

Single Hope Seen for Drug Addicts

Narcotics Anonymous Program Urged by One of Former Victims

This is the second in a series of six articles on the problems of narcotics addicts as told to a Times reporter by doctors, law enforcement officers and the addicts themselves.

BY HARRY NELSON

I was sitting in a room with 20 narcotics addicts, but I couldn't have been safer at home.

Most of them had jail records. In the eyes of the law, they were or had been criminals.

Before they stopped using, they had stolen, lied, cheated and prostituted themselves for the sake of narcotics.

They had exchanged dignity and integrity for a heartful of despair. Narcotics had caused them to be ostracized by their relatives and jailed by the police. They had had geographical cures, hospital cures and "cold turkey" cures in jails.

One Road to Cure

And what it had all boiled down to was curing themselves. Not alone, but in the company of other addicts who know what drug addiction means.

"We realized that we were slowly committing suicide, but we had lost the power to do anything about it," a man who was the leader of the meeting was saying.

A man beside me moaned. "Jail did us no good. Medicine and psychiatry had no answer for us. Everything else having failed, in desperation we sought help from each other in Narcotics Anonymous."

Listening to what the man said, a young girl, maybe 20, looked deep into my eyes. There were tears in hers.

Leader's Question

When the leader had finished his introductory remarks, he said, "Who is having a problem?"

As with Alcoholics Anonymous, maintaining the cure requires constant attention.

At first no one answered. The man had to repeat the question several times. Then, a young man in his 20s said, "The marshal is after me."

"Do you know what he wants you for?"

The boy nodded. "He has his reasons."

Stop Running

"What are you going to do about the marshal?"

The young man sat thinking for a minute. Then he said, "I guess I better go down and see him."

"That's right. That's what you had better do. Stop running. You've run long enough."

The next speaker was a woman about 40. She had spent a full year at the Federal Narcotics Hospital at Lexington, Ky. She said she had been out two months.

"My trouble," she said, "is that I don't feel anything. I sit here and listen to the rest of you and you seem to be getting something from this talk. You feel happy. I feel nothing."

She sat there, nervously twisting a handkerchief in her hands, and repeating, "I don't feel anything."

For the next hour and 15 minutes the discussion centered on this woman and her

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HIGH STEPPER—The Duchess of Windsor gets an assist from her Duke as she manages a difficult one-point landing from a train at the Lausanne (Switzerland) station. The Duke, suffering from shingles, was there to consult doctors.

(AP Wirephoto)

DRUG ADDICTS

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problem. Everybody joined in. I got the feeling she was enjoying the attention enormously. I remembered what a psychiatrist had told me a few days before.

Psychiatrist's View

"An addict is a dependent person. He can't stand to be alone. He takes to dope because he needs a crutch to face life and narcotics provide this crutch," the doctor had said.

In the end, the woman smiled for the first time that evening. When she realized she had smiled, she made it disappear. But everyone there had seen the smile and it made them feel their time had been well spent. The woman said she would come back. The first hurdle had been cleared.

She wanted to stay clean, or else she wouldn't have come there.

New Crutch Needed

She needed another crutch. But this time her crutch would be the compassion of other human beings. People with sympathy and understanding. People she could trust.

After the meeting was over, I went to the home of the man who had spoken to me when I first walked into the meeting. (Explained in yesterday's article.)

I told him I was a newspaperman on a story. He must have trusted me because he bared his soul.

When he had finished, it was 3 o'clock in the morning, and he said, "When you write your story, don't make us sound like a bunch of glorious heroes."

His wife, who incidentally, is a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, sat beside him on the living room divan while he told the story of his life. In another room their two husky children slept through the night.

At 26, this man was finally what he had always wanted to be. A family man with his own business. A taxpayer. A voter.

Tells His Story

And a hero? Well, here's his story:

"I was a stone thief from the day I started on morphine that I stole in a hospital. The first time I got picked up I was 16. The second time I was 18 and they sent me up for six months.

"I hadn't been out 20 minutes before I'd lined up a pop. I remember feeling that I'd been given a bad break and I deserved a good time after being deprived for six months.

"I left that State and took the geographical cure. But no matter where I went I ended up in the bucket. Each time they let me out I needed as much stuff as I did when I left off the time before.

"It was no use running. No matter where I went, I was still faced with myself. I was completely terrorized. I began changing my thieving methods to avoid getting caught. I knew the cops would have a harder time catching me if I varied my operation.

"I had a regular crime schedule. On Sunday I'd work the churches for top-coats in the vestibules. Then I'd hock them. On Monday I'd steal something from a

store and then return it for credit.

"The next day I'd tap a till or use binoculars to read the names on tagged clothes in a dry cleaner's window. Then I'd go in and claim a suit, saying I'd lost the ticket.

Phony Photo Deal

"The closest I ever came to real work was operating a phony photo deal—without any film in the camera.

"I was in Kansas when Bobby Greenlease was kidnaped. I got picked up in a roundup and stuck in a small town jail. They treated me like a monkey in a cage. All day long adults and even classes of school children paraded in to see me. I was the first 'big-city addict' they'd ever seen and I was a spectacle.

"Things got so bad that I couldn't straighten out. I couldn't work or even steal. I was in a fog all the time. The skill was gone. I was nothing.

Tried Overdose

"I tried suicide with an overdose, but the stuff must have been weak because it only made me higher than I'd ever been before.

"I stayed down for four months. Then (as related in yesterday's article) I joined Narcotics Anonymous. I went to a meeting every night in the week. I had to have something to hang on to and other people who had been addicts or alcoholics were the only ones I could trust.

Biggest Problem

"When there wasn't an NA meeting going on, I'd attend an AA meeting. My biggest problem was getting over the idea that the world owed me a living and getting over being lazy.

"Stopping using was only the beginning. I still had to get a job—and who trusts an addict if they find out you are one?

"My first job was driving a truck. One day the boss gave me a sack of money to take to another store. Something inside of me said, 'This is what you've been waiting for.' My wife and I were living in a shack. We had holes in our clothes.

Finally on Way Up

"Then I said to myself, 'No, I won't take the money. Maybe he'll give me another sack to deliver tomorrow and I'll take it then.' The boss did give me another money sack the next day and nearly every day for several months. I didn't dare look inside to see how much was there, but I never stole it.

"Four months later I got another job. I was on the way up."

TOMORROW: State, county and city enforcement officers analyze the problem and a Narcotics Anonymous member tells how his organization began "underground."