

A NEW LEAF

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The Last Bag To Sobriety by Richard D.

I had attended the Thanksgiving Meeting-A-Thon in Mar Vista at St. Bedes Church for my Thanksgiving Day. During one of the meetings I had raised my hand to share and was called upon. I talked about my using times and some sobriety things and acknowledged the presence of my "Eskimo" who was present in the room for that meeting. When the meeting was over I was approached by my Eskimo and heard her say, "You forgot to talk about the last bag story"! Well, I told her that I am now 4 1/12 years clean and sober and said I just don't think about "those" using times anymore and she replied that it was a critical turning point in my sobriety for me and I shouldn't forget it. Well, for several days I thought about why I needed to remember the moment I went from a 30-year-using Marijuana addict to making a decision to turn my life over to a bunch of strangers (ex-drug-addicts) who had some words I was unfamiliar with and a program I knew nothing about. He's what I learned about day one 4 1/2 years later.

The following Sunday I

went to another of my regular meetings and was planning to just listen to others speak (you know, "suit up, show up & shut up"). After one fellow took a newcomer chip and talked about 26 years of abusing Marijuana and how scared he was for his life and how glad he was he had found MA, I was struck with the familiarity of the "last bag". Then another took a one-year chip and again I was reminded of my own hard work and how important that one-year chip was to me and again I was remembering the "last bag". As the meeting went on and several people shared I knew then that I had to raise my hand and share about the "last bag" because although at the time 4 1/2 years ago it was so important to my program, I now know how important it is to share with other addicts, especially the "new comer".

Here's my story about the "last bag". I came to MA in March of 1996 after having tried sobriety through a hospital program and failed and personal attempts and failed. I then took advantage of my work's medical insurance and went to Kaiser Hospitals Out-

patient Program. After only one session a stranger came up to me and we began to talk. He asked me if I was also going to the Tuesday Mar Vista meeting after this one. I told him I didn't know anything about it. He offered me directions and I followed him to my first MA meeting. It was comfortable; I heard things I liked hearing, the people seemed pretty cool and I was OK with it for now. At the end of the meeting I ended up meeting my first Eskimo who did all the things addicts with time do for the newcomers. By the third or fourth week in the program, I met another person who actually became my sec-

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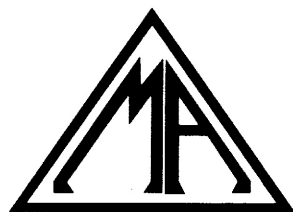
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The purpose of A New Leaf is to carry the message of recovery from marijuana addiction. It is through the written experiences of recovering addicts and their stories that we may find experience, strength and hope.

Articles submitted should reflect recovery, unity, and service. The articles contained in A New Leaf are the sole opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Marijuana Anonymous as a whole.

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ond Eskimo. Keep in mind one thing, when I came through those proverbial doors for the first time I was desperate and beaten from long-term stupidity, Marijuana abuse of the worst kind. When my two Eskimos heard my beginner's shares and heard my story they 12-stepped me several times in several ways. "If you want to get and stay clean and sober you have to get rid of all your paraphernalia and pot in order to make a real commitment to yourself and the program". Yeah! Right! OK! I was willing to toss my pipes (several) out of the car window as I was driving around town, beginning to think of my powerlessness over Marijuana and my desperation to get and stay clean and sober after 30 years. I could toss the Bambús, the Zig Zags, the bong, the roach clip holders and other stuff out the window and make a commitment to getting clean and sober.

When I returned to one of my now-regular meetings and met with my Eskimos (or they met with me) and was asked if I had gotten rid of all of my "stuff" I said yes. I felt good about that. All that money out the window, all in the name of getting clean and sober. Then one of my Eskimos asked me did you also get rid of that "bag" of pot I had just scored? Ah...oh! Well, you see, I, well, I got rid of all my paraphernalia so I don't have any way to get

high, besides, I just want to hold on to it a little bit longer. You know, just to smell once in awhile, you know? Then came my second 12th step. All the reasons why I had to let go absolutely; why I couldn't hold on to my old ways and ideas; why I had to get rid of everything including the "last bag" of pot. I heard what they were saying but they didn't understand what that "last bag" really meant to me. It was the kindest of the green, I had spent a lot of money on it and I just wanted to hold on to it a little bit longer. They just didn't understand. Yeah, right. I found out later through their own shares that their addictions were equal to mine or even greater than mine but they just didn't understand. So, after one of the regular meetings I was asked to do one of two things. Either to go home and get rid of the "last bag" or to give it to some person who will give me the money for it and he will empty it or destroy it somewhere, somehow. Yeah, right. I'm going to give a total stranger my "last bag" of dope to destroy for me. HA! So that night when I got home after the meeting, teary-eyed and angry with my Eskimos that I had to destroy my "last great bag" of pot, I went into the bathroom, raised the lid to the toilet and began a ceremony dedicated to that "last bag". I would pick out one kind bud and drop and

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concluded

flush. One tear. Then another bud, flush. And another and another and another. And then it was all gone and I was so totally spent from that experience I knew right then and there that my smoking and using and abusing days were over for good. Today I have over 4 and ½ years of sobriety and there are some lessons of that time I would like to share with you.

First, to my good friend David who took me from Kaiser to MA and always told me that I would get what he could not become true. Today, I have only his memory because he could not get rid of the "last bag". He could not give up the old ways and ideas of the past. For him and countless others I value my sobriety. **Second**, This program is not easy but it is simple for those that want a better way of life for themselves and their families. **Third**, I have learned that if you put your hand out in MA and ask for help, you will be amazed and how many hands will reach back and say, grab hold, everything will be ok. I do truly owe my life to MA and my two Eskimos without them reaching out to me and saying, "grab hold, it will be ok" I would still be experimenting for you and would probably die thinking I too could not "get it", either. Here's to my Eskimos, thank you and God bless.



Random Thoughts

Do you have random thoughts that bounce around your head for days or weeks before they slowly condense into coherent ideas? I do, and several things that I have heard in meetings have been resonating in my head recently. Most likely because I have had similar thoughts or feelings as the people sharing.

How many people reading this can relate to the concept of NOT being an addict? I certainly can. I can't tell you how many times I have thought that maybe, just maybe I am not an addict. That maybe I could just have one joint, one drink, one something or even better, "someday be able to drink like a gentleman." The thought is always there, lurking, and then I heard someone share the answer to that question. They shared that "their sponsor told them that if you are thinking about using, if you think you just might not be an addict, then you are one." Why would 'thinking about using' make you an addict? Because Normal people don't think about using! They do something or they don't, it is nothing to them. It is like opening or closing a door to them, no big deal. For us the door is either open ALL THE TIME, or it is shut, so if you think you might be an addict, you are one.

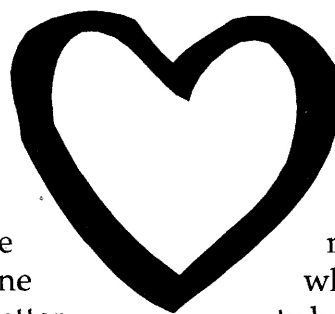
Which ties right into something else, I have heard a

no name supplied

lot in meetings lately. That is the concept that this disease, this sickness, this particular mental twist we have is the ONLY disease that tells you that you don't have a disease, that you aren't sick. Can you imagine some one whose body is racked with cancer wondering if they are sick or not? Cancer can go into remission, which is what we do to our disease when we are actively participating in our recovery. But cancer isn't telling you, doesn't have little voices in your head telling you, "Ah, don't worry, you aren't sick, you don't need to do Chemo, or whatever you are doing to keep the cancer at bay."

Whereas the disease of addiction is ALWAYS telling you, "They can use, they can drink, why can't you? See those people at the next table? They got up and left a half bottle of wine, why don't you go over and take it." What's worse is, you don't even like wine. That is what this disease does to me, which is why I go to meetings. So I can hear voices other than those in my head, so I can hear the things I need to hear to keep this disease in remission.

However, it is not all-bad. Just as this is the only disease that tells us we aren't sick, I have also heard in meetings that this is the only disease that makes you a better person. A better person IF you follow the



Suggested Steps and Traditions for recovery. I mean, what other disease rehab gives you tools to cope with life on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour basis? What other disease gives you the ability to improve your life dramatically, to take your life beyond your wildest dreams? What other disease rehab gives you the ability to help other people? And if that isn't enough, do you know of any other disease rehab that **REQUIRES** you to give your recovery away to keep it? None that I can think of. And I know that from personal experience. I was doing OK in my recovery, I was struggling at times but I had no desire to use, not even when one of my sponsees

went back out. However, once I made the conscious decision to become active in the program, to start participating in my recovery, people came up to me and asked me to be their sponsor. They came up to me and said, "I want what you have." Somehow it works; the more I work with fellow addicts, the more time I have to do what I feel I need to do. The more I work with addicts, the more secure I feel in my recovery. The more I give, the more I get. That is a miracle! That is this program in action, and most of I have to do is go to meetings, listen and let the random thoughts slowly condense into coherent ideas of recovery.

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★ **Celebrating their Sober Birthdays!** ★

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Angie	1/?/00	1 Year!

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Scott Mc.	2/23/94	7 Years

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Mike B.	2/18/94	7 Years
Victoria C.	2/5/95	6 Years

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