



A NEW LEAF

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Changes In Outlook; Two Decades In Recovery

by Van W., District 6

I have been asked to write an article about change. There are three things about my reaction to this request that are different than I would have experienced when I first came to the program.

First, I only took direction when it served my purposes. Minimizing pain had always been a big motive. So, I obeyed cops, and was at least passive aggressive with all other authorities.

Second, I had nothing real to say on recovery; but thought I knew it all. I probably would have written a long treatise on the wonders and freedom found in change (a change in you, that is...).

Third, I would have gone on and on about my experience without identifying one real feeling.

My first sponsor told me that all I had to change was everything. I was angry, but did nothing. I stuffed it.

On my own, I've been going through changes all my life. I was, and am, a freedom freak. A lot of my drug use (including the liquid part) was to put me through changes. I sought it, bought it, desired it, loved it. Three times I was so enamored of change that I tried suicide. There are few things more humiliating than failing at failing. No matter how "up" I got, my self-destructive side could always bring it "down". Even psychedelic side-ways, and kaleidoscopic soul tripping did not work.

My second sponsor went to work on my remorse, self-pity, and escapism. "If it is not practical it is not spiritual". "Deal with the real, as it is, inside and out, in the raw". That put me through

changes. I felt frustrated, angry, sad, guilty, fearful, and lonely. Then the results started arriving. I started to experience real peace, contentment, appreciation, serenity, and satisfaction.

"I'm still stubborn, unwilling, reluctant. But it takes less to get me turned around today. I'm more open to what is good for me, not just good to me."

I've learned, some valuable lessons. Experience can be a teacher. (The tuition is very expensive.) Life is not a dress rehearsal. I don't believe I'm just here to learn. For me, we humans are the only creatures that, by nature, have to participate in our own growth. Our greatest growth is mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. Our spiritual

principles, which I'm challenged to practice all day, everyday, are eternal and infinite.

Today, for me, it is not about change. Re-arranging furniture, doing (instead of hiding) the laundry, replacing light bulbs promptly... those are changes. For me, it's about growth.

It is also about transcendence and transformation. I have believed this at some level for years. (I even have a belt buckle that says so.) That is why Steps 2,7,11 and 12 are written as they are.

I'll never be better than anyone (...and no less). I can be open to the daily exercise of faith versus fear. I can be really loving when my expectations of others are set aside. I can "feel" with you in empathy when I own my

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Freedom, Liberty, Equality, Justice

by Brett, District 6

Freedom is an ideal that I have personally been chasing all of my life. The first time I saw the words of the Declaration of Independence was on the wall of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, DC and I memorized them. All through school I filled my head with American history and political theory and always I was deeply moved by the ideal expression of freedom and independence. At the same time I was frustrated by what seemed to be a lack of these ideals in today's America.

In 1988, I was privileged to participate in perestroika. I toured with a choir from my university to Eastern Europe as part of a cultural exchange arranged by our embassies. We toured

around Romania, performing in several cities, and I met some of the people I only knew as communists. I was raised during the height of the Cold War, thinking that I'd rather be dead than red. However, I learned something while I was there. Those people are really cool. Some of them are beautiful and kind. One in particular, I fell in love with. Somehow, I always knew I'd be back.

On December 23, 1989, I came home from a long day of skiing at Mammoth and turned on the TV. There was revolution in Romania. CNN kept showing video coverage of a fire-fight in the streets of Bucharest. I recognized the location immediately as the Hotel Bucharesti, where our choir had stayed

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A NEW LEAF

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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Nothing To Fear But Fear Itself

by Tom S., District 6

Each month I get a little note with my subscription copy of *A NEW LEAF* asking me when I'm going to write an article. I'd like to think it's because of my wealth of knowledge or my great wit, but I'm sure it's just because they need articles.

The reason I haven't written an article is fear. Fear of my writing skills, vocabulary, spelling, and writing an article with nothing of value to say. Thanks to a computer with "spell check" I now have one less fear.

That's what my article will be on, " F E A R " . FEEAAARRR!!! My life is ruled by FEAR. There are many things in life I do not do because of fear: going

to new places, making phone calls to new people, starting a new business. These are just a few examples. I could go on, but it would add many pages to *A NEW LEAF*.

Why do I have these fears? THAT is the \$64,000 question (an old TV game show)! I know everybody has fears, but for most people this does not prevent them from doing the things they need to do, or the things they want to do.

I have gotten better over my 5 plus years of sobriety. There are many things I can do now that I simply couldn't do when I was using. Learning how to dance is just one of them. Some of the things I do now are still real scary, but you know what? I get through them. It doesn't always come out the way I want, and it doesn't always come out good, but I ALWAYS survive it! I know for sure that if I were still using drugs, I would be too fearful to do anything, except go out and get more drugs.

Why do I think I have these fears? Self doubt? Sure. Low self-esteem? I'm sure that's part of it. I feel these are part of the symptoms. Curing these will surely help, but it will not take care of the whole problem. I believe it stems from a lack of faith. This is something I've had a problem with since a very young age. I used to go to church every Sunday, but by


the time I was 10 or 11 years old I started having real doubts. I thought I was seeing hypocrisy in the church I went to. By the time I was 17, I had lost all my faith in religion. But I still had a belief in GOD, though this was not enough to sustain my faith.

Since coming into MA, my spirituality has grown, but it is still something I struggle with every day. I feel that when I can have complete faith that my Higher Power will take care of me (no matter what) I will lose my excess fear. It is at

"I know for sure that if I were still using drugs, I would be too fearful to do anything, except go out and get more drugs."


that time I will be able to do the things that I am still too fearful to do now.

I will continue to work on improving my faith in my Higher Power. In this I have no choice, because I need to continually grow and improve myself. Hopefully one day, with lots of hard work, I will have the faith I need to end the worst of my fears so I can live the life I want to live: To have enough faith that I do not have to be afraid!

As usual, now that this article is done, I have doubts - but I have NO fear. THANK YOU GOD for getting me through this. 

Your Article Here! (Why Isn't It?)

Just a friendly reminder. *A New Leaf* has been a world wide publication for quite some time now, and there are still entire districts we have never heard from! Please give your articles to your Bureau Chief or you can send them directly to us at our Post Office Box or Fax line.

If your thinking that you've read this article before (or one awfully similar)... you're right! So if you don't want to keep on reading it, how about an article, essay, or column from YOU on the joys and freedom of recovery. 

Freedom, Liberty, Justice

Continued from Page 1

a year and a half before. Those people that I had met were rising up to overcome 27 years of the most hideous oppression any of us could even imagine. I was profoundly moved.


In May of 1990 I returned to Eastern Europe to witness the process of freedom unfold. I spent some time in Romania and watched my friends vote in the first free elections of their lives (coincidentally, that first free election was on my birthday). They hold America on such a pedestal. They quoted from the Declaration of Independence, wanting what we have in America. They thought it was McDonalds; all the things that we have in our democracy. This really frustrated me, because no one seemed to know what freedom was. It struck me that freedom is only a word, when the people don't know what it means.

From Romania, after a brief visit to the Amsterdam coffee houses, I went to Berlin. Deep in Eastern Germany, this little island of the free world surrounded by a wall. That wall had come down in November (6 months earlier) but it was still there. I met a guy with some hash in the Berlin Zoo (the train station) and we immediately went to the wall. We walked some distance along the wall admiring the creative graffiti that covered it. We came around a corner and what I saw drove me to my knees. There was a pile of rubble where the wall used to be. I spent the next 3 days renting a hammer and chisel from a local East German guy (a quick learner on capitalism), beating the shit out of the wall. This, to date, was the privilege of my life.

I always found my freedom on the road. I spent weeks at a time exploring the western United States from a Chevy pickup. I put 230,000 miles on it in two and a half years of exploring. When I was on the road, I could go anywhere, do anything I wanted, and all I wanted was to see more new places. West of Oklahoma, I've got America pretty well covered. I ran out

of new frontiers.

Needless to say, I have been pursuing the ideal of Freedom for a good many years. At a recent MA meeting I learned something that has kept me awake for a week. Freedom is not something that can be provided by a government or a society. It is not something you vote for, or demonstrate for, or kill to protect. It is something that each individual finds within oneself. Freedom from oppression and control happens inside me. In this case, it is freedom from addiction and obsession. What a revelation!! In freeing myself from my addiction and uniting with a higher power, I am discovering a new freedom I never even knew existed. It is in the hearts of man (and woman).


Freedom, true freedom, is in the Twelve Steps. 

Changes

Continued from Page 1

own feelings. I can facilitate with compassion when we share and unburden each other. Or, I can become an egotistic control freak when I don't stay close to the fellowship, the Steps, my sponsor, and spiritual principles.

It seems to me that my first reaction to novelty is regret. I'm still stubborn, unwilling, reluctant. But it takes less to get me turned around today. I'm more open to what is good for me, not just good to me. This transformation has been painful at times. I don't surrender gracefully. The pain of change often has to be less than the pain of staying as I am.

My disease is more subtle today, and progressively stronger and more devastating. But the growth and grace available are stronger. I can celebrate another day clean. 

Thought For The Month

"..... if we listen to the way that we speak to ourselves when we make mistakes, we may be able to hear whether or not we are nurturing or destroying ourselves and our self-esteem."

Marsha Sinetar

Congratulations to our members celebrating their sober birthdays!



Chris F.	Feb.??	7 Years
Jonathan R.	Feb.26	3 Years
Geoff F.	Apr.01	6 Years
Grady S.	Apr.01	4 Years
Bonnie V.	Apr.04	2 Years
Thomas "TV"	Apr.05	2 Years
Van W.	Apr.12	22 Years
Gwen G.	Apr.13	2 Years
Sammie F.	Apr.15	1 Year!
Joanne A.	Apr.21	5 Years
Brian K.	Apr.23	5 Years

Birthday Coming Up? Tell your Bureau Chief. Or, you can write, call, or fax *A NEW LEAF*. We're not psychic. We don't get this by osmosis!

On Learning How To Forgive

by: Anonymous, District 6

I am approaching nine months of sobriety after seventeen years of using. My using career spanned the years of my adolescence and early adulthood. My sobriety has caused me to be conscious, sometimes painfully so, of aspects of my personality and behavior that are underdeveloped because I turned to marijuana rather than confront difficult situations and the feelings that accompany them. This is, of course, no surprise. I have listened as many members have shared the numerous ways marijuana addiction interfered with their emotional, mental, and spiritual growth.

Resuming this growth is one of the purposes of our program. Yet when I came in, I had no idea that relating to people with my feelings in full force could be so awkward at times. My lack of certain personal skills has caused me to feel ashamed at times, but the Promises include "intuitively" knowing "how to handle situations which used to baffle us". The openness other members have exhibited when sharing about overcoming their stunted growth

has been invaluable in inspiring me to gather the willingness and courage to learn and grow. The acceptance and patience I have found in Marijuana Anonymous has allowed me to come to terms with my own humanness and foster a growth capacity for forgiveness.

Understanding and practicing forgiveness is the current focus of my recovery. There are times when I revert to my old behaviors of blame and condemnation when I feel hurt by the actions of another. My sponsor extends a great deal of compassion when I share the specifics of my growing pains, and she tells me it is expected that I will "fall on my face with old behaviors" during early recovery. Taking the Steps has brought me to the place where I can learn to relate to people in a new way and find solutions to the problems I never faced. This is fortunate, because for me, forgiveness is the solution to the destructive resentment that characterizes my disease. Thanks to MA. I am developing a "code" of "love and tolerance of others".

BULLETIN BOARD

DISTRICTS 1 & 2 - Campout! June 9th, 10th, and 11th at Big Basin in Santa Cruz. Call Thomas (510) 234-9232 for more information.

DISTRICT 6 - Friday night Northridge meeting needs permanent baby-sitter(s). Good way to do service and pick up some extra money. Transportation available if you live close. Contact Randy (818) 786-2065 for time, place, and compensation information.

DISTRICT 8 - Richard B. will be your New York Bureau Chief. To place notices of upcoming birthdays or events or to submit articles, please either contact him or write directly to A New Leaf. Welcome Richard, and thanks for your help Carl!

TRI-DISTRICT SOFTBALL GAME - between Districts 5, 6, & 7. Baseball strike got you down? We've got a solution! Tentatively being planned for the end of April. For information contact Todd E. (310) 281-9504.

DISTRICT 7 - WOMEN'S STAG MEETING? - Anyone interested in forming a Women's Stag Meeting on the Westside (Palms, Mar Vista, Culver City, etc.) please contact Betsy C. at (310) 838-4950

WORLDWIDE - For those who now prefer to be in sober cyberspace rather than spaced-out, some of our members have started corresponding via E-mail. For further information you can contact "Rowbear@AOL.com" (a him) or "Bunkybunk@AOL.com" (a her). Now that's New Age!

WOMEN'S RECOVERY RETREAT - June 16-18, in the Malibu area. Any women interested in attending, contact Stacey at (818)753-2880 for further information.

CONFERENCE !! - Districts 6 & 7. Have you signed up yet to be of service? We need members for transportation commitment and/or to lodge attendees in your home. Got a spare bed, couch or futon? It's a great way to feel "part of" and to help MA. This year's Conference will be in District 6 at Pierce College in Woodland Hills, one mile north of the 101 (Ventura Freeway).

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