

HOLLYWOOD AREA NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2011

CONVENTION STORIES

I FOUND THE ONLY NA YOUTH CONVENTION IN THE WORLD

Colin S., Los Angeles, CA

My name is Colin and I'm an addict. On June 21st, I celebrated 10 years clean. In the past ten years, recovery has afforded me, among other things, the opportunity to travel. Before I got clean, I couldn't risk being far from my drugs, nor could I afford to go anywhere, and even in early recovery, I was "on paper" as we say, and had to ask permission if I wanted to leave the county, let alone the country. With those days behind me, just for today, I have been to several states in the US, as well as Mexico, Canada, Ireland and Norway.

In 2007 I got asked to speak at a workshop at the Quebec regional young people's convention. It is the only time I've been asked to speak at an NA event outside my own region, and it was a huge honor. There was a whole contingent of US addicts attending and speaking that year; I think the young people in Quebec had recently connected to a larger network of young people in recovery outside of Quebec, after running a convention for many years in relative isolation within their own region.

Perhaps the first thing that let me know this would be no ordinary NA convention was discovering two condoms and a packet of lube in the registration packet. No, really. Sadly, they were ordinary condoms, and not stamped with the convention theme or NA logo. And no, I did not use them that weekend, as I was in a committed relationship at that time and had by that point in my recovery learned how to actually maintain that type of commitment.

To this day I have mixed feelings about that registration packet. While safer sex is unquestionably a good thing, is it the business of an NA service body to promote it?



I can only assume that the convention committee utilized group conscience and invoked a loving higher power in their decision making.

The main thing I learned that weekend is that the Quebecois are serious about fun in recovery! The banquet before the Saturday main meeting was held with music blasting and members getting up and dancing and hopping from table to table, very different from other banquets I've been to. But it was after the meeting when I experienced one of the most powerful experiences I've ever had at an NA event. They held a clean-time countdown, as is common at NA convention main meetings. However, this was unlike any clean-time countdown I'd experienced before or since. By the time they got down to counting days for the newcomers, the room was electric. Music was pounding, and people were clapping in time, banging on tables, cheering, and chanting in call-and-response, *Revien! Ça marche!* ("Keep coming back! It works!")

The whole room, myself included, was swept up in collective NA love, carried with an energy I have never experienced elsewhere. I can make all the jokes I want about "registration rubbers," but although some people may have been there to catch, they were

also to recover, and the people in that room let me know which was their priority. We were all there to save our lives, together. Revien! Ça marche!



FROM ILLINOIS TO OKINAWA

Chris C., Los Angeles, CA

When I heard the topic for this issue of the newsletter—travel stories—and read some of the prompts that came with it, I knew immediately that I should write about the first NA convention I ever attended. I was between 18 months and 2 years clean, in my first year of college in Peoria, Illinois. It was the regional convention—GIRCNA—and it was held in Springfield, Illinois, about an hour and a half drive away. The Greater Illinois Region isn't huge, and the convention attendance still ranges from two to three hundred people each year. At the time that seemed enormous to a small-town boy like me, but today that type of convention is what I would call intimate—and perhaps to this day is what I would consider an ideal size for the type of NA event I would prefer to attend. (Just like an addict, I'm still trying to get back to that first one.)

At the opening speaker meeting Friday night, a woman shared about having gotten clean in the mid-1980s in a small Midwest town with no NA meetings. Her introduction to recovery was in another fellowship, and even though she had difficulties identifying she was desperate and took what she could get. One night she met a man in a meeting who recognized her as “one of us.” He told her about NA, and gave her some literature (probably a Little White Book) and asked her to think about starting an NA meeting. He was just passing through, he explained, but thought it was important to spread the word about NA anytime he visited a place where there weren't any NA meetings yet. So she started a meeting. And opened the door every

week. And waited. For over a year, while sustaining her recovery and her hope through meetings of another fellowship. As the woman shared about the feelings she experienced seeing another addict walk through the door for the first time, I was overcome with a sense of gratitude and humility. I felt as though the rest of the room just melted away, and all I could see was the soft-spoken older woman whose desire to recover was strong enough to make NA a reality in a community where it previously didn't exist. Even then—when I lived in a place with only two meetings a day, one at noon and one in the evening—I felt incredibly spoiled to live in such a flourishing recovery community.

I heard that story in 1998, and it has continued to touch me and my recovery ever since. I've been living in Southern California for about five years now, and it is not at all uncommon for me to pass by at least a half dozen neighborhoods where NA meetings are taking place as I drive to the NA meeting I'm going to on a particular evening. Most of those are meetings I haven't been to or even heard of, but they are out there and are helping addicts hear a message of recovery on a nightly basis. Keeping that woman's story in mind helps me to keep a little perspective on things.

I happen to be writing this as I'm flying back to LA from Okinawa, where I just attended Japan's seventh regional convention. Attendance was just over 500 members, including three members who stood up for 1 day clean at the Saturday night clean-time countdown, as well as a handful of English-speaking gaijin (foreigner) members from the “Ultimate Weapon” Group of NA on the Futenma military base. I had the time of my life, and so much of what I heard shared throughout the weekend reminded me of the sacrifices of members like that woman I heard share at my first convention nearly twelve years ago.

The convention was a great source of hope, from those few persistent gaijin who keep the two English-speaking meetings going every week to the Sunday morning main speaker who shared about the groups in Sendai—where the next Japan Regional Convention will be held—and how they've been striving to overcome the horrible tragedy and loss that followed the devastating earthquake of March 2011.

Recovery is a wonderful journey—no, a series of wonderful journeys—made possible by those who came before us who chose to keep coming back. Just for today, that's my choice too.

SERENITY AMIDST THE SANDS OF CHAOS

Tom C., Big Island, HI

Asia Pacific Forum, February 2011
Kingdom of Bahrain (The Persian Gulf)

I'm startled out of a restless sleep, the silence of the night interrupted by honking auto horns and bursts of gunfire. As my mind grasps at hints as to my whereabouts, with a sudden clarity, the thought enters my consciousness: "I'm in Bahrain."

The circumstances of my visit were set in place exactly a year ago, when I began serving as a forum delegate facilitating fellowship development in countries needing support within their twelve-step communities. Last year, while we were in Kolkata, India, the bid for the 2011 conference went to Bahrain.

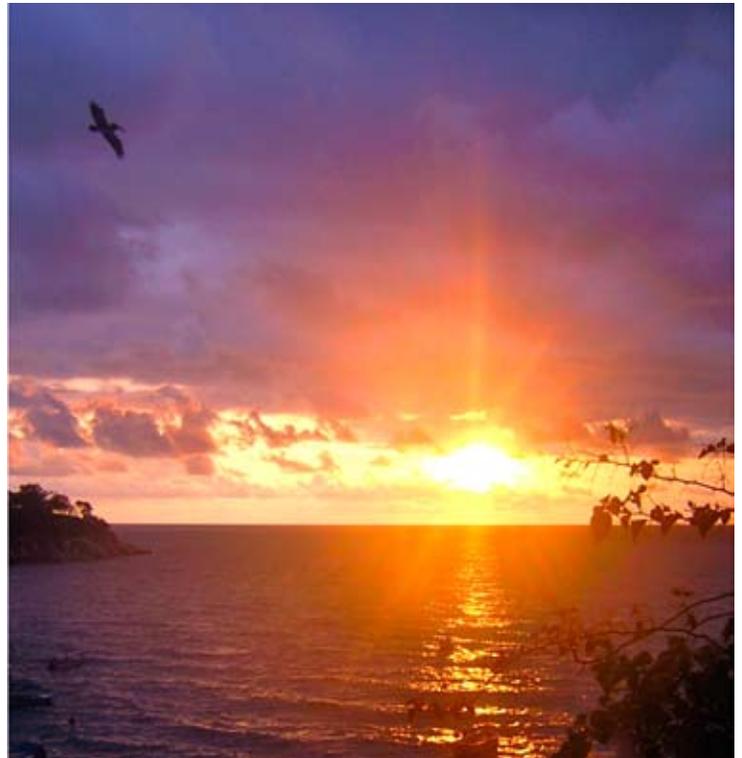
My reservations for travel were made months ago, long before the political events that flowered recently in Cairo, Egypt. My flight to Bahrain left U.S. soil on February 10, at which time the unrest had not spread from Egypt and Tunisia to other countries. I have wondered many times if Bahrain had exploded two weeks previously, would we have moved forward or would the Administrative Committee have canceled the trip?



Flying for many hours can be like a sitting practice on retreat. You are stuck in your seat without the usual distractions. On the seemingly endless flight to the Middle East, my thoughts were of missing my wife, questioning my own life and spiritual path, wondering about my right livelihood, and whether my book was going to reach the audience I had intended to help by writing it. I could choose to observe or attach myself to the thousands of thoughts that arose.

On arrival, I sat with other delegates from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, India, Thailand, Bangladesh--the list goes on. I was caught in the vortex of change, not only

political but also the spiritual change that comes when the message of NA's Twelve Steps is carried.



I probably don't have to describe the demonstrations you saw on TV. We were in the middle of them, and I think I can speak for most of us who were there. We felt we were caught in a safety net of service; we were truly on the firing line of life with our willingness to serve. This willingness is what gives us strength when finding ourselves suddenly in extraordinary situations. During these weeks of change, all the delegates found ourselves in an unpredictable positions, but the twelve-step principles gave a focus to our experience.

During the practice of a spiritual path, the principle of service is at the forefront. In service, we find ourselves thinking of others instead of self. This is the key that unlocks the connection with spirit, regardless of outer conditions. Joy can be felt arising from within.

While NA members from around the world gathered in Bahrain, the principle of service was embraced by the many who ceaselessly gave of themselves to carry the message of recovery.

I want to acknowledge the men and women in the fellowship of the Middle East. They are some of the most loving I have encountered. I've never been hugged and kissed so much. Walking down the street I would sense a presence and as I looked over my shoulder I found I was being followed by peace. May loving kindness find its way to your heart.

NEPAL REGIONAL CONVENTION

NA AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Tom M., Kauai, HI

I am sitting in a NAWS workshop in Kathmandu with about eighty NA members from Kathmandu and a couple of areas in southern Nepal. The workshop was supposed to take place tomorrow but an impending strike in Nepal could possibly shut down the roads leading south, leaving many NAWS members stranded for up to ten days with no funding and nowhere to go.

The political situation has gotten a lot better since the truce between the Nepalese government and the Maoist rebels but things are not completely resolved and, that said, anything can happen at any time. We have been caught in long traffic delays while the marchers are moving down the narrow winding streets but, all in all, it's sort of peaceful.

In the "Building Strong Homegroups" session of the workshop, we have each table of eight start off with naming their table as if it were the name of a home group. I love the names; Road to recovery, Reincarnated group, Awakening group (from darkness to light), Better way of life group, Apechit Group, Sunrise group. Each table draws pictures describing their group. The Sunrise group showed the sun peeking its head over the Himalayas to symbolize NA just beginning in their area. In the picture there is a group of members holding hands looking at the sunrise. They are praying as sun rises that the NA message will spread its light over Nepal.

It's a hard facility in which to complete the workshop. A narrow room in the basement of a hotel, the acoustics are terrible and at lunchtime a handful of members disappeared into the streets. The fellowship is made up of mostly young people, averaging from 16 to 25 years old but it's a growing fellowship nonetheless. After lunch we asked the members who were still present what we should do about the members who left. NAWS was to fund their hotel and food expenses for two days. These were Fellowship Development funds that the world service conference had allocated to help carry the message. The group voted unanimously to cut the rooms of those who were not back by the next break. Fortunately by the next break we had nearly 100% of the funded members Which led to a whole discussion on the seventh tradition and the second tradition.

After the workshop we attended a meeting. One thing the members do is when they pass the seventh tradition basket around the room, each member will take the money and place it on their foreheads and on their lips and then on their hearts before putting it in the basket. To them this is a blessed offering. What a beautiful attitude.

At the end of the day, it is clear that We are all servants, we then demonstrate ability and follow through and we become trusted, then as we become more experienced and committed we become leaders. Doing fellowship development service over the years, I've learned something about NA's program of attraction that has helped my recovery tremendously. Real leadership does not simply create followers: It creates more leaders.



(KATHMANDU, NEPAL, MARCH 2007)

CLEAN TIME COUNT DOWN- NEPALESE STYLE **Kimmy I. (Oahu, HI)**

The Nepal Regional Convention of NA was held 7,200 feet up in mountains with a spectacular view of the Himalayan mountain range. Over 700 members were present, most of them staying in these little hotels tucked away in the hills of Nargarot. You will just love the names: Space Mountain Hotel, Dragon Resort, Hotel Snowman, Hotel Elephant Head and Hotel Galaxy View. Some had hot water and some had private toilets, but mostly we were roughing it.

The convention was held under a huge tent in the middle of a little village. The locals in the village just seemed to take it in stride, going about their business herding goats and sheep and carrying firewood. The days were warm but the evenings cooled down a lot. The Nepalese people are some hearty souls-- little children with gorgeous smiling faces would greet us, pointing their hands together up to their face and saying "Namaste." Cute, my god you would just melt, rosy cheeks and barefooted. The cold didn't seem to affect them at all and they loved all the activity coming from the convention.

There are no clean time count downs in the world like the ones you would see in the Asian countries, especially India and Nepal. We were told to get over to the big tent at 7:30 PM as the count-down would begin. They didn't tell us the countdown would not end until around midnight. There is a huge sound system blaring out Techno music, literally echoing through the Himalayas. Then they switch from Techno to the song "Final Countdown" by the band Europe. Man oh man, what a trip! They create a huge circle while one member M.C.'s the countdown. The music goes on and on and on and the members are rockin', then they start forming a tight barrier within the circle to keep everyone back. First they announce how many collective days and years of recovery there is-- the one I attended 4 years ago they even announced seconds and minutes. Then they switch up the music again and move into a community countdown. As they call out your country you and all your compatriots have to come into the circle and dance to the music while everyone else is screaming and cheering you on. They have members protecting the tent poles to prevent the tent from collapsing! It's a total rave and of course this goes on to all the areas of Nepal and the areas of India.



At nearly 10:00 they are just beginning the clean time count down. Again as they call your clean time it's with blazing music in the background and you have to come out in the middle of the circle and dance. There were a few of us that ranged from 25 to 38 years that had to do solos. If you can't dance or have a fear of dancing in public, get over it, cuz your dancing. You know the saying "don't leave before the miracle?" Well, a bunch of us filtered back to the hotel before it was all over. I lasted until they got to one year at 11:00. For most of us, it had been a long 4 days at the APF and we are old.

When they got down to one day they turned off the music and handed out candles to everyone. Somehow they accomplished the impossible feat of getting 500 addicts not to light the candles until the right time, when one by one they moved towards this beautiful Sand Mandela they had created on the ground. It read NA On Top Of The World. A sand drawing of the Himalayas and the words NRECNA II. One candle was lit and from that all the candles were lit and placed within the Mandela. I am sure recovering addicts from all over the world could all see the light glowing. If not, I am sure you felt something. After all NA is on top of the world.

Aside from the 23 NA community's that attended the AFP meeting and the members from neighboring countries, there were several members attending the convention from various parts of the Western world including Sweden, Germany, the UK, Australia, USA, Canada and Finland. I hope I am not missing someone! But I just wanted to mention how much they were appreciated by the locals and what a contribution their presence was, especially the women. There are very few women in recovery in Nepal, fifteen in all and that is including those in a halfway house. They held a couple of common need meetings for the women at the convention. In all there were over 50 women at the convention, many with lots of clean time, so you can imagine the impact they had.



J'ADORE NA!

Leigh S., Oahu, Hi

WCNA25 Paris, France, September 1995

By far the most significant NA event I ever attended was my first World Convention in 1995 in Paris. Because of my disease I had not really gone anywhere until I got clean. I love to travel and I missed exploring other places and cultures. I got clean in San Diego, so I knew addiction affected many people, but when I got to the convention in Paris, I was amazed by how many countries were represented. Five thousand addicts from all over the world! A dozen translation booths! People speaking in a constant flurry of languages, and sharing in our common language of recovery. This experience has stuck with me for the entire twenty years I've been clean. No matter where I go, whether or not I speak the language, get a translator or just sit in the room, I feel at home. I am so grateful that NA is here for me in America, but it really makes me grateful that NA is available to any addict no matter where on the planet they are and that it will be there for me no matter where on the planet I go. Mahalo, NA!



SUICIDE OF A SCREENWRITER

Anonymous



You rang me on the horn that day, your nerves shot,
jabber frantic,

You squawked about cruel Hollywood, of scenes that
fade to black,

Of molting cuckoos destitute, bad eggs hatched
sycophantic;

I smiled serene (I'd kicked the pills): "Let me help
you kick smack."

Your chutzpah pleased the surfer dude, you schlepped
his ball and chain,

The Lost Boys mooned your falling star like raunchy
birds of prey,

You trembled in a tunnel dark, feared light at end a
train;

I soothed, "Fear not the bright sunbeam. It's there
to point the way."

You found N.A. but mocked their prayers, then
clowned it up bohemian,

They climbed twelve steps, you skipped the stairs, a
grandstand your foundation,

You tripped and fell and snapped a bone, a slip so
vastly Freudian,

The pain immense (the yardstick yours) you pleaded
for sedation.

Now death you choose, the wave has crashed, the
surfer winks and nods,

Your sucker's punch has knocked me out: fresh en-
trails for the gods.

CAMPFIRES AND MOUNTAINS AND STARS, OH MY!

Lillas J.,
Rapid City, SD

In South Dakota, a lot of our NA get-togethers are campouts. For seventeen years, we've had a week-long campout in August during the Sturgis motorcycle rally in the Black Hills. This provides a safe place for recovering addicts to camp in what can otherwise be a chaotic situation. (An internationally famous event, the motorcycle rally attracts between one and two hundred thousand bikers, and there is usually a great deal of insanity afoot.)

The rally campout, the longest running NA event in western South Dakota, is sponsored by the "Other Side" group and held in a beautiful forest setting at Sheridan Lake. Over the years, people have come from nineteen states and one Canadian province.

This is the longest running event in western South Dakota. We've seen couples on their first dates, last dates, hosted a marriage ceremony, watched kids grow up, separated fighting dogs, held lots of campfire meetings, and experienced many adventures on and off our bikes.

One year, two people got lost in the Hills overnight without food, water, or warm clothes. Another year, someone brought a potato gun, which was very entertaining. One woman claims she was hit by a fifty-pound pine cone. Two addicts rode four thousand miles, but when they got to the lake, they couldn't find our actual campsite and ended up sleeping on the ground next to the parking lot. One guy, who rides a bit fast, told the crew "Follow me!" and no one saw him again until dinner.

One fellow who does a lot of service has shown up for a number of years running with someone he "found" along the road. One year, it was a woman trying to fix her bike. She's not an addict, but showed up a second year and still sends food to the campout from Denver. Talk about attraction, not promotion! Then there was the young hitchhiker on his way home from stint working on a Alaskan fishing boat, and the firefighter from New Mexico who didn't know the route. Over the years these "guests" have become a kind of running joke, and we all wonder "Who will he show up with this year?"

Addicts from local towns look forward to the campout as a time when they can meet recovering addicts from other places and learn how NA groups function in their community. Local NA members also sponsor a pancake breakfast one morning during the week.



The nightly campfire meetings are extremely spiritual and create a deep sense of fellowship. The campout has helped many NA members here, including me, build strong friendships in recovery that have lasted for years and transcended distance. We've seen each other through deaths, suicidal children, health problems, and all the other challenges of "life on life's terms." It's been a terrific experience across the years: the great outdoors, fun, fellowship and recovery the NA way!



AM I AN ADDICT IN EUROPE?

Robert S., Los Angeles, CA

It's 5am and, as usual, I'm sitting at my computer with a cup of coffee. I'm an early bird. I like feeling as if I am getting a head start on the day because I may not get up at all if I wait too long. Contrary action is something I learned in my first thirty days of recovery. In addition to showing my gratitude to the universe for this particularly foggy, humid and hazy morning, I seek guidance from my Higher Power in honoring commitments, being sensitive to the needs of others and for the ability to be punctual. Then I realistically let go to whatever happens. Somewhere in between taking a shower and walking out the door, I often forget the morning prayers. If I don't remember the prayer word for word, I at least remember the authenticity while doing it and that feeling of authenticity is worth more than a good memory.

I started getting up early because being in recovery has given me an opportunity to go to school and after some tinkering with time, deadlines, homework, step-work, meetings and breathing I found greeting the morning before it got there shows respect to a new day, plus I get a lot of homework done. And get this, I have a 4.0 GPA. Addiction taught me to believe I am dumb and recovery has pulled its covers. I am not dumb. I am intelligent and I bet you are too!!

I accept my sensitivity. I find I have compassion for others if I am in touch my own feelings and their feelings carefully avoiding damaging other's spirits or causing them pain. I haven't always felt that way. I hated being sensitive...or "thin-skinned" as it was described by my therapist who has since committed suicide. Addiction had taught me to believe I am a wimp and a sissy for crying or not wanting to fight. Recovery is teaching me that crying and not wanting to fight are assets to a spiritual life and for me I should redefine what a MAN is.

You see, my story began in NA 15 years ago. I was clean the first time for 8 years and the second time for 4 years. I had many firsts; first job, first bank account, first date, first spiritual awakening, first sponsor. I gained back the love and support of my family, developed close and long-lasting bonds with others in the program, which I am still close with today. I put all my stock in people and my job. I became defined by what I did, what I had, how I looked, and how active I was in NA. Showing others in the program how much I could do and how much respect I gained would certainly fill that hole I was so unwilling to discuss was still in my gut. What would it mean if I was just an average Joe?

I am close to a year clean again and I feel I am working very hard at having that first experience with a Higher Power that will guide me toward being that average Joe. The unfolding of my character and what I become is left up to how well I honor the spiritual principles of this program. I have a lot of experience in confusing my will with the will of the universe. The serenity prayer makes sense to me for the first time, or at least I am now willing to practice it. That is how tangible my Higher Power is to me right now. I'm not sure if I am on the right track or not but one thing is certain, I feel more freedom this way.

I do less mental masturbation about how great I could be. I avoid flogging, super-deep introspection, and listening to the media....about anything!! I have a sponsor who is sensitive himself and through his actions shows me how comfortable he is with his sensitivity. I am learning to be uncomfortable yet secure. I let good things happen to me and do my best at not taking advantage of the kindness of others.

I recently went on a trip to Europe, Paris and Amsterdam. I had never been off the continent and through the love of someone very close to me I was presented with this opportunity. I wanted desperately to find the selfishness in this. How could I possibly feel worthy of a gift so great, especially at a time so crucial to my recovery? "Suffering is more important" my addiction told me." I should stay here and contemplate how horrible I am," it said. Then the universe declared, "15 years of struggle in my journey to seek humility is 15 years longer than desired. Enjoy your vacation... you earned it!!

"WOO HOO!!" I shouted and "thank you!"

My flight from LAX was to land in Paris. I had detailed directions and instructions from my good friend who invited me on this trip of what to do once I got off the plane. My heart began to pitter-patter, and at different intervals throughout the trip continued to do so. I was so excited!! The flight attendants began serving beverages immediately and I was awestruck at how many people were asking for wine...in French, of course. I withdrew into my seat as if I was part of it and began to soak in what was happening to me. I was the minority on this flight and my language and customs are NOT the norm. My next thought was, "yeah...nobody knows you either, Robert, and you're on the journey of a lifetime...live it up!!" Am I an addict, even in Europe?

I felt a physiological shift inside of me. The phenom-

enon of craving working close with my endocrine system went to town on my serenity. I had a choice at that moment. My options were to entertain this ridiculous but very real and dangerous notion that I could drink wine... which I can't stand the taste of anyway, or I could seek guidance from the universe, which I believe is part of me, and since I was 34,000 ft closer to the cosmos, I felt I deserved a quick response, and I got it. This was an authentic moment between me and my HP. I was angry at the idea my good time was interrupted by my disease and I wasn't accepting this interruption. I was very clear in my prayers about my desire to stay clean at that moment and I did. Not only did I stay clean I began to have a constant stream of pleasant thoughts of places I would visit in Paris, beautiful memories of people close to me in recovery which I had already experienced and the friendships I've been building with them. Thank God I had some practice in prayer and meditation because Step 3 saved my life!!

I went on to have many moments throughout my trip where I would seek guidance from my HP. I went to NA meetings in Paris and Amsterdam. My friend goes to another fellowship and he knows his way around Paris so that is where I started. People there directed me to an NA meeting and they had wonderful things to say about NA. I was shocked at how open they were to other programs. I never had a problem with other 12 step programs so I felt very comfortable wherever I found people who were like me but I understand NA is my home and the only place I can truly identify 100%. This is just my truth.

The members were very welcoming. I was lucky enough to sit in on a step meeting. They were using the work book, Step 6 I believe. The meeting went an hour and a half with no break. Everyone was speaking so honestly it felt like less than an hour went by when they called time. I felt so good to be a meeting. I knew I would be able to overcome any obstacle with; the knowledge I had a HP I knew I could communicate, meetings to recharge at, and knowing how to respond to the physiological changes which occur in my body when I am reacting to different stimuli.

FYI: If you are on a plane and alcohol begins to look good, you may just be thirsty. Drink something you enjoy, without alcohol, until you are full, and wait a few minutes. Continue praying and open up a recovery book. It was a practical tool in my tool box which helped derail my desires.

My name is Robert and I am an addict...an average Joe with the potential to do great things, not a great thing desperately trying to avoid being average.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JASON T. AND ANONYMOUS MEMBERS EXCEPT FOR IRAN UNITY DAY PHOTO COURTESY OF IRAN REGION OF N.A VIA MICHELLE A.

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