

The Messenger

The Hand of NA Was There!

By George S.

I remember thinking “I really have to do this, in fact, if I don’t do this I’ll die. I really need to get a sponsor to help me! I know I am a piece of human debris. God, I hope nobody asks me to talk. I hate the fact that I stutter. I am finally ready to work this program though! God, if you are there, please help me!”

That is what I was thinking, right before that uncomfortable moment when a guy came over and sat down next to me, put his hand out, and said, “Hi! I am Greg and I’m an addict!” He didn’t flinch, he didn’t yell, he just kept his hand out, waiting for me to shake it. Then he said, “Normally, you would have shaken my hand by now and responded with your name, but that’s OK! We’re not here to find out who you are, we’re here to help addicts who want to get clean! Do you want to get clean?” It seemed like a million years went by between the time he asked me that question and when I finally answered.

I was born into a small Hispanic citrus-farming community. My parents had come through the Great Depression in the United States and believed in hard work and self-sufficiency. By the time I was 9 years old I got paid to run through the orange groves with fire and light the smudge pots when the temperature threatened to freeze the crops. I also had a paper route which paid me handsomely because I would exaggerate my hardships when it was time to collect the subscriptions and receive larger tips. By the time I was 10 years old I had parlayed my earnings into a new bike and believed I was on my way to becoming rich. I was an A student, had a photographic memory and was convinced that with my ability to speak Spanish and English I was going to do much better than the adults I was in contact with.

Testing in first grade had shown that I was “gifted.” This “gift” was really causing me hardship because I was not able to turn off my brain! I would go see movies and remember everything in them, watch television and remember everything I saw, I would be given school assignments, read the material, and not be able to forget it, even if I wanted to. One day in my fourth-grade class, we were told that we could take tests with parental approval, which would allow those who did well the opportunity to skip a grade and get closer to graduation. I decided to forge my dad’s signature and take those tests. When the principal called a meeting with my parents the fact that I had passed all the tests was nothing compared to the trouble I was in for having forged my dad’s signature!

At the age of 11, I stumbled upon what I thought was a miracle. That was the day that I was introduced to alcohol. It instantly and unexpectedly solved all my problems! This was the greatest development in my life to date and I now planned to employ this wonderful elixir so as to be like other kids I saw enjoying life. Alcohol provided me the ability to watch things without remembering everything, to listen without recall, and to sleep without overthinking, but soon I needed something more!

By the time I was 12 years old I began smoking dope. Now this was my new heaven on Earth! The feeling I had after having smoked a joint was ten times better than I felt after drinking. I wanted more! And so began my journey of addiction in which there is never enough. I maintained straight A’s in school, but my after-school antics began to draw attention. When I introduced my friends to the wonders of alcohol and drugs it did not seem to do the same for them as it did for me. In fact, some of my friends could not handle getting wasted at all and got sick, and then told their parents that I had talked them into drinking and doing drugs!

My parents were divorced by this time and rather than face their wrath I went and lived in the garage of my friend John B. His mom was cool and she was an attorney! When the police came by, she spoke to them and they never came back! Within a short time, I was in trouble with the police. My life began to fall apart and I was blaming everything but my drug use for my problems. By the time I was 15 I had tested out of high school, graduated from Juvenile Hall to the Youth Authority (prison for kids), got placed in a group home, and was declared a ward of the state.

At the group home I got clean for about four months and with the counselor’s help was able to get emancipated and have my juvenile records sealed. I then took the ACT and SAT tests and applied to some colleges. I was accepted at Harvard University with the caveat that I attend a semester at a junior college to help emotionally prepare me for the university. A new life of freedom was now mine!

But with active addiction there is no freedom. At age 16 I had already been sent to 12 step meetings but thought the program was more like a smorgasbord in which I could pick and choose what steps I wanted to work and leave the rest alone. I thought NA was for people who could not handle partying. Although the NA Basic Text had not been printed yet, I doubt I would have read it because I still had all the answers!

I thought that NA members who talked about a Higher Power were ridiculous. From my childhood religious imprint, I already knew I was going to Hell and every time I had been “saved” before I ended up loaded again, so what was the point?

The Hand of NA Was There! (cont.)

At 16, I was busted a third time for DUI and possession. I was brought before a judge who reminded me that even though I was 16, that by being emancipated, I was now being tried as an adult. My appointed legal counsel said that he felt I would be sentenced to two to three years. From my “Scared Straight” experience I knew I did not want that! Counsel also mentioned that the judge was a veteran and that if I agreed to go into the military, I would probably be able to get all the charges dropped. The lawyer told me that once I was in the military that I could party as much as I wanted if I did my job! I said, “Hell yes. Sign me up!” The judge agreed to drop all charges pending my enlistment.

At 17, I was in the Navy and found out quickly that my disease follows me wherever I go. The military gave my disease of addiction everything it needed to annihilate myself. By the time I was 18 I had liver and kidney problems, pancreatitis, chronic dehydration, and had begun stuttering. I was also losing control over my bowels. But my plan to address this was not to quit using; just buy more underwear! I began to be ostracized out of the worst places on Earth. Long gone was any semblance of dignity. I had been through two rehabilitation programs and had been put into a straitjacket because of my insanity. Nothing illustrates insanity like coming out of a blackout in a straitjacket, strapped to a gurney in a hospital, having a nurse wiping my rear end, and truly believing that this nurse might want to go out with me. That is the level of delusion my addiction brought me to.

Then came what seemed like an oasis in a desert. The Red Cross notified my Command that my grandfather was dying and that it would be advisable that I come home, if possible. My Command agreed and I was soon on a military flight home. Back then, they did not check bags on military flights for drugs! When I landed, I found the nearest seedy bar and, even though I was underage, I was served because I was in uniform. Soon I was partying and the drugs I had brought from overseas in my sea bag was a real hit with the people I was partying with. After a few hours I was dropped off at my dad’s house. I knew my family would be at the hospital with my grandfather and that is when I decided to “borrow” my dad’s sports car.

The accident report had me going over 80 miles an hour down a residential street and hitting a lady who was turning into her driveway. I was trying to pass her when she turned and—boom. When I came to a stop and realized I was OK, I got out of the totaled car, checked on the lady, and then took off running. I ran until I reached a diner and used the pay phone to report the car I had “borrowed”, stolen. When the police arrived; I explained how I just arrived home and was on my way to see my dying grandfather and while I had stopped to eat, the car had been stolen. The officers listened carefully and then two more officers showed up.

While we were talking the car that I had totaled came into the driveway on the back of a tow truck and they asked me, “Is that the car?” I acted horrified and said, “Yes, that’s it, did the guy who stole it make it out alive?” The officer then turned to me and said, “I think so! Son, your story was pretty convincing but the glass on your pant legs tell a different one, you are under arrest!” I immediately hit the officer as hard as I could. This brought all the other officers to engage with me.... Obviously, I do not make good decisions when I am loaded!

That night ended with two felonies and eight misdemeanors. My life was over! After the police chief, a family friend, made a call to my Commanding Officer, I was arraigned the next morning, escorted back to the military base, and put on a flight back to my Command. By the time I landed I had not used anything in 20 hours and began to go into withdrawals. I was taken to the hospital and was touch and go for a few weeks. Then I was sent back to my Command.

When I arrived, the Commanding Officer and the Command Drug and Alcohol Coordinator advised me of what they saw as my future:

1) I would be tried and convicted in a civilian court for the charges against me. **2)** I would probably serve 15 years in a civilian prison and then be released. **3)** I would then be re-arrested and sent to Fort Leavenworth where I would be charged with having been Absent Without Leave (AWOL) during that 15 years and would then probably be sentenced to another 10 years in Federal prison. **4)** I was advised that a No-Contact Order had been issued by my family. **5)** I would receive a dishonorable discharge after I had served all my sentences.

My Commanding Officer then made it clear that I was not welcome in our unit as my conduct was unbecoming and had tarnished the good reputation of our Search, Salvage and Rescue Team. He then asked me, “is there anything else I wanted to say?” I looked him in the eyes and stuttered, “Yes, Sir. I know that I am an addict. If I can be sent to a rehabilitation center in between now and my sentencing I would appreciate it.” The captain was stunned and asked, “Is this another stunt?” “No.” I told him, “I have surrendered many times before, Sir, but this time I am defeated. No more stunts, no more ideas, no more plans. I just need to work the 12 steps and get my disease into remission. It does not matter that I am going to prison. I need help.”

As I write this, I now have over 40 years of continuous clean time. It feels great to be able to tell you the rest of the story and how a Power greater than me took that piece of human debris that I had become and through NA, showed me how to live! I was sent to the Navy Rehabilitation Drydock and that is where I began to see the People, Information, and Events—what I call PIE—happening every day in my life. That is how God has worked in my life ever since! I had counselors who helped me work the steps and go to meetings. One of the counselor’s was Pete P. who had been instrumental in bringing Narcotics Anonymous to Hawaii and knew Jimmy K.

So, there I was at an NA Meeting in December, 1981, and I needed to get a Sponsor. That is when Greg walked up, extended his hand, and said, “Hi! I am Greg and I’m an addict!... Do you want to get clean?” And after those million mental miles I said, “Yes. My name is George and I am an addict too. I need a Sponsor to help me work the 12 steps.”

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He assured me that NA is a way of life; not a way of worship! And that even though I was still in a rehabilitation facility that I would have to commit to call him every day. No excuses. He said that every time I had wanted to use I had found a way, and so I needed to find a way to call him every day.

In January 1982, with polished shoes and a freshly pressed uniform, and letter from my sponsor, I went before the judge for sentencing. The judge asked me after reading the charges, and the few words by my appointed attorney, if there was anything I wanted to say for myself. I stuttered out, "Your Honor, I am an addict and I must work the 12 steps for the rest of my life. Regardless of the outcome today, I believe that all of this will be made to work for the good by a Power greater than me." The Judge then asked me, "Do you feel that being in prison will help you work these steps?" I said, "Your Honor, whether in prison or outside, for me to stay clean I will have to work the 12 steps, work with a sponsor, and help other addicts so that I never again destroy everything in my life.

After what seemed like an eternity; the judge decided to suspend my sentence for five years and if I had so much as a parking ticket, he assured me that I would come back to his court and face the full force of the law. He then fined me and slammed the gavel down. My appointed attorney, who had said he was going to try to get me off with only having to serve 10 years, staggered to his feet, and said, "Congratulations, you are the luckiest man alive today!"

I went back to my Command and was told that although the judge had given me a break, I was not going to be given a break for tarnishing the reputation of our team. For the first year I was clean, not only did I work the twelve steps, I cleaned the ship's bilges, stacked and re-stacked 5-gallon cans, busted rust, and had to provide weekly updates from my civilian sponsor as to my level of dedication to the program of recovery. After three years I became the Command Substance Abuse Coordinator. I advanced in my rank and left the military with an honorable discharge. By doing college course work I applied and was accepted at a university in southern California.

I got a new sponsor when I moved to California. The importance of looking someone in the eye had been impressed upon me. My new sponsor told me that nobody was going to give me a break but a Power greater than me was going to break every obstacle that stood in the way of me doing what I needed to do to stay clean. My first sponsor, Greg, died of an overdose. He was proof that no matter how well you talk the NA program, or how long you have been clean, if you are not continuing to work it, the disease of addiction will return and you will get loaded again. My disease of addiction only respects what I do today to keep it in remission!

Over my first 10 years of clean time I graduated from the university, rejoined the military, participated in Operation Desert Storm/Desert Shield, and continued to see a Power greater than me do for me what I could not do for myself. I made amends to those I had harmed and restitution to those I owed. I found out that the 12 steps and the spiritual awakening I had as a result of working them was sufficient for living life on life's terms. I learned to seek solutions rather than get loaded when I am afraid or fearful.

At 19 years clean, through a series of unexplainable events, or P.I.E., I was nominated and confirmed as a member of the Police Commission of the Police Department that had arrested me all those years ago. In fact, I served on the Commission with the former police chief who had called my Command that night after I was arrested for assaulting those police officers! During the years that I was blessed to be the Police Commissioner, I became more humbled by the amazing outcome of what NA and my Higher Power have done in my life.

I ended up having an extraordinary relationship with the judge who had suspended my sentence and had real compassion for people who got arrested because they were suffering from the disease of addiction, just like I had. I learned firsthand that I could not help people who will not help themselves and cannot work anyone else's program accept my own!

Every morning when I wake up my disease of addiction has recalibrated my brain to be selfish and self-centered. I also know that my disease of addiction does not care how long it has been since I last used nor is it impressed with any of my accomplishments. I am so grateful that I have the NA 12-step prosthetic that I can put on every morning, that works in combating my disease of addiction. As a result, I can share with another addict how they can create their own NA 12-step prosthetic to live life clean on a daily basis.

Being in service is of value today because of the spiritual awakening I have had as a result of working all 12 steps. As a result of service in NA, I meet addicts who want to get and stay clean. When I extend my hand toward an addict who is still suffering, I know I am bringing hope. I love asking the question, "Do you want to get clean?" The Hand of NA was there for me and if I want to stay clean I need to ensure the hand of NA will continue to be there for the next suffering addict. I still repeat the third step prayer daily:

"Take my will and my life, guide me in my recovery, and show me how to live!"



Talent show & Art exhibit.
Awesome -
Artisans.
 at the Hub,
 1408 W. State St.


THIS IS OUR 10TH ANNUAL EVENT, AND IT GETS BIGGER AND BETTER EVERY YEAR.

First, how has your experience been serving as Master of Ceremonies for Awesome Artisans?

Many years ago, I was involved in a group conscience 'brainstorm' with members of my home group and many serving on the activities committee. We came up with the idea of a talent show, and the intent behind this was to highlight the hidden talents so many of us have. The reason it's in January is that so many of us have that typical urge to set new year's resolutions; "I'm going to exercise more", "I'm going to pick up the guitar again", "I'm going to sing more", "I'm going to get back into photography", "I'm going to write my novel." One of the personality tests I had many years ago identified me as an "activator", and I exhibit "connectedness" which means if you tell me you want to do something, I'm going to "activate" you by encouraging, promoting, planning and basically telling you to stop talking about what you want to do and actually get out there and do it. My "connectedness" shows up by telling you who else has similar interests, or a place you can practice/display your art, or a source of inspiration. Awesome Artisans is a manifestation of a desire to activate and connect people, especially addicts with the vast power and creative energy we all have. As the MC of this event, I'm merely a witness to the Awesomeness that is NA.

Second, what are you expecting from the regular performers and artisans at this year's event?

I really can't think of this event with an expectation because we all know where expectations lead us. I will say that each year I'm inspired, each year I'm connected and activated, and each year the spontaneity, love and support shown by addicts for each other is overwhelming and I'm left with a huge sense of gratitude. I'll go out on a limb and say that any expectations I have will be wildly exceeded by this event.

Third, what is your feeling empowering so many recovering addicts in the arts in the Treasure Valley Narcotics Anonymous Area?

Without trying to sound like some guru philosopher... I think we all have a need to create. Women have the power of creating a life and giving birth. Gender norms say they create a family and a home or community, men are generally relegated to creating products, wealth, or economic growth. At the end of the day, we all have the power to create something, we all have something that we are uniquely qualified to contribute to the world around us. It can be a word, a sound, an image, a shape, a texture, or an emotion. Addiction was once defined to me as a disease of loneliness and despair. Our ability to create and connect is the treatment for that loneliness and despair.

My last question is about your own music and recovery: How has your own artistic involvement with music enhanced your recovery in NA?

I started playing violin when I was 8, I started using when I was 14. By the time I was in full-blown addiction, I didn't believe I could be creative, funny, interesting, productive, happy, loving, anything, without being on drugs. I lived with that shadow for many years. Thanks to NA, staying clean, not using, and finding a new way to live (clean), I've found a new way to think about myself. I'm not the most amazing musician on the planet, but I know I have something to contribute. My ideas are valid, my creativity is valid, my ability to connect people through music is valid, my ability to encourage others to share their voice and vision is valid. I am enough as a person, and I am no more, no less than anyone else in NA. I am anonymous.

Thanks for allowing me to be of service.

Oliver T

ADMISSION IS FREE, WE WILL BE PASSING THE BASKET TO OBSERVE THE 7TH TRADITION.

Saturday, January 27th 2024
 7:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Artist's, CRAFTSMEN, musicians, POETS, dancers, JUGGLERS, Photographers, Singers, and more.

IF YOU HAVE A TALENT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHOWCASE OR DISPLAY,
 Contact Tim C. 371-5327

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