



A COUPLE THINGS BETTY WHITE AND I HAVE IN COMMON

by Matt W.

I woke at dawn with wet pants on the living room couch of a waitress named Barb I was trying unsuccessfully to bed down. She liked me as a friend. During the night she had covered me with a blanket her Nana had knitted for her, and I had peed all over it. I escaped, threw Nana's blanket in a dumpster, and never answered another of Barb's phone calls.

This and other shameful moments sometimes keep me up at night. During these long hours I talk to myself in languages I barely know. Nana's blanket is gone. Barb became a dental assistant and moved to Minot, so there are no easy answers, but as a recovering person, I need to find a way to let go of my former filthiness.

Enter NA, where we have the ability, at yearly intervals, to give a celebratory acceptance speech in front of our friends and family. I do not count the 30 day, 60 day, 90 day, 6 month, or 9 month speeches, which should be immediately rescinded in Minnesota, as they already are in meetings in the less pansy and enabling states. Newcomers should get a key tag, a hug, and a special chance to sit back down in their seat. Once, in Florida, I saw an old-timer named Buck put a lit cigarette out on the neck of a newcomer who wouldn't stop talking, and this was at Denny's, during fellowship, in the non-smoking section. Buck had some outside issues.

Though an analogy is often drawn between our annual speeches and those given by the winners of Academy Awards, the bloated introductions given by our friends, relatives, and attention thieves—you know this guy, he goes up right after your sponsor, to a communal eye-roll, and after a quick introduction that, at least on a surface has something to do with you, says: "You were at my first meeting, and since then I've been going through a lot of things, starting with a girl in this room, who gave me herpes and afterwards put in a restraining order against me just because I wanted to see her at three a.m. forty-two days in a row..."—actually place our clean-time speeches only a montage shy of the celebration that often barely pre-dates a eulogy, the Lifetime Achievement Award.

One thing people for whom this program becomes paradigm have in common is a love of the sound of our own voices. I have a sexual reaction to mine. We are narcissists who struggle our entire lives to move one degree toward the consideration of those pesky demons called people who populate a universe we secretly believe was created for us. This is what connects our speech most clearly to the Lifetime Achievement Award. During clean-time speeches we can finally stop pretending we care. On that night everyone becomes what in our minds they have always been: minor characters in our movie.

These speeches are the antidote to shame. People clap, cheer and cry. They tell us, in a parade of introductions that sometimes simply won't stop, that we are heroes. This praise, often the first true victory of our lives, is stored somewhere deep in the subconscious, where during the midnight shift it battles the addict voice that shows up and says, Everyone thinks you are a peeing idiot. The addict is convincing, but a tearful friend telling us, in front of a room full of people that we have saved their lives is undeniable, and that is why our speeches matter. They are warm, dry blankets that separate us from the wet ones we threw away a long time ago.

ONE TIME by Steven P.

One time. Two times.
Three times. More times.
Why try to count one time?
Trying that equals a thousand
times of lies.



RECOVERING LIFE by James G.

When I first came to NA, I did not enter it with open arms. I entered my thirty day treatment program as one of those “fake it to make its” and was just focusing on being out of jail and intending on continuing using until I was ready quit. Little did I know what was in store for me in the following months ahead.

I had six years of getting high everyday under my belt and I was quite positive I wasn’t by any means ready to quit, not without a fight anyway. Well let the inner conscience battles begin. I was positive that I liked being able to mask my past from myself with the cloudiness that drugs offered. I *enjoyed* being able to turn off my mind for long periods of time. Frankly the mere thought of living clean scared the hell out of me.

The first couple days in treatment I walked around with a “deer caught in the headlights” look. Being very lost and unsure of myself, I started feeling that maybe there was some truth to what the treatment counselors were trying to instill upon me. On my third day of inpatient I decided to make what would later be called the best decision of my life and give treatment a shot. A lot of people don’t give themselves a chance to open up and accept that they have an addiction. If I had not made an honest effort in treatment, there is absolutely no way I would still be alive today.

I initially entered seeking help for a marijuana addiction, but after grasping the fact that this is a program based on honesty, I decided to come clean about my severe use of narcotic pain relievers as well. In replacing food with pills I had not only lost 90 lbs and looked like death, but I lost the people who cared most about me along with my self respect.

I make it a point not to share too much about this upcoming incident because it is very painful to bring up but I feel that putting this out there could really save a life. My mom and I were very close my entire life and she was the kind of mom who I was really able to tell absolutely everything to. Three years ago she fell ill due to diabetic heart complications. When she was going through rehabilitation from several heart attacks and open heart surgery, we were still able to somewhat keep our close-knit relationship via phone. Despite me going through what I now call my “teenage dick head phase”. That was, until, she had called to see how I was doing. At the time I was (unsuccessfully) looking for a bag. We got into a heated argument about the negative effects the person I dating at the time had on me. I misread her concerns and took them as a personal insult. In my moment of frustration about her comments and not being able to find a bag that she should go f*** herself. Told her I hated her and never to talk to me again and hung up. That was last time I spoke with my mother.

I called the following day to apologize for the argument her personal nurse answered the phone and informed me my mom had passed away during the night due to cardiac arrest. Upon hearing this I threw my cell phone down and immediately went to go smoke weed. I was filled with regret and fear. I realized I would never again be able to tell her I loved her, or how much she meant to me, and most importantly how sorry I was. I see now that I was a moody teenager, and moody teenagers have these types of conversations with their parents from time to time. I just wish it hadn’t been the last one she and I would ever have. CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

RECOVERING CONT.

The next few years they were the worst of my life. They were a drug-induced blur. I was living with severe depression and an extreme amount of guilt. I came close to dying many times because of lethal combinations and if it wasn't for GOD looking out for me I would be dead. If it wasn't for my Dad, the justice system, and most importantly GOD, I would've died from an overdose the day before I entered jail. After doing time for a drug-related crime, I was released and began treatment. Recently, through talks with my sponsor that I realized the last conversation with her was the drugs talking and not me, that she is looking down on me with a proud heart for bettering my life. Through GOD's mercy I have learned that everyone is here for a purpose and I feel that mine is to spread the message of recovery and hope.

I am proud to say that I am living just for today and am enjoying living clean. I have had consequences but that's life teaching me lessons of how important it is to be clean and healthy. I've gained a lot of positive people in my life. My weight is coming back (and then some), and some of my family have returned too. All this has taught me how precious life is. I urge everyone to take their recovery seriously and know the Lord is always with you. You are worth it and people do care about you! No matter how harsh they may seem when trying to get you help, they are only doing it because they care. And ultimately, after gaining a little bit of clean time, you will begin to see how important life *really* is and how insignificant drugs are in the big scheme of things. Please choose help, because it all comes down to the matter of choosing life or death.

THE SEED OF NA by B.L.

My name is BL, and I am a recovering addict. I was brought up in the Bronx, in a middle-class family. My father was a construction worker, and my mom stayed home and took care of the apartment. I had an older sister. I just never felt like I belonged. I didn't belong to my family and I didn't fit in with the other kids. I wasn't good at sports, and wasn't that bright academically. I just didn't belong!

There was an older kid who lived across the street; he was a loner, and I felt comfortable around him. We started smoking cigarettes in the back alley of his apartment building. Then I met another guy who I thought was cool. He was a loner too, but he made it look like he wanted to be a loner. I smoked my first joint with him. Then I met others just like me who felt good around each other as long as we had a common bond—getting high.

We all know what the progression of the disease is like. My family moved to a different neighborhood in Queens. I met others who were doing drugs, and proceeded to do it as much as I could. The lifestyle of getting, using, and finding ways and means to get more took over. I was that loner doing whatever I needed to do for the next one.

The short version of my using history is that I was arrested five different times for five different felony charges. Each time I went to a New York state prison for varying lengths of time, plus I was sent back four different times on parole violations. From the age of nine to the age of 42, I spent 17 years behind the walls of state prisons. I also spent approximately two years in various short-term mental hospitals and observation wards. When I wasn't locked up, I was imprisoned by the disease, caught up in the grips of active addiction. During that period I never gave much thought to God or a Higher Power, but that doesn't mean God wasn't paying attention to me! He had a plan. All I was capable of planning was my next stick-up or next high, but God had plans for me!

I went from a maximum-security-status inmate to a medium-security-status inmate and was moved to the medium-security part of the prison. My cubicle was located in the unit that was the prison's drug program. I hadn't signed up for the drug program. I never told them I had a drug problem. I didn't want to be there, but it was the only medium-security bed available, so there I was. When I realized that all the addicts were in that unit, and that was where the contraband was, I quickly signed up for the drug program. For the first time in my using history I admitted to someone else that I was an addict.

FOR NOW by Tom P.

For now I'm taking things one blink at a time
I no longer put myself last in line
separate what I from what I want
freeing my ghost for somewhere else to haunt

For now there is only one thing to do
embracing the old cleanses the new
those who give will always get back
there is a compromise to things you lack

For now this so important to me
I know an orphan named spirituality
so many prayers that need to be spoken
for the countless rules that I've broken

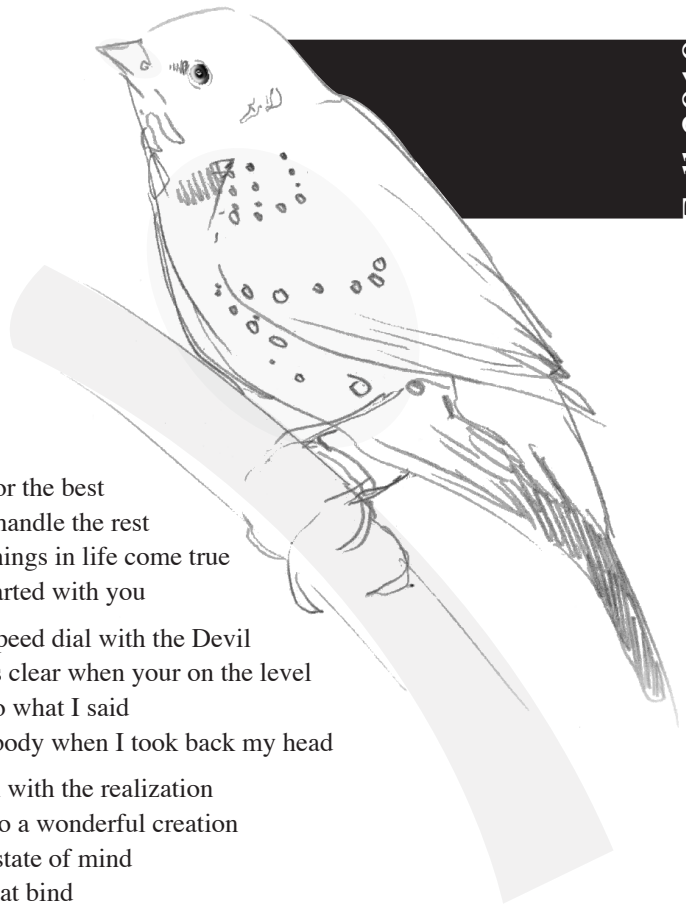
For now the hills are jagged and slanted
time to retain what was taken for granted
leaving behind all that's spoiled and rotten
reflecting on how terrible its gotten

For now I can only concentrate on my goals
its gonna take a while to fill in all the hole
I want results and I want them now
the virtue of patience is the will and know how

For I can only hope for the best
I will rely on God to handle the rest
may all of the good things in life come true
my winning streak started with you

For now I'm not on speed dial with the Devil
how the conscience is clear when your on the level
I say what I do and do what I said
the imposter left my body when I took back my head

For now a fascination with the realization
an infant introduced to a wonderful creation
freedom is not just a state of mind
severed are the ties that bind



THE SEED CONT.

I didn't get clean then; I continued to use for another six years. I was convicted of a fifth felony. But the seed of recovery was planted. From my perspective in recovery, I see that the hand of God was beginning to work in my life. In 1983 I met the addictions counselor when I signed up, and 20 minutes into our first meeting he said to me that he was going to teach me some things and make me his "in-mate peer counselor." He did, and I became the inmate counselor; we'd all get loaded and do group and have a great time. Like I said, I got out that time, and caught another bid. At the end of that last prison term, I was 42 years old with nowhere to go. I wound up in a program for ex-cons with an addiction history, and was guided into the rooms of NA.

After completing that parolee program, I moved out. I was going to meetings, doing step work with my sponsor, taking suggestions, and living the program to the best of my ability. I got a call from the director of that parole program, asking me if I wanted to work there as a counselor. He said they would train me, since I had some experience. So I said "yes" and started my career as an addictions specialist, which, thus far, has afforded me a decent living. All my clients were on parole, and because they all lived in the same place, they had the same parole officer. The parole officers would rotate about once every year.

I had been working there for approximately four years when something amazing happened. I received a call from the parole office to bring my guys down so they could meet their new parole officer. So there I was, the ex-con, recovering addict, parole program counselor, meeting the new parole officer who turned out to be the very same ex-drug counselor who first taught me counseling skills! Way back then, he saw something in me that I was incapable of seeing in myself. God knew, and I believe He had a plan.

It was a nice reunion between me and my ex-counselor and mentor; we discussed the irony of it all. I believe God smiled at us that day with an extra twinkle in His eye. I'm now 61 years old, and am in my 19th year of recovery. Thank you for allowing me to share.