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A NEW LEAF

A Publication of Marijuana Anonymous

Starting A Chapter

by Lee R., Delaware Valley, Pennsylvania

I started a chapter of MA because I wanted my recovery to involve people who were addicted to the same substance as me. I chose to follow a 12-Step program because quitting marijuana left a spiritual void in my life. Since the closest MA chapter was in New York City, some three hours away, it was necessary to start a chapter within a reasonable distance of where I lived. (Even an addict doesn't want to drive into New York City during Friday night rush hour!)

Finding a place to hold the meeting was easy to do. A couple of my old smoking buddies belonged to a church where AA meetings were already being held. The church elders approved the use of a room for MA meetings. We have a wonderful room and can come and go using our own key to the church.

The New York City group suggested that we get a telephone number with voice mail. The thinking was that the phone number could be independent of any particular person. When I first called the 800 number for MA World Services, I was impressed with all of the information that was recorded on the line. We currently have the directions to the church and the time of our meeting in our message.

After I got the starter kit from the World Services office, we were ready to announce the first meeting. We sent announcements to all newspapers and cable tv stations in the surrounding areas. We contacted colleges and sent them flyers. *Recovery Times* was the first publication to run our announcement.

After several months, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* started listing our MA group in its Sunday suburban edition. Nicotine Anonymous groups let us put flyers on their literature tables. We have not yet contacted the probation departments in the various court systems, nor have we tried getting public service announcements on radio or television.

"I started a chapter of MA because I wanted my recovery to involve people who were addicted to the same substance as me."

Although our first few meetings were on Tuesday nights, we eventually changed to Friday night.

I remember looking forward to getting high on Friday nights after working all week. Our group felt that anyone trying to stop smoking pot would be severely tested on Friday nights. Now, instead of getting high, they could come to a meeting.

Growth has been slow. Many meetings are with just two people. We now have a core group of three to four people. Our meeting format is divided into three parts: the first part consists of reading from MA's *Life With Hope*; the second part consists of sharing; the third part is devoted to discussion—cross talk is encouraged! This three-part format has been very successful. All of us are new to the Twelve Steps, so the reading is important. During the sharing, no cross talk occurs. The

discussion part allows us to answer questions from newcomers and to interact as a group. We try to follow the Fifth Tradition, carrying the message—not the mess.

We have found that most members of the group have stopped smoking prior to attending their first meeting. They use what they learn at the meeting to get through the next week. At my last meeting, there were five people in attendance—a record!

I'm sure that the future will bring some changes to our meeting, such as a move to a more centralized location. For now, though, all who come to our meeting are happy for what we have—each other, our recovery, and an MA meeting to attend each week. ■■

A New Life

by Duane I., District 10

Getting sober was very scary for me because it meant starting a "new life." I did not know anything about this life, since I had been using marijuana and other drugs for the last 15 years.

I never wanted to stop using drugs because I had not thought of it as a problem. My usage of other drugs always got out of control, and luckily I was able to quit them. But I could not stop using marijuana. It gave me a feeling of happiness and a sense of control. Whenever I felt upset, stressed, or depressed, smoking marijuana put everything at a certain level that I could handle. Unfortunately, in the last six years or

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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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A New Life

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so, everything had changed.

My problems and feelings had become harder to handle. There was a little voice inside my head that would talk a million miles a minute. The only way I could shut it up was by getting high. I could not handle life anymore; I did not even want to. Instead of dealing with my problems and emotions, I would try to eliminate them by getting high. Consequently, I smoked more and more. I had no sense of feeling except feeling high.

During this time in my life, I did not feel that I was doing anything wrong. What could be wrong with getting high? Well, what was wrong was the fact that my brain was so fogged up that getting high was the only thing that was important to me. As a result, my problems only seemed to get worse.

I could not do anything without being high. My entire day consisted of getting high: getting up, getting high, going to work, getting high all day at work, driving home, getting high, going out, and getting high all night. Soon, I started coming into work late because I'd stayed out too late the night before (getting high).

My life was just not going right. My girlfriend did not want to be with me anymore, because she could not deal with my severe mood swings. I was happy one minute and depressed or extremely angry the next. After she told me that she wanted to take a break from me for a while, I became so overwhelmed that I rushed over to her house to persuade her to change her mind. After talking with her for a while, I could see that things were not going the way I wanted them to. As I was trying to convince her that things were going to be different between us (just like I had tried a thousand times before), a powerful feeling overcame me and I said something that I had never realized before that night: I had a marijuana problem.

I do not know where this realization came from, but it led me to my first MA meeting. I liked what everyone at the meeting was saying. For the first time in my life, I found out that I was not the only one with these feelings of helplessness.

Shortly after going to this first meeting, I moved in with my girlfriend. I planned to keep going to meetings but this plan didn't last very long. I didn't go back to that meeting and returned to my old habits. Every week I would tell my girlfriend that I was going to the meeting; instead, I would drive to a friend's house to get high. I was getting high without my girlfriend's knowledge and we were getting along fine. This led me to believe that my getting high wasn't the problem. I thought that I was handling it pretty well.

After about nine months of this, the mood swings and feelings of helplessness returned—this time hitting me harder and more seriously than before. Again I found myself at an MA meeting. I have now been sober for 75 days. *

Although it has only been a short time that I have been sober, I have found things in MA and my sobriety that I never thought were possible: peace of mind, happiness, a sense of hope, a new relationship with my girlfriend, and what is most important, I have found new friends.

It has not been easy and, at times, I still struggle a great deal. I never thought that I could deal with myself or my problems without being high. I also thought that I would shrivel up and die if I could not get high anymore. I came to realize that getting high did not solve my problems or make them go away; it only made everything worse. With a little more understanding of a Higher Power and the MA program, I now know something I never thought I would—I now know and enjoy a new life. ■■

*This article was written 4/17/96.

Every Day Is a Beginning

by Jonathan R., District 7

I have this letter I wrote on day twelve. I pull it out and read it once in a while. I thought if it appeared in *A NEW LEAF*, people who feel the same way I did then will know that they are not the only ones who feel this way. Also, I want them to know that it does get better!

On the twelfth day of my sobriety, the emotions started to come up. It wasn't easy, because the first thought that ran through my head was: "You know the solution: GET HIGH!" I was scared of going to jail and being a slave to pot for the rest of my life. Of my thirty-five years, I'd spent twenty years using—almost two-thirds of my life up in smoke. I thank my Higher Power that I was finally able to reach out and ask for help (I've buried too many friends who weren't able to reach out).

A man who had ten times the sobriety I had said, "Maybe you could write about how you feel." So, I wrote. This is what I wrote on day twelve:

Boy, I'm f...ed up. So much is going on, and I feel like I'm going crazy. The tears feel like bursting out every day. This is the hardest thing I've ever tried to do. I know there is so much goodness out in the world, and so much pain and b.s. I feel like a child, like a baby in some ways.

I love my girlfriend so much, but right now I have to fix my own life. This is all so new to me. I always looked at people in twelve-step programs as losers, as weak. It's hard to admit that I've been losing out and that I've been weak. I AM! It almost feels good to admit it. It's just like starting over, and it's scary as all f....

I have a problem and I had to deal with it. It would be easier to smoke a joint or have a drink but that scares me even worse. I am so confused, all these feelings coming up. It's so hard to fight the feeling that says "f... it." I want to fight it. I want to do something with my life besides get stoned. I thank my Higher

Power for this place and these people. If they were not here for me, it would be so easy to get right back in that same groove of getting high, watching tv, and just not dealing with life.

I hope I can stay with the program. I want to, I need to—I will, damn it. I want to be productive and helpful. I want to learn to enjoy the simple things in life.

The place is here and the time is now. I know there is support. I matter how hard it seems. I will take advantage of that support, one day at a time.

Day twelve seems so long ago. It was! Over four years and four months ago. I've learned some things in that time. Life on life's terms is very hard. Life is too short to sit around being pissed off about things I have no control over, such as people, places, and the past. If I don't accept these things, they live in my head rent-free. I try to keep it simple. I make the next decision in front of me the best I can. When something doesn't turn out the way I want it to, I look at my part in it. I pray for the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

I have worked the twelve steps in Big Book workshops. I take commitments at meetings. I have a sponsor, and I sponsor others. I continue to work the steps and my life continues to get better. I hope someone can be motivated by these words. I don't know if this program will work for you as it's working for me. All I do know is that it's working for me because I work it.

For me, every day is a beginning. I now have a way to deal with life. One hundred years from now, we will all be dead. The question I ask myself is: "How will I live today?" ■■

Thought for the Month

Perhaps one of the greatest rewards of meditation and prayer is the sense of belonging that comes to us.

We no longer live in a completely hostile world. We are no longer lost and frightened and purposeless.

Twelve and Twelve, p. 105

Congratulations to our members celebrating their sober birthdays!

Steve P.	August 01	2 Years	Dana R.	August 15	5 Years
Vicki M.	August 01	4 Years	Captain Kurt	August 16	4 Years
Terri	August 08	1 Year!	Joyce M.	August 20	6 Years
Lance D.	August 08	2 Years	Steve A.	August 23	1 Year!
Mary S.	August 08	2 Years	Tom S.	August 25	7 Years
Goleman G.	August 13	4 Years	Todd E.	August 31	3 Years



Convention '97!

from the Planning Committee

The 1997 Marijuana Anonymous Convention will be held in San Diego at the Handlery Hotel & Resort over the President's Holiday weekend: Friday, Feb. 14th thru Monday Feb. 17th. It just so happens this also turns out to be Valentine's Day weekend!

We feel the 1997 Convention will definitely be one to remember. In addition to the usual spiritual workshops, meetings, speakers, and banquet dinner, there will be a "Play Day" on Sunday. This is your opportunity to take the family, your significant other, or your friends and spend the day playing in San Diego. San Diego offers a wonderful variety of attractions ranging from Sea World and the world-class San Diego Zoo, to shopping and restaurants at Seaport Village and historical Old Town, to the old wooden clipper ships and modern Navy destroyers and submarines at the Embarcadero. Not to mention the museums at Balboa Park, the grass parks and beaches along Mission Bay, or Cabrillo Point, where you can watch migrating whales swimming by.

And at the Handlery Resort itself there are lighted tennis courts, three heated swimming pools, a spa, a weight room, basketball and volleyball courts, and a 70-par golf course! Finally, "Play Day" will end with a 5-hour dance lasting until 2:00 am!

For our parents, we will have volunteers to watch the kids at Handlery's playground/pool area during the workshops.

Our Hospitality Room is adjacent to the main pool, so there will be a place for smokers to hang out. There will be NO smoking allowed indoors.

Pre-paid reservations are an absolute must for the Saturday dinner banquet.

Registration forms will appear in October's *A NEW LEAF*. Hope to see all of you there! ■■



District 5 celebrates 10 years of MA in Orange County the weekend of **Aug. 23-25** with a **campout** and **Beach Dance/Barbecue/Fireside Meeting**. At **San Onofre State Beach Bluffs Campground**. Take the 5 South to Basilone Road and turn right. Make an immediate left. Park entrance is just past the nuclear power plant (*zowie!—Ed.*). \$10 a person, no reservations needed, call **Meri K.** (714) 547-3693 for further info...**District 6** is having a **yard sale** on **Saturday, Aug. 3** at 10360 Haskell Avenue in Granada Hills. It starts at 6:00 am. For info, contact **Susie C.** (818) 895-3069 or **Sunnie R.** (818) 788-0230. Also, they are hosting a **Beach Day** on **Saturday, Aug. 10** at **Zuma Beach**, Lifeguard Station #6 at 12:30 pm. Call **Sunnie** for more info...**District 7** hosts their

annual **Sober Day at the Shore** on **Sunday, Aug. 18** at the grass picnic area on **Temescal Canyon Blvd.** (1/2 block up from the Pacific Coast Highway—look for the red balloons!) Volleyball at 10:00 am, meeting at noon, bring your own food. For info, contact **Jim L.** at (310) 478-5152. On **Sunday, September 1** (Labor Day weekend) there will be an **MA picnic and softball game** at **Mar Vista Park**. Game is at 10:00 am (equipment will be provided). There will be a barbecue (bring your own meat!), swimming (\$1.25 for adults, \$.75 for children), and two MA meetings. For info, call **Lori Rae** (310) 858-7181 or **Jim L.**...and for those of you up north, don't forget the **Labor Day (Aug. 30 - Sept. 2) campout** at **Big Basin Redwoods in Santa Cruz**. Contact **Thomas** at (510) 654-2805 for further information.

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