

WE MADE A DECISION

All of us now in N.A. had to make one crucial decision before we felt secure in the new program of life without drugs. We had to face the facts about ourselves and our drug using realistically and honestly. We had to admit that we were powerless over drugs. For some of us, this was the toughest proposition we had ever faced. We did not know too much about drug addiction. We had preconceived impressions about the term "addict." We associated it chiefly with down-and-out derelicts. Or we thought it implied degradation in some other form. Some of us resisted making the admission that we were addicts. Others clung to mental reservations.

Most of us, however, were relieved when it was explained to us that drug addiction was an illness. We saw the common sense of doing something about an illness that threatened to destroy us. We quit trying to deceive others — and ourselves — into thinking that we could handle drugs when all the evidence pointed to the contrary.

It was emphasized to us from the beginning that no one but we, ourselves, could determine whether or not we were addicts. The admission had to be sincere and based on our own judgment — not that of a doctor, husband, wife, or spiritual adviser. Our friends might be able to help us understand the nature of our problem but we were the only ones who could determine whether drugs had become an uncontrollable problem for us. Frequently we asked: "How can I tell if I am really an addict?" We were told that there were no hard and fast rules for determining drug addiction. We learned that there were, however, certain tell-tale symptoms. If we got "loaded" when we had every reason to stay clean, if our drug using had become progressively worse, if we no longer got as much fun from using as we once had — these, we learned, were apt to be symptoms of the illness we call drug addiction. Reviewing our using experiences and their consequences, most of us were able to discover additional corroborating evidence.

Quite naturally, the prospect of a life without drugs seemed distasteful and dull. We feared that our new friends in N.A. would either be square or, worse yet, be fanatics. We discovered that they were, instead, human beings like ourselves with the special virtue of understanding our problem instead of merely condemning us for it, as so many non-addicts had done in the past.

We began to wonder what we had to do to stay clean, what membership in N.A. would cost, and who "ran" the Society locally and worldwide. We soon discovered that there are no "musts" in N.A., that no one is required to follow any formal ritual or pattern of living. We also learned that N.A. has no dues or fees of any kind; expenses incurred for meeting rooms, refreshments, and other incidentals are defrayed by passing the hat, but even contributions of this kind are not a requirement of membership.

It soon became apparent to us that N.A. has no formal organization and that it has no governing officers. The arrangement of meetings and the other jobs that are essential in keeping the Fellowship together are handled by informal committees whose membership is rotated periodically. These committees act as servants of the group for limited periods, not as officers.

How, then, do we manage to stay clean in such an informal, loosely-knit fellowship?

The answer is that, once having achieved it, we try to preserve it by observing and following the successful experience of those who have preceded us in N.A.

Their experience provides certain "tools" and guides which we are free to accept or reject, as we may choose. Because our being clean is the most important thing in our lives today, we think it the best part of wisdom to follow the patterns suggested by those who have already demonstrated that the N.A. recovery program really works.

For example, we take no pledges; we don't say that we will abstain from drugs "forever." Instead we try to follow what we call the "Twenty-Four Hour Plan." We concentrate on keeping clean for just the current 24 hours. We simply try to get through one day at a time without drugs. If we feel the urge to use, we neither yield nor resist. We merely defer taking that particular drug until to-morrow.

We try to keep our thinking honest and realistic where drugs are concerned. If we are tempted to use — and the temptation usually fades after the first period of transition into N.A. — we ask ourselves whether the particular drug we have in mind would be worth all the consequences we have experienced from using in the past. We bear in mind that we are perfectly free to get loaded, if we want to, that the choice between using and non-using is entirely up to us. Most important of all, we try to face up to the fact that no matter how long we may have been clean, we will always be addicts — and addicts, as far as we know, cannot use drugs normally.

We follow the experience of the successful "old-timers" in another respect. We usually keep coming regularly to meetings of the local N.A. group with which we have become affiliated.

There is no rule which makes such attendance compulsory. Nor can we always explain why we seem to get a lift out of hearing the personal stories and interpretations of other members. Most of us, however, feel that attendance at meetings and other informal contacts with fellow N.A. members are important factors in maintaining our objective to stay clean.