

THE CONNECTION

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SHARING WORLDWIDE RECOVERY

number 2

CONFESSIONS OF A CONFERENCE JUNKIE

*A dedicated conference junkie recalls
1st East Coast CA Conference as weekend
of intimate sharing and Love*

Appropriately dubbed, "Good Times No Lines", the 1st East Coast Conference of Cocaine Anonymous, held February 21-23 in Pauling, NY, attracted over 70 enthusiastic, clean and sober men and women from as far as Michigan and California who joined together for a weekend of intimate sharing and love.

For me personally it was an extra thrill as I celebrated my fifth birthday over the weekend. Joined by my close friend Jennifer from New York who had hit the five-year plateau the month before, we reflected with both amazement and gratitude over the growth of CA in Connecticut and New York over the past two years. Where had we ever gotten enough self-esteem to start CA in the face of such vehement disapproval and oftentimes even ridicule from more than a few members of AA? Surely God had to be carrying us during those early months when ours were the only footsteps in the sand. We recalled our self-doubt in the beginning, having to control, manipulate, justify, explain and finally, in the end, simply turning CA and its future over to God.

Today, at last count, there are 28 meetings a week here in the Northeast

and the phenomenon continues to snowball. As more and more newcomers walk through our doors, desperate for recovery, sober men and women are waiting to sponsor and support them.

I'm a dedicated conference junkie. Since my first AA weekend conference with three months' sobriety, I've been to over forty conferences and conventions all over the country. . . . CA conventions in Santa Barbara and Palm Springs. . . . AA conferences in Denver, Cincinnati and Chicago. . . . NA conventions in New York and Atlanta. And even though I was on the "Good Times No Lines" Conference Committee, I had no reason to expect that this small gathering would surpass anything I had ever seen or felt at a conference. There were only four

*Where had we ever gotten enough
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disapproval?*

conference "old timers" attending; almost everyone else was new to the conference scene. I was covering the registration desk, welcoming everyone with a

MARATHON MIRACLES

Miracles in sobriety come in all shapes and sizes. On March 9, 1986, the 23rd week of my sobriety, my Higher Power and I ran—and finished—the 1st Los Angeles Marathon.

I was as nervous as the other 8,199 runners that morning at the Coliseum. I'd run two previous marathons in New York City, so I knew I'd be able to finish, but I didn't expect my time to be very good because I was 25 lbs. heavier and hadn't trained as much. Of course, I secretly hoped for a miracle, a really big one, to be able to finish under five hours. As a grateful recovering addict/alcoholic, I tried to believe the only thing that really mattered was attempting to run the race. Rigorous honesty, however, demands that I confess I knew I would *kill* myself if I didn't finish...no matter what!

It was so crowded at the start I wasn't able to find the other two guys on the program I knew were running. I wondered if I'd meet anyone else from CA or AA. Then, before we reached the two-mile mark I heard, "Are you a friend of Bill W's?"

It was Howard, from Anaheim. The back of his shirt read "EASY DOES IT". We were soon joined by Kurt and a half-dozen other CA, AA members. We ran together for a couple of miles; it was wonderful. That same feeling of instant

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When was the last time anyone asked for your opinion? Well, we're asking you now. We'd like your opinion on how Cocaine Anonymous might better serve the Fellowship as a whole, what you think about the program, how you feel about meetings. What step has helped you the most? What is the most beneficial advice your sponsor has given you?

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 ideas and opinions and feelings are freely exchanged, with just one basic underlying principle: how can I help another? What can I bring to the party? What do I have to give back to the Fellowship?

In short, to paraphrase the *AA Grapevine*, it's your meeting in print.

And so far, it's been a pretty successful one, too. All the subscriptions you sent in following publication of our first issue made us self-supporting from the very start; we received more than \$1300, and we look forward to even more as more copies of the newsletter are distributed across the country.

Send all written material, typed and double-spaced, to The Editor, *The Connection*, Cocaine Anonymous, P.O. Box 1367, Culver City, CA 90239. Your anonymity will be respected. Only your first name, the initial of your last name and the name of your hometown will be used. See you in San Diego.

The Editor

Lonely is the long-distance runner... unless he's accompanied by his Higher Power.

camaraderie you feel when you run into someone from the program when you least expect it...we could have used a starter kit.

I ran into Paul around Mile 7. Then Richard, who I'd planned to join at the start of the race. We met at Mile 14, just when my legs were starting to yell Uncle, a full seven miles before they betrayed me—twice before—in NYC. Running into Richard was just what the doctor ordered. We ran together for a couple of miles; he sacrificed his own time to slow down and help keep me going, for which I was very grateful.

Suddenly, the thought entered my mind, "*Why don't we stop running and walk for a while?*"

"What? Me, Macho Man, *walk* in a marathon!?"

"*Would you rather have a heart attack? You know you're too fat and you haven't trained enough.*"

"Of course not. I don't want to die."

"*You won't die...but you won't finish the race if you pass out. So, come on, let's walk a little bit. Plenty of other runners are doing it.*"

"OK...but what if someone I know sees me? And how am I going to break five hours?"

"*No one's going to see you...trust me. Relax. You'll break five hours with time to spare.*"

I walked for a few hundred yards a time, maybe the equivalent of a mile between Mile 19 and 24; the marathon course is 26.2 miles. When my steady female running partner, Pat, waved from the sidelines at Mile 20, I was running again. I smiled. He had been on the level, after all. Great. I started walking once more. Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice.

"How're ya doin'?"

I looked over. It was Mitch. He'd come all the way downtown just to cheer

me on...only to see me walking! I waved over weakly, indicating I'd see him at the end of the race.

"THANKS A LOT!" I muttered sarcastically to my Higher Power.

Moments later, as the digital clock above the finish line came into focus, my heart sank. It read 4:59:27. I was definitely more than 33 seconds away from the finish line. I "thanked" my Higher Power again and picked up the pace for that last 200 yards.

Well, He must have heard...because suddenly I remembered that my own watch was two minutes slower than the "official" time because it took that long just to cross the starting line.

So, I *did* break five hours.

And even though I walked part of the way and didn't find my brother and his family, or Pat, or Mitch at the finish line...I did manage to locate my car and stagger over to it without collapsing, which was when I began to recognize and count all my spiritual blessings.

I forgot about being cheered at the finish line...or running all the way...or breaking five hours...or having a flat stomach.

Instead, as I sat in the warmth of my car (not a moment too soon, either; my legs would have gone on strike if they'd been asked to take one more step), I thought about all the runners who still hadn't crossed the finish line, about the ones who were forced to drop out miles earlier, and those who wouldn't be able to find their car and warm clothes for hours...who might not have friends and family to call later...*these* were the Important Blessings of Life. I was truly blessed.

"Thank you, Higher Power. I'm sorry I got angry at you earlier. And thank you, fellow members of CA. I couldn't have done it without all your love and support."

Chuck H., Los Angeles

LOCKED UP ONE DAY AT A TIME

*How a clean and sober member of Cocaine Anonymous in prison gets through the day.
Harvey G. relates his experiences.*

I was sitting in the first meeting I've been to in two weeks, the other night, when I suddenly realized just how truly lucky I am. I have a good job where I'm really appreciated, I have a roof over my head, I have enough to eat and I'm reasonably comfortable. Patti, the woman I love, is loving, caring, loyal and supportive. And my friends, Neil, Richard, Bruce, Dana, Susan, etc. are more supportive and loyal than I can possibly believe or understand. Life is wonderful, indeed. The program works. It really does. I have so much to be grateful for and, for the first time in my life, I am at peace with myself.

For the past 15 months, I've been incarcerated in a state prison about 60 miles west of Los Angeles. I've still got another seven or eight months to go before I'm allowed out on a work furlough.

It may sound strange but I think I'm lucky. Neil came out to visit me, Saturday, and we talked about what it means to be able to love and to be able to accept love in return. That is what you people have taught me. When I came here after being clean and sober for almost 17 months in Cocaine Anonymous, I thought I knew what life was all about, I thought I knew how the program worked.

Yet, after all these months, I've just begun to learn how *little* I know. Over the past 15 months I have experienced just about every emotion known to man. I have gone from bitterness and anger to "woe is me" to acceptance and, finally, serenity.

Today at 41, I feel physically and emotionally better than I have in the last twenty years. I have real friends today, something I never had before. I have people out there who really care about me, people I love and care about.

This past year has gone by quickly because I do my time in here the same way I approach my sobriety . . . one day at a time. Every evening when I say my prayers I ask God for the strength and the wisdom and the hope to get me

It would be easy for me to stay loaded all the time in here.

through one more day. Lately, I've gotten in the habit of saying my prayers every night at 8 o'clock because it makes me feel as if I am at a meeting. Perhaps that sounds crazy, I don't know. We have no CA meetings in here, just one AA meeting and an occasional NA meeting a week.

I usually get up about 7:15 a.m. during the week, do some exercise, take a shower, make a cup of coffee and get dressed. I report to work about 8:15 at In-Service Training where all the correctional officers go for additional training. I stay until 3. Since my office is located outside the main gate, I have to walk back into the institution every afternoon.

On Monday, we have an AA meeting at 7:30 p.m. On Tuesday, I go to a Men's Advisory Council meeting at 6:30 and we have an NA meeting an hour later. These are scheduled meetings; they don't always take place on schedule, however, due to one thing or another. It's

TWELVE STEPS TO A SLIP

1. Start missing meetings.
2. Nurse the idea that someday, somehow, you can use again and control your using.
3. Let others do the 12th Step work in your group. Don't get involved yourself.
4. Become conscious of your length of sobriety; view newcomers with a jaundiced eye.
5. Become so pleased with your own views of the program that you consider yourself an "Elder Statesman."
6. Start a small clique within your own group, composed of only members who see eye to eye with you.
7. Become critical of others who do not agree with you about everything.
8. Tell newcomers in confidence that you yourself do not take certain of the 12 Steps seriously.
9. Let your mind dwell more and more on how much you are helping others rather than on how much the AA Program is helping you.
10. If one of your friends in the program has a slip, drop him at once.
11. Habitually borrow money from other members, then stay away from the meetings to avoid embarrassment.
12. Look upon the 24-hour plan as a vital thing for new members, but not for yourself. You have outgrown the need of that long ago.

M. Perry G., New York

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IF YOU THINK YOU CAN

If you think you're beaten, you are.
 If you think you dare not, you don't.
 If you'd like to win, but think you can't,
 It's almost certain you won't.
 If you think you'll lose, you've lost.
 For out in the world you'll find
 Success begins with a fellow's will —
 It's all in the state of mind.
 If you think you're out-classed, you are.
 You've got to think high to rise;
 You've got to be sure of yourself
 Before you can ever win a prize.
 Life's battles don't always go
 To the stronger, faster man;
 But sooner or later the man who wins
 Is the man who thinks he can.

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hug which was reluctantly accepted by many and politely (and not so politely) refused by a few. By Sunday, however, hugs and love became a permanent and integral part of everyone's sobriety.

As the attendees registered, they were directed to the various meetings in progress. Some of those wanting to escape the growing intimacy feigned exhaustion and went to their rooms for a nap. Others asked for directions to the gym to work out their anxiety on the Universal equipment. When asked how they were doing, many covered their discomfort with the standard "I'm fine", (which I've heard means Fearful, Insecure, Nervous and Emotional). By the end of the conference virtually all the "fine" people (along with everyone else) had pretty much put down their walls and were completely open to the love and understanding that is truly the hallmark of a good conference.

Later, I attended "Self Worth. . . Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?". Jerry B. from New York was the main speaker. When he finished, a few hands were ten-

tatively raised. "My name is John and I'm an addict." The group followed with an enthusiastic, predictable "Hi John!". What followed, however, was far from predictable, when the four "old time" conference junkies in the room chorused together, "Love you, John. . . a lot." John appeared somewhat embarrassed. And most of the others didn't know what to make of it. "Love you" is a tradition we picked up at AA Young Peoples Conferences in the Northeast. When the next person shared, however, a few more of us chimed in with a loud "Love you." By Saturday, almost everyone was joining in. Walls were tumbling, people were sharing, becoming vulnerable, open to receiving love, open to giving it, open to telling who we really were. We really felt great about ourselves, great about each other.

The principles I want to practice in all my affairs are those that I've picked up at conferences.

Saturday morning, I ran a three-hour 4th Step Workshop gratefully borrowed from the one in which I had participated at the CA Convention in Palm Springs five months earlier. Two-thirds of us took part. Again the atmosphere was upbeat and charged. Those who had taken the 4th Step for the first time spent the rest of the weekend reveling in their new-found self-knowledge, openly sharing.

For me the weekend also meant rekindling old West Coast friendships. Happy Howard from Los Angeles was actively promoting his non-profit, anti-drug T-shirts. Bob M. (CA's World Service Public Information Chairman) arrived Saturday afternoon just in time to chair his assigned group "Couples Meeting. Do I want to be in the Singles Meeting?" Ironically, Bob became a single himself several hours earlier. I also met Debbi S. from Flint, MI, who started CA in that state."

It's wonderful to know, as CA grows, I'm developing a new network of friends throughout the country.

With Conference Co-Chairperson Chip M. from Conn. as our charming,

eloquent host, Saturday night's Banquet included a sobriety countdown. Starting at 50 years and working down to one day, the applause and cheers became deafening. I found it hard to believe that 70 recovering addicts could make more noise than 500 straights. Some things don't ever change.

Sunday morning's spiritual meeting, featuring five speakers, was chaired by my pal, Perry G. from New York. The years of gratitude that started to flow at the meeting continued to build until the final closing "Gratitude Meeting, Happy Trails To You" (no pun intended). By then we were all pretty sad about leaving.

"Wouldn't it be great if we could all spend the next year together here at Holiday Hills?" someone remarked. "It's back to reality," another moaned. But the way I figure, the stuff conferences are made of is the kind of reality I want in my life. I feel most sober, most connected and centered, most human and lovable when I'm with my CA friends for a weekend of sharing and hugging.

The second part of the 12th Step had new meaning for me after the weekend. The principles that I want to practice in all my affairs are those that I've picked up at conferences. . . to put down my walls, to trust and to love, to allow others to love me, and to cry. Sometimes at conferences I hurt so badly I just want to run. And I talk about it and you hold me and tell me it's OK, that you love me. And I feel safe again.

Last week, Jennifer called to say that we've booked Holiday Hills for another conference the Weekend of October 31st. what a trip! A halloween conference where I don't have to put on a mask. CA has taught me to play again, to live as God wants me to live, to be happy, joyous and free. I sure hope you'll join me in October as we trudge the road to happy destiny. Love you.

Jack P., Conn.

Editor's Note: For information and a flyer on the October 31st Conference, Call Jennifer at (212) 713-5383.

AND THE WINNER IS. . .



*All my life I wanted to be “somebody.”
Rich. Famous. A Woman of significance.
I wrote my acceptance speech 100 times.*

As I watched the recent Oscar ceremonies, I realized how much I've changed. How grateful I am to be clean and sober and a member of Cocaine Anonymous.

All of my life I wanted to be 'somebody'. Rich. Famous. A woman of significance. I wrote my acceptance speech at least a hundred times and rehearsed it daily in front of my grandmother's mirror, decked out in high heels and low self-esteem. Yes, even at 8 years of age, my disease was alive and well. Later in front of other mirrors, rolling up hundred dollar bills, snorting cocaine, my ego smiled and rehearsed a brand new type of madness. It is not wrong to have dreams, to have goals, to accomplish them. But I was in that addictive state of mental masturbation where you feel that all you need do is push and shove and scream loud enough and the world will surely reward you. I was so busy talking about being 'talented' and complaining about 'not making it', that I failed to work at my craft.

We are a strange bunch we cocaine addicts. Our grandiosity coupled with our insecurity makes for quite a combination . . . 'a volcano of craziness' that seems to erupt on cue. Whenever we walk into a room and not enough heads turn, we will invariably make it happen. Whatever 'it' is depends on our mood. For me, 'it' was getting the hottest looking guy's attention, or taking over the party with a funny, hip line or some other kind of provocative behavior.

Opening three buttons was one of my favorites. A producer friend of mine told me that if I wanted to be taken seriously as a writer I shouldn't walk into his office to pitch a story dressed like what I was really pitching was my body.

My retort to that little comment was usually, "Fuck that. I'm *me*. I like the

way I dress. I'm not trying to seduce anybody. You're nuts." I always felt they were trying to inhibit me, hold me back, change me.

I left my hometown of South Philly in the Sixties and landed in New York. I was young. I was hopeful. I strode through the Lower East Side in my fake fur and innocence (ha, ha) and embraced every portentous moment. I marched against the mainstream every chance I could. From anti-war demonstrations to civil rights protests down South. *I was the letter the world was waiting to receive.*

What a wonderful way to avoid myself, to stay above the madding crowd and point my finger at the rest of the world. They had no ideals. No values. No dreams. "They" just worked, raised families, went to church, lived their lives. Lost in self-righteousness, arrogance and denial, I was going to help them find themselves.

*I was the letter the world
was waiting to receive.*

During that period I had some success, money, jet-setting around in limousines and lies. I started taking lots of uppers and downers. Never went out until 11 pm — never came home before 6 am. I lived the good life. After I ran through London in mini-skirts, looking for Alfie and what it was all about, I returned to New York committed to getting grounded. To find a nice guy, get married, have a baby. Time and time again I was told I was really a mess when it came to relationships. So I set out on my quest to find Mr. Right. In all the wrong places.

Cocaine was waiting patiently. It crossed my fingertips on a number of occasions but I quickly said, "No, thanks," swallowed two greenies and

thought to myself, "I'm together, they're fools."

Several years later out on a movie set, Mr. Right asked me to score him some weed the next time I went up to the City. We were in a small mining town. It was the weekend of the Great Anti-War March. When I returned, I couldn't wait to give Mr. Right his lid. Of course, we got high together. Of course, I fell madly in love. Of course, I gave up my career, my apartment, *everything* to spend the next six years travelling from one motel to the next on location. 'On location' is like being on acid. Nothing is what it seems. My life became one big backdrop. I finally demanded he marry me. He gave in. I took charge. He was drinking a lot more but I overlooked it. I had a baby instead. For five years we danced 'the dance of death'. We divorced and I did what many of my single-parent women friends were doing at that time. I went back to school. It was on the Santa Monica College campus that I began using Cocaine.

It was obsessive love at first bite. For the next few years I alternated between being Super Mom and Super Student . . . with a little help from my friend. Getting up at 6 am, going to the day care center with my daughter, then off to school, then back to the day care to work as an aide, and on and on and on. I gave up my show business pursuits and concentrated solely on my child and my school. The plight of single-parenthood. Using my state-subsidized income for household items and cheap Brand X cocaine. I deluded myself into thinking I was a wonderful Mom. I believed I was 'different'; my daughter would have a Mom home baking bread. If I showered her with everything she asked for. I

Turn it over

thought, she'd grow up loving and healthy. She'd never have to resort to doing 'lines' to get through the day.

How intrinsic the patterns of our parents are woven on our psyche. I thought I'd never be like my mother. Yet, being both a mother and a daughter has been painfully overwhelming for me; especially now as my bruised inner being unfolds through the Twelve Steps of this slow but ever so healing program called Cocaine Anonymous.

My home turned into a play-school room. Paintings by my daughter were plastered all over the apartment. She had become the center of my universe. My Mom had never hung anything I drew, she'd never read me bedtime stories. So I overcompensated. During the years I did cocaine, my daughter grew confused. One minute I'd let her do something, the next minute I wouldn't. I would get angry with her. When her father took his life behind this treacherous disease, my cocaine use escalated. Guilt. Fear. Remorse. Resentment. I was overwhelmed. How do I do this alone? I had done it alone most of the time, but now he was really gone. Mirrors were now being held up by my child. Mirroring my anger, my pain, her own 'ism' emerged. I continued to pamper her. I thought if I took her to sushi instead of McDonald's, if I did *her* career and put mine on hold, well, somehow it would all

tally in the end. What a myth. What a nightmare unravelled for the next two years.

I believe that our disease is hereditary. Like attracts like. We are not only what we eat but what eats us. It was no accident that in a cast of thousands on that set years before, I was drawn to the pensive, poetic alcoholic. That I played Alice Al-Anon until I, too, let my patient disease come out of the closet. Nor is it an accident that my child has an addictive personality. It is not my business to say she is one of us but I know I tried to break the pattern. I know I gave it my best shot. Without Cocaine Anonymous I know I would never have gotten honest with myself about the part I played in the

*I live alone today because
my sobriety and sanity cannot
be jeopardized by anyone.*

last fifteen years of my life. I know, too, one unalterable fact about me. About you. About all of us. We all arrived here whole, loving, trusting. For those of us who had addictive/alcoholic parents as role models there was no way we could become the parents we never had. What I've learned these last three years and three months is that one day at a time I get to change. The woman God wanted me to be as opposed to who I thought I had to be, needed to be, is evolving. I have a strong program that consists of

God, me and the 12 and 12. Cocaine not only aged me it preserved me, kept me far away from my true self. Far away from God. Far away from inner peace. I love Cocaine Anonymous. I really don't believe I'd be sober if I hadn't gone to those early Cocaine Anonymous meetings at St. Johns, and the Tuesday and Thursday noon meetings at Kauffman & Broad.

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FRESH AIR!

Fresh air! What a feeling to smell it. You see, I'd been in a jail cell for a few days. But it was more than that. I knew now that I did not have to do coke, anymore. No one could ever have thought this could happen to me. Especially me. What a nightmare!

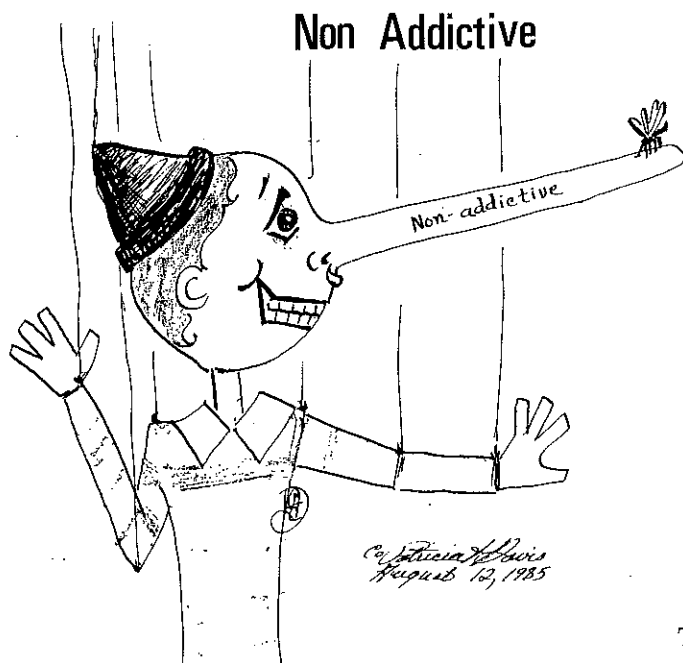
It seemed so innocent at first. A few lines now and then. All-nighters after awhile. Then full-blown addiction. No need for war stories here, though. The lying, cheating and stealing. That's all part of it. What's important is the turnaround. Or should I say the ability to begin turning around my life. We've all lost things because of coke. Most importantly, self-respect! Without this I became totally unconcerned with the people in my life. No relationships, just hostages. No real friends, only "klingsons," people who hang around for the stash.

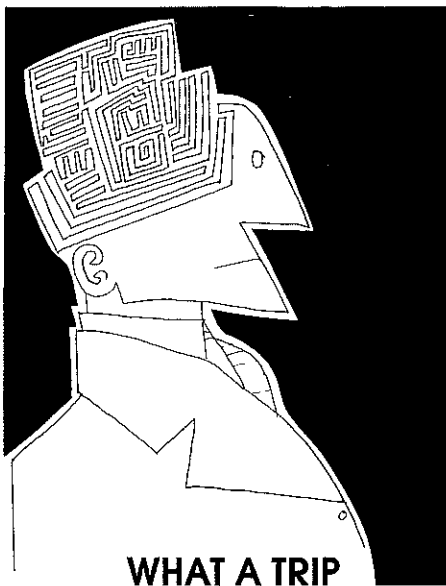
I had no intention of stopping. But somebody up there took control. My life was such a shambles that I did not care anymore. What's the use? How wrong I was!

Today, I am able to function in society. Going to CA meetings. Being of service, speaking at hospitals. It's beautiful to help others because they, in turn, help me. And that's the most important thing I've got. Me.

I'm not a loser, anymore. And none of you have to be, either!!!

J.P.S., Los Angeles





WHAT A TRIP

Christopher Columbus was a lot like us. When he embarked upon his journey, he had no idea where he was going. When he got there, he had no idea where he was. And when he got back, he had no idea where he'd been.

WHEN THE PARTY'S OVER

I read in *The Connection* that it is only when the addict has lost nearly everything he or she values that the addict can truly be helped.

I now understand to the fullest extent that to reach one's bottom is the loss of nearly everything of value to the individual . . . whether spiritual, moral or financial. Only at 15 months of sobriety do I now understand that my bottom was the sudden realization that the party was over. The thirty-year party had come crashing to an end with my marriage to an addict/dealer. I had no decent friends, I was unacceptable, indecisive. I vowed each day would be the last time. I never strayed far from the house. The days got worse and worse.

The house had broken windows, holes in the walls, doors smashed from our erratic behavior. Bills weren't paid, shady characters from all walks of life came and went, not to mention the Federal Express man always at my front door . . .

Is this any way for a bride of six months to live? Hell no, honey!

Richard L., already a member of CA,

Locked Up Continued from page 3

been a while since we've had an NA meeting, for instance, as the sponsor got sick and couldn't put it together last week and this week we're in the middle of a lock down of the entire institution while the guards search for a gun that was supposed to have been smuggled in here by a visitor. If there are any in here, I hope they find them quickly. The last thing we need is some crazy asshole running around here with a gun.

Wednesday and Thursday nights I work out in the visiting yard in the MAC shack warming up food for visitors. On Friday, I lead the services at the Jewish Temple. We have a Havdalah (closing of the Sabbath) service on Saturday, which I also lead and then, if I have any work to do on my own things, I do it there. I also watch a little television occasionally. Patti visits me on Sunday.

never gave up on me through this difficult period of my life. He called me on a regular basis. Even when I said I was on my way out (out in space, that is), he always called back.

Finally, I dragged myself to a therapist to tell him my marriage was on the rocks (pun). Imagine my astonishment when he told me I had a problem with drugs and alcohol.

Moi? You can't possibly be speaking of moi!!

Richard took me to my first CA meeting in January 1985. It has not been an easy task to nurture the bankruptcy of all my emotional beliefs and values, but here I am 15 months later.

I took direction, I attended meetings, entered into therapy, worked each and every day, moved out on Mr. Wonderful and became the Ex-Mrs. Wonderful.

When I first joined CA, I saw a young, pretty little vivacious blond girl around the meetings. How nice it would be to have a friend as genuine as her, I thought. Now I call this friend my sponsor.

Judy G., Los Angeles

We had a wonderful AA meeting about three weeks ago. I got to read Chapter Five, which is something I try to do every meeting I go to. It was a real up for me. One of the speakers was an old drunk from under the bridge, and he was terrific. Of course, *all* the speakers are terrific even when they're kind of boring.

Maybe I'm finally getting it, whatever "it" is.

Meetings in here are quite a bit different from the meetings I remember outside. It's extremely difficult to share your

This year has gone by quickly because I do my time in here the same way I approach my sobriety.

innermost feelings; the "peer pressure" is indescribable. I feel like I have to wear a mask everywhere I go, even in the meetings. I mustn't express any real emotions, it's a sign of weakness.

So, I write letters. That's about the only way I can really open myself up. It would be easy for me to stay loaded all the time in here, and that would kind of deaden some of the loneliness I feel a lot of the time. But, for whatever reason, that's the last thing I will ever do. My sobriety is too important to me.

Whenever I start to feel down I say a prayer I learned at religious services here. . .

*Birth is a beginning
Death a destination
And Life is but a journey. . .*

I have learned to make my journey meaningful. And I pray that upon my release I will be able to help others, that in some small way I will be able to reciprocate all that has been given so unselfishly to me.

Harvey G., Chino

Editor's Note For all of you who would like to write the author of this piece, address all correspondence to Harvey G., c/o The Editor, The Connection, Cocaine Anonymous, P.O. Box 1367, Culver City, CA 90239, and we will forward your letter. Harvey would love to hear from you.

GETTING HIGH ON H & I

And The Winner Is... Continued from page 6

One of the most rewarding parts of my recovery has been my participation in H & I.

My sponsor had told me you never turn down a CA request, so when I was asked to chair the Panel Board, I accepted. This was the only reason I had. My own motivations revolved around the power and praise, but God out-smarted me.

When a panel leader asked me to speak on his panel, I could hardly refuse since I myself had appointed him. The truth was, I was afraid. I felt I had nothing worthwhile to say.

I had been reluctant to share my story with others because I felt that I could not come up with either the funniest or the most meaningful pitch they had ever heard. Being a perfectionist, I would rather say nothing than say the wrong thing.

To my surprise, I found that the fifteen minutes allotted were hardly

enough time to say anything. No matter. All the patients wanted to hear was that it was possible to live a sober life, that there were other addicts like them who could share their experience, strength and hope.

It was a wonderful experience that first time and every other time since. But that was not the end.

I was at a meeting last night. I was feeling shaky. I had just shared some painful experiences with my sponsor. I was listening to the speaker when a man across the aisle stuck his hand out to shake mine. He said he had been a patient in a hospital where I shared on a panel some four months before and still remembered something I had said. It had helped his sobriety.

Regardless of my motives or fears, there was my proof that my actions had helped another addict. That helped *me* stay sober last night.

Bernard S., Los Angeles

One day at a time, a life of sobriety has changed my goals and found me less a show-off, less provocative and more and more grateful that God is in charge and not me. The road gets narrower, but it's worth the trudge. It is a selfish journey but selfish in a positive way.

I live alone today because my sobriety and sanity cannot be jeopardized by anyone. No matter how significant the other is to me, my sobriety comes first. My door and my heart are open, but my mind is closing each day a little bit more to its relentless need to keep me looking into mirrors, telling lies, dancing in the past. Life is meant to live, not just survive.

No matter what the name, the address, the color of the skin, all of us who sit in these smoke-filled rooms night after day after night . . . hugging, laughing, crying . . . sharing comes from the same home and . . . the winner is . . . us.

Joanna F., Los Angeles

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