

HELP WANTED -- FOR GSR MAILING LIST

DA needs a volunteer who is willing to be custodian of its mailing list for GSRs and board members on computer disk. The list is on DATA-EASE Version 2.5 software, which runs on a 640K IBM compatible computer. The program is easy to learn and operate, easy to modify, and can be programmed to generate lists, mailing labels, and short mail-merge type letters. Susan W., whose company donated the software and manual, says that the ideal candidate for the job of list custodian would be someone with a computer at home who can use the software and who has a dot matrix printer that can run the labels, who has some knowledge of different software programs and, most of all, is willing to learn and to serve. As updates are received from the various groups, they must be entered and/or deleted.

If you would like to volunteer for this job, the GSO would be very grateful for your help. Please contact Pam M. or John C. at the DA address given on page one of this newsletter.

COMING TO TERMS WITH SPIRITUALITY

The following share was sent to us from someone who adapted it from the work of Bill B. in another 12-Step program:

I can tell you this: a spiritual experience was absolutely essential for my recovery. The experience didn't

come fast and it didn't come easily. As I meet other people joining the Program, I always hope their spiritual awakening will come faster than mine did. But then, each of us is different, and we come to terms with spirituality in our own time. In Dr. Bob's story in the Big Book, he tells how he had his first real spiritual experience after two and half years of sobriety. If it took Dr. Bob that long, I think we can be patient and allow ourselves some time.

I did everything backwards for such a long time. I'd plan my priorities like this: "First, I'll get my money under control; second, I'll straighten my head out; and finally, if I have the time and patience, I'll try to get a little spirituality." Time after time, I'd try to redirect my life that way. But I'd always fail; eventually my plan would give way and I'd be back with my old behavior. The Big Book is quite clear when it says that only after the spiritual malady is taken care of will other things be corrected. All those years, it was pointless for me to work on the physical and mental aspects of my life without first working on my spirituality. This Program can free us from those temporary, self-defeating plans to improve our lives.

I always assumed a spiritual experience would be a real drama: I'd instantly be charged with a great dynamic force. Of course, it didn't work out that way. Even when I actually had that first spiritual experience, my expectations about it were unrealistic. I was surprised, having undergone this "transformation," that I still had to wait in line at the supermarket. I thought that somebody who'd had a spiritual experience would surely get through the line quickly. A later spiritual experience told me that it was okay to wait

in line. Since that time, I have learned to enjoy an unexpected wait in a line. It gives me a chance to look around at other people and their reactions; it also gives me time to think.

A welling-up inside or a feeling of well-being that fills your consciousness -- that's really the best way I know to describe my own spiritual experiences. The Big Book describes it in terms of feeling "safe and protected." When I'm in fit spiritual condition, I feel comfortable and sure that God is with me at all times.

For me, getting to that point could only be accomplished by living each of the Twelve Steps. The longer I live those steps, the more I feel comfortable and sure about myself and others and have no desire to debt compulsively. I've come to like myself and I don't get down on myself anymore. I don't have that bottom line feeling that I'm basically bad. The shame is gone.

I've come to terms with my fantasies. I know I'll never achieve some of the goals I've had for my life. I can accept that and move ahead to concentrate on goals that are attainable. I do have something now that I never thought possible -- peace of mind.

Most days, real happiness and self-acceptance make it unnecessary, even unthinkable, for me to compulsively debt. I have discovered that the greatest spiritual experience of all lies within me.

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March/April 1989

Ways & Means

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Happy
13th
Anniversary,
DA

Memories of the Early Days

On April 26, 1989, DA celebrated its 13th year of existence. Joan M., one of the early members of Debtors Anonymous has recorded her memories about how it all began for her:

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 if 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.

Memories (continued)

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 the 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 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 Shrafft's 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 bandanna on my head because I was too depressed to wash my hair. I had torn stockings and was totally dishevelled, 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 of a hectic work day in the center of Manhattan, had sat with me for three hours, had understood everything I said, and didn't seem phased by it. And, most of all, he didn't judge me.

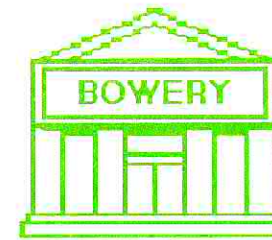
To this day, I don't think John knows that I was expecting him to pick up the check when it came, but in fact he paid his own and let me pay mine. In a strange way for me at that time, his action was a compliment, because implicitly he was saying, "You really CAN take care of yourself." It gave me a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

I had the good fortune to have John in my pressure group for the first four or five years or so 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. ###

JOHN H. REMEMBERS

In January, at the Winter Lights Luncheon in San Francisco, John H., the Founder of DA, reminisced about the early days of DA. He told the assembled guests that, starting in 1968, he and Howard, an AA friend, met regularly to try to get a grip on their money problems. At first they started an organization called "Capital Builders," reasoning



that since they felt their problem was not having enough money, what they needed to do was build up some capital. As time went on, other people started to join the group. New members of Capital Builders would walk next door and open an account with a dollar at the Bowery Savings Bank. This was the way they thought they should handle their money problems. As Capital Builders grew, John said, so did disagreements. In time the group fell apart, and Howard got the idea that they were compulsive debtors. That's the day -- December 1970 -- John says, that DA was born as an idea, because they realized that the answer to their money problems lay in letting go of compulsive debting one day at a time.

Fortunatus Interruptus

"What we're suffering from in DA is *fortunatus interruptus*," John went on to say. "Debt becomes the contraceptive of life -- it gets in the way of our getting on with life. Recovery is about getting on with it, about what our lives are becoming. Prosperity is the ability to proceed with hope."

John concluded his remarks at the luncheon with this prayer from

The Divine Milieu

by Teilhard de Chardin

If we believe, then everything is illuminated and takes shape around us:

Chance is seen to be order, success assures an incorruptible plentitude, suffering becomes a visit and a caress of God.

But if we hesitate, the rock remains dry, the sky dark, the waters treacherous and shifting. And we may hear the voice of the Master, faced with our bungled lives:

"O men of little faith, why have you doubted . . ."

DA IN 1989

From six meetings and 25 members in 1980, Debtors Anonymous has grown slowly but steadily to the point now where it is estimated that we have approximately 3500 members attending 170 meetings in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia.

We now have a Board of Trustees with members in various parts of the United States who meet four times a year to handle DA's business activities. The General Service Board acts as a central clearing house for all matters that affect DA groups. The GSB handles correspondence from the general public and from DA groups worldwide. It provides literature to start new meetings throughout the world. DA's prosperity has grown to the point where the Finance Committee



of DA, working with the Board of Trustees, is working to find and furnish a brand new General Service Office.

Let's congratulate ourselves and look forward to another year in DA's history -- a year of commitment to support DA in its work of reaching out to debtors who still suffer.