched atop the rock, the waterfall screams. My heart is now beating in my throat. "Bear left!" Phil screams. "Pick up speed!"

"GOD GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO A-A-A-A-AHMH MIGOD!"

We're airborne. We're grapes being dropped in a cuisinart. We're a Picasso painting. Phil and Steve are flipped into the front of the boat alongside me and Bud. I can't tell if we're up or down. We're being spun around like a rubber duck in a bathtub.

And almost as suddenly as it had begun the roar of the rapids gives way to

the cheers of the spectators (Now we're the Boston Celtics accepting the accolades of the crowd).

"God, I love it out there on the edge!"

"YEAH", our voices cry in unison. Our High-5 paddles signify we never had a doubt.

"God, I love it out there on the edge!"

It sure beats the hell out of driving past a gas station when your car is on "E" or flirting with a girl who has a hulk of a boyfriend.

Finally, all too quickly, it's time to go home. Our ETA is 3:00 am. Imagine, if you will, the nine-hour ride home ... tired, sleepy and somewhat soggy. And yet ...

I CAN'T WAIT TO DO IT AGAIN!!!!

Mick M., Reseda

Editor's Note: The Southern California Flake and Powder Society is a non-profit travel club offering year round trips and is run by and for clean and sober addicts and alcoholics. They are based in West Los Angeles.

CORRESPONDENTS continued from page 1

If, by chance, you live in some part of the country that isn't covered by one of our six Regional Correspondents, submit your contributions directly to The Editor, *The Connection*, Cocaine Anonymous, P.O. Box 1367, Culver City, CA 90232.

Deadline for editorial contributions for our last issue in 1986 is October 15th. All material should be typed and double-spaced.

We call *The Connection* a newsletter, but it's really a lot more than that. We like to think of it as kind of a forum, where feelings and experiences are freely exchanged, with just one underlying principle: What can I bring to the party? What do I have to give back to the Program? How can I help another?

In short, it's *your* meeting in print.

Note: If you would like to serve as a Regional Correspondent in your area, contact The Editor, Bruce M., at (213) 656-5318.

CRACK Continued from page 3

cocaine increases the risk of severe drug-related medical and behavioral complications," says Herbert Roehrich, M.D., Clinical Director of 800-COCAINE. Of the crack users surveyed, 7 percent suffered brain seizures, 64 percent chest congestion, 40 percent chronic cough, and 32 percent black phlegm.

Callers also described psychiatric side effects: depression, irritability, extreme paranoia, lack of sex drive, memory loss, violent behavior and suicide attempts.

Use of crack also seems to take its toll in the workplace. One-quarter of the crack callers used the substance while on the job, with more than half reporting daily use.

"Smoking crack delivers such a high dose of cocaine to the brain that it can cause almost immediate disruption of brain function and ability to perform on the job," says Dr. Washton. "This raises the serious concerns about on-the-job accidents resulting from crack use."

1. *What is "crack"?* Crack is freebase cocaine sold in the form of tiny ready-to-smoke "rocks." Crack spares the user the delay and bother of having to extract the more potent freebase form of cocaine from its parent compound, cocaine hydrochloride powder, a process which requires either of baking soda to perform the extraction; i.e., to "free" the basic cocaine alkaloid from its hydrochloride salt. Unlike cocaine powder, freebase can be smoked rather than snorted up the nostrils. It is usually smoked in a glass waterpipe, but is sometimes used less conspicuously in a tobacco or marijuana cigarette.

2. *Why is crack so dangerous?* As compared to snorting cocaine powder, smoking freebase gives the user a more intense and more rapid euphoria, a higher concentration of the drug in the bloodstream and the brain, and a more powerful compulsion to repeat the experience. The "high" from each dose lasts approximately five minutes and is followed immediately by an unpleasant "crash" characterized by feelings of irritability, agitation and intense cravings for more cocaine. Crack appears to stimulate the brain's most primitive neural reward circuits — the ones also stimu-

lated by natural reinforcers such as food, water and sex — and cause biochemical changes in these brain areas which create an intense and unrelenting drug hunger. In this regard, there is no doubt that crack is *physically* as well as psychologically addictive, even though chronic users may experience no severe withdrawal syndrome. The physical addiction to crack is a chemically-induced change in brain functioning caused by the repeated drug-taking. One need not be psychiatrically disturbed or otherwise profoundly unhappy to be a potential candidate for addiction to crack.

3. *What is a typical pattern of crack use?* Crack is often used in "binges" lasting one to three days at a time. During the course of a binge, the drug is smoked continuously until money and drug supplies are depleted or the user collapses from physical exhaustion. As much as 10-50 grams of cocaine, or even several ounces of the drug may be consumed during a single binge.

4. *Medical Consequences.* Smoking crack can cause a wide range of medical problems including brain seizures; lung damage; heart attack; stroke; neurological impairment; chronic cough; chest congestion; black phlegm; wheezing; burning of the lips, throat and tongue; weight loss; and general physical debilitation from improper nutrition and neglected health care. Smoking cocaine increases the possibility of a fatal overdose reaction because of the large doses of the drug that are delivered into the bloodstream and the brain. *However, the primary danger of crack is the drug's ability to cause an extremely rapid and severe addiction that controls the users' behavior and dominates their life.* Many crack users also become addicted to alcohol, tranquilizers or heroin which are taken to alleviate the unpleasant side-effects of "crash" from crack use.

5. *Psychological Consequences.* In the early stages of use, crack induces a wide range of pleasurable feelings. The user feels energized, euphoric, self-confident, talkative, sexually stimulated and instantaneously relieved of stress. However, with continuing use tolerance develops to these desirable effects and ultimately the drug causes only unpleasant feelings, including depression, para-

noia, irritability and impotence. Some users become violent or suicidal on crack, due to the extreme drug-induced paranoia, agitation and depression.

6. *Social Consequences.* The irresistible drug compulsion that develops with crack often leads to marital, job, financial and legal problems in many users. *The drug becomes more important than almost anything else in the user's life including food, sex, family, health and career.*

AMENDS Continued from page 3

wait no longer. I called my friend to set up an appointment to see her. I explained the Program and how we make amends, and that I owed her a major one; could I come and see her? Not believing that I really had done anything to her, she accepted anyway.

I went to meet my friend at the beach, and I was thoroughly frightened. How could I admit that I had snuffed the life out of an innocent creature. How then could I rectify it? My friend arrived. I didn't know how to start, and expressed this. Before I could get two more words out, my friend interrupted, "I don't want to hear this."

"Look, I know you haven't done anything, and I don't want to hear this. If you need to say this stuff so badly, go out there on the pier, and tell it to the ocean."

Not knowing what to do, I decided to do as I was told. I went out on the pier and explained to God what had happened, how badly I felt about it, and prayed for guidance in how to make it right.

As I walked back from the pier, I realized how merciful God had been to me. This situation couldn't have been planned. Little did I know that God's sense of humor was about to zap me. I was walking my friend back to her car after thanking her for this opportunity. We were chatting. She explained how she had discussed this event with her boyfriend prior to meeting me.

"I said I wasn't interested in hearing what you have to say. He asked me how I could not even be curious. I told him curiosity killed the cat."

Gil M., Van Nuys

FLYING HIGH

Returning from the 2nd Annual World Service Convention in San Diego, CA, 35,000 feet above Akron, OH, five recovering addicts crunched together in the center seats of an L1011, recited the preamble and began the meeting. The topic was gratitude and convention sobriety. We were higher than we'd ever been.

Deborah F. began by saying she was grateful that she was not alone and that she had other people to help her change her life.

Jennifer R. was feeling revitalized, alive and very grateful. She was overwhelmed at the uniqueness of the meeting and promised to submit it into the Anonymous World Book of Records!!

Jack P. shared that he was looking forward to getting old with Jonny S. of Los Angeles, but not *too* quickly.

Stanley G. expressed the power of this program transcends racial and sexual boundaries. He said he learned to love a little more this weekend.

Shahin G. shared her gratitude for being able to practice the principles of the program and take responsibility for

herself. This weekend gave her new strength.

The meeting ended with a moment of silence, with the added touch of the "California knock," and the Lord's Prayer.

A week before, as I boarded the plane to California, my mind was racing. As a delegate to the World Services Conference in San Diego and a G.S.R. for both CA and AA, I knew that there was going to be some heated discussion at the conference. I also knew from our past delegates report of the first conference held in February that CA (being so new) was a little disorganized and struggling.

I had gone to the conference to represent the Fellowship in Connecticut and bridge the 3000 mile gap that separates us from World Services. I wanted to learn more about the inner workings of CA and help set policies that would be beneficial to the Fellowship as a whole, to get Connecticut involved so we would know what's going on and show our support for World Services.

Unity was a major theme of the conference, for without unity there is no CA. Being a new delegate, however, I was unprepared for the "California Split" where the delegates from Northern California and Southern California seemed to disagree on a disproportionate number of issues. Not everyone, it seemed, appeared to be working for the same goal, and I had a hard time understanding their "politics."

When you're dealing with people, you have to expect that personalities often come before principles. But, by the end of the first day, my head was spinning with constructive ideas and my heart was beaming. Not only that but in the space of just eight hours I had made a number of new friends. The second day of the conference brought on even more emotions and I think we accomplished a great deal. We organized enough guidelines to go back to the Fellowship for suggestions and approval and, by the end of the day, the so called "California Split," had been completely resolved!

Not only that but we elected six new Trustees from various parts of the country to serve on the World Services Board. These were: Greg D. from Chicago, Reggie L. from Los Angeles, Bob L. from San Francisco, Fenn P. from San Rafael, Jennifer R. from New York and H. Lee S. from Houston.

The two Trustees already serving, Ray G. from Riverside and Jonny S. from Los Angeles, were re-elected to another term.

All in all, the conference was a huge success. I think that we accomplished a lot. It's extraordinary how much work goes into the World Services Organization and how truly dedicated these people are.

I'm grateful to have been a part of it all.

Lucie M., Conn.

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