Newsletters Help To Carry The Message From DA’s Early Years To The Present

Twenty-three years ago, Anni W. had a dream.

The fledgling fellowship of Debtors Anonymous consisted of only a handful of meetings in four major cities. Although DA was poised for tremendous growth in the next few years, communication in 1985 between meetings in New York and Los Angeles, Washington DC, and Boston, DA’s four early centers, was difficult and sporadic. Someone, or something, had to inform the fellowship, unite it, knit it together.

Someone had to create DA’s first national newsletter.

A debtor from Eastern Massachusetts, Anni, who was later known in the fellowship as Elianna, had discovered DA on an out-of-town trip, and had returned to her home fired up with the DA message. Determined to build DA in Boston, she started meetings, organized recovery events, and published a nameless, two-page, local DA newsletter. Her boundless energy brought her to the attention of the DA General Service Board, which elected her a trustee in 1985. It was a fortuitous election, because she was precisely the right person for the job at the right time. Just months before, the GSB had created a Newsletter Committee, which had foundered for lack of the skills actually needed to produce such a publication.

Anni became DA’s first periodical writer, editor, and historian. During the latter part of 1985, she lobbied the perennially broke board for the funds to get the newsletter off the ground. The first issue of Newsletter To The Groups rolled off the press in January 1986. (The working title had originally been “Final Notice”, but that chilling reference to the kind of dunning notices debtors receive made another name preferable).

The Newsletter To The Groups, though, scarcely resembled a conventional newsletter. It was plain text with no graphics designed specifically to be read by the secretary of each DA meeting during the announcement period, bringing national DA news to each group at the end of each month. When this didn’t happen, except in Boston, Anni was heartbroken. The GSB minutes of the time reflect her disappointment that group secretaries around the country weren’t cooperating in that fashion.

And so the Newsletter To The Groups went back to the drawing board, adopting more of a newsletter “look”,

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DA Members Share From The Heart
In Two Decades Of Recovery Writing

Twenty years worth of experience, strength, and hope.
It’s been an adventure, these past few months, reading through
two decades of back issues of Ways & Means in preparation for this 20th Anniversarv Issue. Twenty years of the fellowship’s history, of changing language, newsletter design, and type styles, 20 years worth of the soul sickness of this disease of compulsive debting, and 20 years worth of the joy of DA recovery.

Reading these hundreds of pages (longer than most books) and dozens of issues has allowed me to pick out some wonderful stories from those years to share with you. It’s also allowed me to pick up some impressions about the state of journalism and sharing here in Debtors Anonymous.

First, I’m struck by how difficult, nearly impossible, it is to find stories like these anywhere else. Other than DA’s book A Currency Of Hope, there are few places that speak “the language of the heart” to compulsive debtors like the DA members who share here in our “meeting in print.”

When we read a story in Ways & Means it is as Elaine S. describes her first face-to-face DA meeting in a story later in this issue, “I heard this woman share her experience, strength, and hope; she and the others who shared spoke about money and their lives as I have never heard anyone else speak, but exactly as I thought, spoke, and lived!”

Second, I am amazed at how bright, how talented, how capable so many of us are in Debtors Anonymous, creative people who, thanks to this program, have begun to liberate their inner gifts and share them with others; people who’ve overcome the deep shame that comes with this disease and begun to write about their recovery.

But third, I am dismayed by how few of us have done that. The simple fact is that, although there has been some wonderful sharing in these pages, it’s been done by a very dedicated but very small group of the same few people, year after year.

Virtually every person ever to serve as editor of Ways & Means, and there have been many over the years, has left behind written evidence of their frustration and bitterness over the unwillingness of DA members to write stories for the newsletter. Hundreds of impassioned pleas have gone out over the years, almost always with little response. Many editors ended up filling the pages with stories written themselves, or by a small, dedicated group of trustees, GSRs, and office employees, who would step up to the plate time after time after time.

In his famous 1991 keynote speech to the World Service Conference, DA founder John H. said, “Here tonight in this room are some of the greatest writers, architects, artists, lawyers, and therapists that exist in the world.” But he went on to say, “But there still remains this cloud over DA, this shadow of doubt and ambivalence and shame and blame,” a cloud that keeps us from being all we could be and dream in our hearts of being.

John’s prayer that night, and his vision for DA as a whole, was that “we be freed as this shadow is lifted so that we can all march out and do what we were created to do.”

Ways & Means was founded in the early days of our fellowship to give voice to those prayers, to share the adventure of reclaiming our integrity and releasing that shame and blame by sharing, each with one another. The founders of the newsletter saw the need for a forum in which the joy of recovery, the excitement of living debt free, the spiritual awakening that comes as a result of working the 12 Steps, could be shared with our membership, issue after issue, year after year.

I’m deeply grateful to all the DA members who’ve shared their stories in this newsletter over the past 20 years, and my wish for DA, my vision for Ways & Means is that this shadow be lifted from many more of us so that the incredible recovery and creativity to be found in this program will fill many more pages and inspire new generations of DA members in the 20 years ahead.

— Anonymous
13 Years Of Not Debting And ‘Different Attitudes’

March/April 1989

John H., our founder, sat down in 1976 with a man named Danny to talk about his compulsive debting, and they helped each other to become solvent. John has told us of the early days of DA, wondering whether anyone would show up for meetings, and of the challenge of developing the tools and keeping faith that there were other compulsive debtors who would respond and recover in the program...and people did start to come, and kept coming back.

I remember those early business meetings in St. Ignatius Church in New York City before we even had a Board of Trustees. As compulsive debtors, we didn’t think we could manage business effectively, but John kept us all believing in ourselves, and eventually we started becoming more confident and solid as a group. Thus DA became a healthy toddler.

I personally found DA on Tuesday, March 25, 1980, when it was four years old and there were a total of five meetings in the entire world, all in churches in New York City, a nucleus of 25 people who kept coming consistently.

We were all in awe of John H. One of our early members, Colin S., affectionately and facetiously coined a phrase about him which was as follows: “We turn our will and our lives over to the care of John as we understand him!” In fact, the first person who held out his hand to me when I entered my first meeting was this same Colin S. John wasn’t there that day. There were about six other people who are still in DA today who were sitting in that room almost nine years ago.

I was desperate with fear, suicidal, and barely functioning. I realized as the meeting proceeded that I had finally come home. I knew I belonged in that room as I listened to the sharing. My sense of relief and hope was enormous.

When I had been in the program for only about three or four days, an incident occurred that I will never forget, because in a nutshell I think it sums up the character of the man who founded DA — his intelligence, vision, deep spiritual nature, and true compassion.

I could not wait to get to meetings, and one Friday afternoon I turned up at St. Patrick’s Cathedral Parish House, only to find out that the meetings had been cancelled. Someone had left two telephone numbers to call if anyone needed to talk after they found out no meeting was to take place that day. So I headed straight for a telephone and was walking along Madison Avenue when I bumped into Colin. He told me John H. had left those numbers and that he was the founder of DA. We chatted for a few minutes and then I rushed on to make that call.

Sure enough I reached John and he asked, “How bad is it?,” to which I replied, “Chronic and awful.” Then he said, “Where are you?” I told him I’d just left St. Patrick’s, so he suggested we meet at a restaurant nearby on Madison. He said he’d be over in 10 to 15 minutes. I had just come through an entire month of terror and isolation, walking around with a yellow bandana on my head because I was too depressed to wash my hair. I had torn stockings and was totally disheveled, but I couldn’t have cared less. Needless to say, I felt rather embarrassed walking into that restaurant to meet a total stranger to talk about something of which I was so ashamed.

We sat in a booth and I blurted out my whole story, sobbing along the way. John just sat there and listened and seemed to understand everything that I was talking about. I didn’t have to “translate” a thing, and when I finished about three hours later, he wrote something down on a piece of paper and pushed it over the table toward me and said, “You know, when I was coming over here in the cab, I was thinking about these words....” and on the piece of paper it said: “There is enough.”

That simply confused and annoyed me. How could he say there’s enough when I’m dying and don’t have any money left and I’m in a panic over the terrible lack? What a strange thing to say. How can there ever be enough, I thought...

But I couldn’t get over the fact that this total stranger had stopped working in the middle...

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How Debting Kept My Life From Happening

Winter 1990-1991

Ever since I was young I was a whiz in math. I got good grades on tests and aced every class. Math was always easy for me, as long as it wasn’t in my checkbook.

As I began to manage my own money the confusion set in, and all of a sudden it was like I couldn’t add two and two. I’d sit down with my checkbook and add and subtract with my super deluxe pocket calculator, and after a time I’d finally have to quit thinking that I could ever balance to the bank. My “committee” had plenty of explanations for this inability, most of them having to do with my incompetence and inability to participate in the world on any level. Over time my checkbook and my finances became an area of shame and embarrassment. My checking statement became a monthly reminder that I wasn’t good enough and that my “committee” and all “those people” who said I’d never make it were right. I had sabotaged myself to create proof that I wasn’t good enough.

When I arrived in DA I heard that “it’s not the money,” and somewhere down inside I knew they were right. I was told that all I had to do was to trust God and work the program to the best of my ability. I recorded my daily expenditures and kept records as best I could. I did pretty well after a time, just because I didn’t give up the first or second time I “forgot” to write something down. I knew I was fighting an uphill battle against my “committee” and against all of those deeply rooted negative messages many of us seem to have acquired over time. I just refused to surrender over an occasional setback. I just couldn’t do that to myself. I knew this program had the answer to my debting insanity, so I just kept putting one foot in front of another.

After a time, by using the tools, I had calmed down enough of the whirlwind of finance that I could begin to work the Steps. The Steps have been a slow process for me, but this is when the major miracles began occurring in my life. After I began working the Steps, my checkbook began to balance with less and less of a struggle, my debts got paid off, I lost much of my compulsiveness about money, calmness set in. I was beginning to live a 12-Step way of life.

What this means for me is that I have free time where no troubles, worries, or shame are hanging over my head, time that I don’t have to use worrying about work or payments or budgets or any of the other things I used to worry about. The only way I can describe it is to say that this time feels clean. It’s time to do with as I please; I’ve earned it. The 12 Steps have and are cleaning up my life.

I got to begin the process of finding out what I wanted to do when I finally discovered that I had the time to do whatever I wanted. Walk on the beach? Read a book? Go for a drive? I hadn’t ever done any of that before (unless, of course, YOU wanted to, but that’s another story!) I’ve gotten to take the time to begin to uncover not only my likes and dislikes, but also my vision (I never allowed myself one before--too many other obligations to fulfill.) It’s quite an adventure, not scary, just wonderful. DA has helped me get enough recovery to discover how to make the world a banquet, and now I’m feasting. I’m feeling safe and free.

One thing I always have said about DA recovery is that I love it because you can touch so many of the miracles. You can see them in black and white. A new car, a bill paid in full, a class taken to begin a dream, even a shift in attitude that impacts a life; recovery is tangible here. One miracle I’ve noticed in my own life is the process I go through every month now with my checkbook. When the statement arrives I open it, sit down, and balance my checkbook, to the bank, to the penny. First try, every try. Sometimes I don’t even use the super deluxe calculator. Do I love DA? You bet I do!

—Richard C.
Los Angeles
A Non-Debtor Views DA From An Inside Perspective

Winter 1992-1993

About 1983 I had a call from a most extraordinary man who has since become a good friend. John introduced himself as a member of the Debtors Anonymous Board of Trustees (I subsequently learned that he was a founder), and he told me the board was looking for someone to serve as a Class B, non-DA member trustee, and that a mutual friend had given him my name in light of my experience as a member of another, much larger 12-Step fellowship. Several meetings followed during which we discussed the commitment involved, and I tried to figure out whether the DA program made any sense at all.

As a result of John’s enthusiasm and ability to articulate what DA is, I came to understand compulsive debting and to believe that the DA program could provide help. Then, and repeatedly through the ensuing years, I recognized that I have had close friends, some of whom had made wonderful recoveries in other 12-Step programs, that suffered greatly from the problem of compulsively incurring unsecured debt.

I agreed to join the DA Board in 1984. At the time there about 30 groups in essentially four metropolitan areas. DA now has over 300 groups in 39 states and six foreign countries, many in locations in which there was not one recovering debtor in 1984.

Looking back to those first years of service on the board, I witnessed a few things that seem to me truly remarkable. First was the courage of John H., Donald A., Leila B., Joan S., Jim C., and John C. and others to establish a national board in such a young and tiny fellowship. Their faith and vision strike me as incredible. In those years there was not always a great deal of recovery, at least in terms of length, on the board. There was a lot of turnover, personality conflicts, and emotionalism. Despite these problems, the board never lost its vision of building a DA service structure and DA unity. Frequently the board took two steps forward, one backward, but it always kept the faith.

Second was the determination and daring of the DA Board to create links with the DA groups and the Fellowship it served. This was particularly true with respect to initiating a General Service Conference and the board’s willingness and desire to seek guidance from the DA groups through the Conference. AA did not establish a General Service Conference until there were over 100,000 members and groups in every U.S. state and Canadian province. I had grave reservations as to whether a Conference would work for DA so early on, but it has.

Unquestionably, the most rewarding aspect of my participation in DA has been the opportunity to associate with DA members. You are really very interesting people. Over time, I’ve arrived at certain generalizations (there are always exceptions) about the personal characteristics of compulsive debtors. Bear in mind that I’m a businessman, not a shrink, and for that reason I’m a little reluctant to make these observations. With that caveat, here they are:

From the beginning, I have been struck by how intelligent DA members are. It once occurred to me that if everyone at the board meeting in which I was sitting were given IQ tests, I would probably wind up in the lower quadrant. I also realize that an unusual number of you are highly educated and hold advanced degrees.

As time went on I also became aware that the debtors I met were generally very creative people, frequently in several areas. At the same time I was amazed and occasionally frustrated to observe that these charming, intelligent, well-educated, and creative folk seem to have some sort of dysfunction involving monetary considera-

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DA’s Publications Evolve Over The Years

Third Quarter 2008

Ways & Means

DA's Publications Evolve Over The Years
Third Quarter 2008

Ways & Means®
A Newsletter For the Fellowship Of Dharma Anonymous
Spring 2002

Trustees Have Vision Of A Vibrant D.A.
A vision of a growing, vibrant Fellowship, programs enough to provide a full range of services for members and groups, and fully integrated in a growing spirituality, has been expressed by the trustees of D.A.‘s General Service Board. The vision, outlined at the group’s headquarters in Berkeley, CA, is for an expanded level of growth in membership, service, and unity over the next few years. It also calls for a “transparency” effort on the part of the organization, individually and collectively, to show what its work is and what its priorities are in order to attract new members and increase public awareness. This statement is important for D.A. in order to attract new members and increase public awareness.

Focus On Prosperity
The work of the trustees is to ensure that the group’s programs are sufficient to meet the needs of its members and to support the overall growth of D.A. In the near future, the trustees will continue to look for ways to increase the group’s membership and to show the public what D.A. is all about. The trustees believe that D.A. is a growing and vibrant Fellowship that is important for the growth of spirituality.

Board Call
The General Service Board’s Newsletter to the Members of D.A.

Sacramento Busyly Prepares for the 18th World Service Conference
By now you should have received your conference registration packet. The Host Committee of Sacramento has been hard at work making sure that everyone gets the best possible experience at the conference. Registration is open until the end of the month and there are still many slots available. The conference will take place at the Crowne Plaza Hotel and include a variety of programs and activities. For more information, please visit the conference website or contact the Host Committee at (916) 456-7890.

DA Celebrates World Service Month 2006

Meeting by meeting, member by member...
DA founder, Bill W., was 35 years old when he was asked to lead the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935. The Fellowship had only just begun to grow and needed a leader to take it to new heights. Bill W. accepted the challenge and went on to lead the Fellowship for many years, helping it to grow and prosper. Today, the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous continues to grow and prosper, with more than 1 million members worldwide.

How to donate to DA
DA is a nonprofit organization that needs your support in order to continue its work. You can donate to DA in a variety of ways, including online, by phone, or by mail. To make a donation, please visit the DA website or contact the DA office at (916) 456-7890. Your donation will help DA continue to provide programs and services to those who need them most.

Ways & Means®
A Quarterly Newsletter For the Fellowship Of Dharma Anonymous
2002 2003 2004 2006

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In writing the title for this qualification, I wondered if it shouldn’t be “DA—It’s Shown Me How To Live!”, because that’s how it feels today. But on June 13, 1988, halfway into my first meeting (a beginners’ meeting led by my now-sponsor) it felt as though my life had just been saved. I heard this woman share her experience, strength, and hope; she and the others who shared spoke about money and their lives as I have never heard anyone else speak, but exactly as I thought, spoke, and lived! Then and there, I came to believe that Debtors Anonymous could and would save my life, if I didn’t debt and if I came to meetings and if I asked for help.

Until that moment, I was heading for hopelessness and doom. I was $165,000 in debt (although, of course, I didn’t know then the exact amount); I was months behind in my maintenance and mortgage (how many months?); I could barely walk, even with a cane, because I’d fallen down a flight of stairs at my new entry-level job in my new change-of-career career and I couldn’t get any results (payments) from Workers’ Compensation. I was all alone because I was ashamed to tell anyone of my precarious plight (they would abandon me if they knew the truth!); and I was terrified.

But without knowing it, I had taken the First Step that afternoon: I had taken the monumental risk of sharing honestly—mind you just a tiny-voiced confession to a friend—“I’m a bit worried about money,” when she’d called and then asked why I sounded so odd. (I hadn’t eaten or left my apartment in two days). Her response was the suggestion that I call DA and ask where I could find a meeting. I’d done that, and now I was “in the rooms” taking the Second Step. (I took the Third Step in the elevator on the way to hire a lawyer to keep me from losing my apartment, without any money to pay him).

I needed rescuing, and I got it from my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God, right away. I abstained from debting one minute, one day at a time. I was invited out to breakfast the next morning. Then a member of the Fellowship asked me to do a free-lance project after I shared at my next meeting. I found a sponsor, a pressure team. I took every suggestion I could, and prayed—page 165 in the Big Book and the Serenity Prayer—when I couldn’t. (I now call that the Sixth and Seventh Steps). I continued not debting, attended meetings, made telephone contact, and on my 90th day without debting, I qualified and I accepted a nomination for service as treasurer of that group. I went to a beginners’ meeting, a qualification meeting, and a Step meeting per week.

I’d read the Big Book and 12&12 from cover to cover in my first two weeks, and continued to do so and to ask people with long-term recovery, including doing the 12 Steps with a sponsor, for their points of view. I began my Fourth Step, and then I took my Fifth Step. I took my Sixth and Seventh Steps immediately after. Then, with my Eighth Step list, I began to make amends to those my sponsor had labeled “now,” and soon the “laters,” “much laters,” and “maybe nevers” began to show up in my life, giving me opportunities to grow and change. You got it! I was confused, anxious, insane/sane/insane, hopeful, eager, despairing, and finally humbler, more conscientious, happier, sadder, more joyful, and so, so grateful. I am a grateful compulsive debtor. I have received the lifesaving, life-changing gifts of the 12 Steps, the Tools of DA, sponsors, pressure people and fellow travelers on the path, and almost four years of therapy, all without debting. I am becoming happy, joyous, and free. The Promises (Ninth Step) are materializing for me, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. I am a more solid citizen, more responsible about my financial obligations, more clear about taking prompt action to keep my life manageable. I love my religion and appreciate my early religious education. I see my parents and their “addictions” with more realistic and compassionate eyes.

I feel freer to love and trust my Higher Power, the world, other

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with the DA logo incorporated into a nameplate. It was meant to be read individually, not during meetings, and subscriptions were offered. Each month, Anni would lovingly include every possible snippet of news from every corner of the tiny fellowship. She also began a one-woman effort to preserve DA’s history in print, at a time when virtually none of it had been written down.

Anni was astonished when, early in her recovery, she heard DA founder John H. express alarm that no one had recorded DA’s early history, and that it was in danger of being lost after just a few years. Resolving to preserve it for posterity, she worked with the fellowship’s oldest members to document DA’s early days. Her column, “Keeping The Fellowship Record”, was one of the most avidly read sections of Newsletter To The Groups. Each month she wrote about some aspect of DA’s early years. The surviving newsletters are of incalculable value today, because they contain a great deal of information that has not been recorded anywhere else.

The pace of producing a monthly newsletter took its toll, and in 1987, Anni was forced to cut the newsletter back to bimonthly publication, where it would remain until its transformation into Ways & Means. Health issues ultimately led to her resignation from the General Service Board, and a succession of other editors took over the newsletter.

After a few years of publication, DA’s trustees began to have a broader vision of a periodical for DA. In addition to pleas for contributions to provide services, and articles on events such as the World Service Conference and details of DA’s growth in a dozen cities around the country, there was a demand for recovery articles, a forum for sharing the experiences of individual members as they achieved more years of solvency.

With that in mind, Ways & Means was launched in the summer of 1988, with Trustee Donald A. listed as editor. The first issue was dated July/August 1988, but inexplicably, it was dated Vol. 2, No. 1, an anomaly no one can explain today. It contained a front-page story touting the newsletter’s new name and complete redesign, asking for contributions of “stories, poems, quotes (famous ones, or ones heard at meetings), letters and articles with messages of hope, cartoons, appropriate reprints from 12th Step literature, and so forth.” For the first time it identified itself on the nameplate as “A newsletter for the fellowship of Debtors Anonymous”, a designation that it continues to bear today.

From the very beginning, there were two trends that were to be evident throughout much of Ways & Means’ history. First, the editors had great difficulty in getting issues out on time, and second, despite herculean efforts, it was difficult, sometimes nearly impossible, to get DA members to write for it.

The two problems were closely related. Often, an issue would simply not be printed because no one had submitted any stories for it. Dozens of impassioned pleas for submissions would bring little or no response. Editors responded by writing large amounts of copy themselves, or relying on a small number of loyal trustees, GSRs, and others active in service work in DA to turn out copy to fill the pages. In 1991, after having failed for three years to produce the requisite six issues a year, publication was trimmed to quarterly, where it remains today. Even with a deadline every three months, there were years when only two or three issues appeared instead of four, although the GSB always kept its commitment to paid subscribers by delivering them the full number of issues they paid for.

This lack of interest in writing by the fellowship at large bedeviled every editor who served the newsletter over the years. One comment, from the General Service Board minutes in the 1990s, (Continued on page 10)
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is typical of many others: “The bad news is that we are simply not receiving submissions of shares from members, so this issue, like others, we have pulled together on our own. Frankly, I don’t know what to do about it. I am personally unwilling to call up people and constantly ask them to send in a share. To me, that feels like being a creditor for an action; it feels like codependency to bug people about the ‘when’ of things—either they will be accountable or not, to get something done once the need is made known.”

This frustration led to frequent changes of editors over the years. Most editors were trustees on the GSB, while a few were volunteers working under GSB supervision and there was one experiment for a few years with a paid editor. Among the longer-term editors over the years were Richard C., Lee L., Suze G., and Kieran K. Many others served as editor for just one or two issues.

Another frustration over the years was the lack of paid subscribers. Subscriptions rose and fell over time, but never reached more than about 300. Efforts to make and keep Ways & Means self-supporting were a continual thorn in the fellowship’s side.

Despite these problems, Ways & Means has fulfilled the dreams of its founders, at least some of the time. Some brilliant, highly inspired writing has appeared in its pages over the years: founder John H. detailing the spiritual and emotional growth that led to his recovery, former GSB chair Marjorie M. launching the “visions” movement within DA with an inspired discussion of “next stage recovery”; and an article by a member from Seattle that set off a firestorm of reaction after announcing her reasons for leaving DA.

In 1998, the General Service Board attempted to resolve Ways & Means’ “identity crisis” by spinning off a separate publication that would contain service news and the GSB’s view of the fellowship. The GSB Quarterly News, which later became Board Call and is today known as the DA Focus, freed up much more space in Ways & Means for recovery articles. The move gave each of DA’s two quarterly newsletters its own clearly defined mission and identity.

Ironically, the split into two newsletters almost sank Ways & Means. With few submissions, it became harder and harder to put out an issue. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the GSB came very close to discontinuing Ways & Means for good. A vote of the World Service Conference in Baltimore in 2001 gave it one year on life support before the plug would be pulled.

But support from the Conference, and belief in the newsletter’s mission would keep it alive until a new incarnation could emerge. At the suggestion of the WSC Fellowship Communications Committee, Ways & Means underwent a metamorphosis over the next few years. It became both a print and an online publication, with the online version free to view and download. After the full complement of print issues had been sent to subscribers, the print edition was discontinued, and for the past few years Ways & Means has existed free and online. Web site statistics indicate a high readership, and many groups and individuals download and print out copies for personal and meeting use. Utilizing its new format, the electronic newsletter has a greater readership than ever before.

As Ways & Means enters its third decade, it is going through a period of growth and innovation. In the last year, the number of pages has grown dramatically, from a static 28 per year to more than 40. Articles detailing DA’s history are again appearing after a hiatus of many years, and a new emphasis on “recovery stories,” articles written by people with years of strong DA recovery has sparked new interest. There are plans in the year ahead to begin running photographs of some of DA’s most important historic sites.

Most importantly, Ways & Means still fulfills the dream of Anni W. and the other trusted servants who started it, of bringing the fellowship together in understanding and unity, of providing a forum for members to share their experience, strength, and hope with one another, and as always, of carrying the DA message to the debtor who still suffers.
From The Beginning
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people, and myself, because I have the “sober” reference of knowing from my own experience that I can trust ME! I live in Steps 10, 11, and 12, as best as I can, and I accept, enjoy (I am determined to enjoy) my life.

The proof? I’ve now sold my apartment (it came within 12 hours of being auctioned off in foreclosure in 1988), and made or am in the process of making all financial amends. I’ve moved to the other side of my city, and I love it! To my surprise (always!), the more I work the program, the more I change. The more I change, the more I become my true, real, own self, and I love it!

I’m still seeking “right” work, but I know it’s all right as long as I’m in the process of learning HP’s will for me. When I practice the principles in all my affairs, I have more serenity to accept the things I cannot change, more courage to change the things I can, and more wisdom to know the difference.

Trust, faith, and self-loyalty seem to be my antidote to trouble, turbulence, and self-loathing. My reflexive, defensive thinking and behavior, my heretofore blind spots, are receding. Respect for me and others—all life—is growing. DA saved my life and put my feet on the path to happy destiny!

—Elaine S.
New York City

13 Years
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of a hectic workday in the center of Manhattan, had sat with me for three hours, had understood everything I said, and didn’t seem fazed by it. And most of all, he didn’t judge me.

To this day, I don’t think John knows that I was expecting him to pick up the check when it came, but in fact he paid his own and let me pay mine. In a strange way for me at that time, his action was a compliment, because implicitly he was saying, “You CAN take care of yourself.” It gave me a momentary feeling of self-esteem.

I had the good fortune to have John in my pressure group for the first four or five years in the program, where I was the recipient of a lot of hard lessons and tough love. I gradually developed a new attitude about money. (I’ve always thought that DA should stand for “Different Attitudes.”) I began working the 12 Steps of AA, substituting the word “debt” for alcohol.

It was through John that I truly started to learn and understand about God working in my life, but I kicked and screamed and protested along the way. I argued and wanted proof and was very skeptical, but I followed the suggestions of my pressure group anyway. My life started to change and improve.

I am deeply grateful to John H. and to all DA members.

—Joan M.
New York City

Article Submissions

Submissions are now being accepted for the 4th Quarter 2008 issue of Ways & Means, due out in November.

This will be a “regular” issue, for stories on any aspect of DA recovery or service. There is considerable flexibility on article length, which can range from 200 to 1200 words.

All submissions are subject to editing for length and clarity. Deadline for the 4th Quarter issue is October 15, 2008.

To submit an article, send by e-mail to waysandmeansda@hotmail.com or by postal mail to Ways & Means, c/o DA General Service Office, PO Box 920888, Needham, Mass. 02492.

Questions and comments should be directed to the same address.

While articles are welcome on all aspects of personal recovery and DA service, Ways & Means is particularly interested in stories on the following topics: practices that build strong groups and intergroups, the history of DA in your city or state, sponsorship, working the 12 Steps, how members apply the 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts to their recovery, and the personal stories of “longtimers” who have refrained from incurring unsecured debt for 10 or more consecutive years.
Non-Debtor’s View
(Continued from page 5)

tions—cash flow, the relationship of what comes in to what goes out, and so forth. A more recent observation is that compulsive debtors often have difficulty finding a career path that utilizes their very considerable talents and provides the rewards, both financial and spiritual, that they seek and deserve. This also seems to be true of pre-DA friends I suspect had a severe debting problem. As DA recovery has progressed, I have happily seen some indication that the program can provide help in this area as well.

Participating in DA from a somewhat detached perspective, it strikes me that the Fellowship is still in the process of defining its singleness of purpose. Some members feel the primary purpose should be rather strictly defined in terms of recovery from unsecured (money) debting. Others talk of “time,” “self,” and “emotional” debting. All of these views were expressed, without acrimony, at the 1991 World Conference. I am confident that if DA members maintain the spirit reflected at the Conference, these questions will at some point be answered. At the same time, recognizing the great need that compulsive money debtors have for the help DA can clearly give them, I feel it is vital that groups retain a focus and not simply try to be all the things that people walking into the doors of DA meetings might want DA to be.

It also seems to me that the way DA “long timers” view their own debting problem will be critical to DA’s survival as a 12-Step fellowship. Will they come to feel, as they achieve solvency, that their problem was a dysfunction, or possibly a defect of character from which they have recovered, or, borrowing from AA’s disease concept, a condition that has been arrested but not cured. During a recent board meeting we discussed just what compulsive debting is. One view was that it does not much matter what word is used so long as it is understood that a debtor cannot go back to unsecured debting without risking a return to the hopelessness that brought him or her to DA.

For DA to grow, indeed to survive, as a fellowship offering help to the suffering debtor, members will have to understand and practice DA’s 12 Steps and DA’s 12 Traditions as they work to achieve solvency. This means acknowledging that continuing recovery requires carrying the DA message, in other words, some form of DA service. It means that groups and members will need to appreciate the necessity for DA unity and the idea that a group has but one primary purpose—to carry the DA message. These principles are clearly stated in your 12 Traditions and are implicit in the 12th Step.

During my first years on the board I was concerned about the long-term commitment of members once they achieved solvency and even “abundance.” The concern was twofold: 1) whether recovery would be maintained by those who did not stay involved, and 2) whether DA could meet the challenges of growth and fill the very clear need for its message if it were simply a fellowship of newcomers. Now, down the road a little, I’m far less concerned. I know members who have achieved happy recoveries who talk about their need to stay connected. These long timers have remained active and dedicated in DA service at all levels.

One final observation: DA’s tools are truly remarkable, pragmatic, and effective. They give newcomers a simple focus in their effort to climb out of the abyss of compulsive debting. Simultaneously, DA is a 12-Step program, and I hope that the early concentration on the marvelous Tools will not deter debtors from truly working DA’s Steps for the opportunity to experience the spiritual recovery and the joy to be found in living a life based on the simple principles encompassed in the Steps.

When all is said and done, DA’s Steps simply suggest that compulsive debtors live a life of love and service to the best of their ability, in all areas of their lives. In so doing, I believe DA promises both a way out of financial despair and a means of dealing with the problems that beset all of us who share the human condition.

—George D.
Tiburon, California
Remembering Those Who’ve Gone Before Us...

We Remember Leila B., Pioneer In California

Leila B., whose life of service ended on September 17, helped to make Debtors Anonymous a truly national fellowship when she started DA in California. She was a trustee on the General Service Board, served on countless pressure groups, was sponsor to dozens of members, and is lovingly remembered by the entire fellowship. Due to illness, she was unable to attend the Washington (World Service) Conference. where she was sorely missed. A memorial service was held for her in New York City on Sunday, October 15 at The Lambs Theater.

(November/December 1989)

In Memory Of John D., Early Member In LA

John D. passed away in late December 1993. John was one of the first five DA members in Los Angeles.

John established a Sunday meeting at a savings and loan in the posh community of Beverly Hills. As he shared his recovery in his spiritual and financial journey, he attracted people from a long distance. The meeting became “standing room only.” We had to have folding chairs donated to seat the crowd. When that building was torn down, he got us a new room. That room, too, would be filled to overflowing. We listened and were inspired about the small spiritual struggles in life: how he worked to eliminate an unwanted habit of buying and eating frozen yogurt; his spiritual discoveries about hidden assumptions concerning relationships, family, work and earning or debt. We heard truth and remarkable candor to “uncover, discover, discard” blocks to recovery.

John had a standing time each week for giving pressure groups. At least one of the people he helped was able to come from poverty to ownership of her own condo. Another went from sleeping in his car to chief executive officer of a thriving company. John shared his DA recovery with many other audiences, which brought us a stream of newcomers. He personally sponsored many, and met with them weekly to guide and inspire them. As the recovered, they became members of the meetings and inspired yet others in applying the Steps to their debt problem.

When DA began to have national conferences, John became a representative from Southern California. He worked on the Public Information Committee, helping to carry the message of recovery via radio, TV, and the press. He helped complete the national PI guidebook, attending the 1991 Conference in San Francisco. In 1992, our General Service Board honored John. In the discussions prior to the award, our trustees who live throughout the U.S. could immediately recognize who John was, that he wore sandals as part of his distinctive style, and that he had contributed to our work and had a place in their hearts.

(September 1994)

Susan P. Of Boston, DA Doer And Dreamer

Susan P., longtime member and GSR of Boston DA and co-chair of last year’s World Service Conference died from lung cancer on May 1.

I’d like to say a few words to acknowledge the gifts Susan shared with all of us who knew her. What can I say about my joyful friend? She was a dreamer. She entered, lived, and actively pursued her dreams. She was dedicated to the creation, discovery, and realization of all of our dreams. Once, on her birthday, Susan had her friends to her house to have a pressure group for the Earth. Susan was the first person who gave permission to dream for the sheer power of dreaming. She dreamt of living in a supreme spiritual state. Her whole life was dedicated to taking care of herself, loving herself, and being the person her spirit was meant to be. I pray that we may all be as loving and dedicated to ourselves and to our communities as Susan was to hers.

My knowledge and my prayer is that Susan is as joyous now as she ever dreamed of being, that she is in harmony with the Earth. My knowledge and my prayer is that her energy, at once released and eternal, dances in the universe, drawing us all to our dreams, calling us to ourselves, showing us our way home. May we love ourselves and one another in her memory.

(3rd Quarter 1993)
Around The Fellowship

Non-Profit Status
Debtors Anonymous is now officially incorporated as a non-profit corporation by the State of New York. We are awaiting our IRS tax-exempt status, but donations made after the incorporation will be legally deductible. Many thanks to our Legal Committee chaired by Trustee John S. for arranging for this legal work. (Newsletter To The Groups – March 1987)

First Regional Directory
As of January 1990, listings of meetings and contacts for our 12 regions worldwide are now available from the General Service Office. This information, plus whatever is received by early February, will comprise the first World Meeting Directory. (January/February 1990)

Audio Tapes Now Available
DA’s first literature audio tape is now available for purchase by individuals or groups directly from the General Service Office. This tape is a reading of the basic DA pamphlet and the pamphlet on Pressure Groups and Pressure Meetings, and is of excellent sound quality. Tapes will also be available for sale at the World Service Conference. (2nd Quarter 1993)

Computer Pals Project
DA members who wish to communicate with each other by the relatively new technology of computers can obtain a confidential list of members available via computer bulletin boards of electronic mail. Write to the General Service Office with the notation “Attention Computer Pals.” Please fill out the coupon on page 5 if you wish to be included on this list, or to receive it. Note: DA does not promote or endorse the use of computer networking services. This service is provided via the Fellowship Communications Committee, which also runs a Pen Pals project for those who wish to communicate by letter or who wish to receive long-distance phone calls. (September 1994)

Hope Becomes Reality
After seven years in the making, the first DA book, A Currency Of Hope, has been published and is now available. A commemorative first edition is bound in a “prosperity green” hard cover, but only 1,500 copies were printed for a one-time opportunity to support the Fellowship. The limited first edition costs $20, while a standard paperback edition costs $11.95. Although no discounts are available on the limited first edition, significant discounts are available for group orders of the paperback.

The 200-page book is the result of seven years of effort by dozens of DA members. It is a collection of 38 personal stories by DA members from all walks of life. Their stories reflect a wide spectrum of DA experience, strength, and hope as they share their road to recovery through the DA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. (Summer 1999)

Back Issues Wanted
The DA Archives are seeking donation of back issues of Ways & Means and other past and present DA publications. Issues of Ways & Means from the period 1995-2000 are particularly important, but issues from any year will be accepted. Also being sought are any back issues of the Newsletter To The Groups, GSB Quarterly News, Board Call, and DA Focus, as well as any local and regional newsletters. Please send donations to DA General Service Office, PO Box 920888, Needham, Mass. 02492, and mark “For Archives” on the envelope or package. (3rd Quarter 2008)