

Many Voices, One Message: Revising our Basic Text

Q: What has been through five editions but hasn't changed?

Most of us felt "different," in one way or another, almost all of our lives. NA is home for us because, at last, we have a place we feel we belong. But for many of us, that sense of being "a part of" did not come the minute we walked through the doors of our first meeting. Listening to others' stories helped us to identify, and some of us remember the moment when we first heard someone speak or share and we thought to ourselves, "That sounds just like me."

It has been more than twenty years since our stories were first collected for the Basic Text. Much in NA has changed over those decades, and now the time has come again for our gratitude, as a fellowship, to speak. Over the next few years, we will be collecting members' stories and experience to include in a revision of the Basic Text, which will be up for approval in 2008. We hope that a revised personal stories section will better reflect the diversity of NA today, speaking to *all* of our members as well as the addicts who have not found us yet.

This is the first of what we expect will be regular reports in *The NA Way Magazine* about the Basic Text project. We also will give updates in *NAWS News* and on our website: <http://www.na.org/conference/index.htm>.

We made a decision

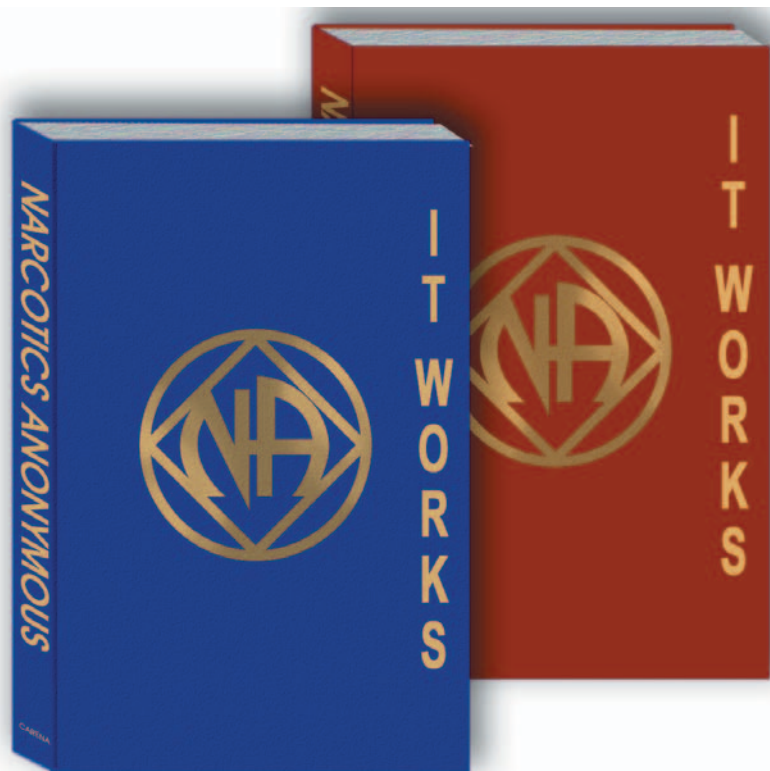
The story of revising (and not revising) the Basic Text is as long or short as one wants to make it. Those of you who are interested in the history leading up to this particular project can see the essay beginning on page 15 of the 2004 *Conference Agenda Report*: <http://www.na.org/WSC2004/car-toc.htm>. In a nutshell, the 2004 World Service Conference passed a motion that ended six years of deliberation ... at last, we have made a decision.

What did we decide?

The motion passed by the conference approved work on revisions including replacing some or all of the personal stories, adding a new preface to the Basic Text, and adding a brief introduction to the personal stories section. No changes will be made to Chapters One through Ten or to the existing preface and introduction.

It's a new day

One of the main motivations to revise the personal stories section of the text is to capture the experience, strength, and hope of our diverse fellowship. NA really is a worldwide fellowship. When the Basic Text was first approved in 1982, there were about 2,700 weekly NA meetings, almost all of which were in the United States. Today we have more than 30,000 weekly meetings in 116 countries. And our growth hasn't just been geographic; our fellowship has a richness of age, ethnicity, clean time, sexual identity, and personal experience we could only dream of more than twenty years ago.



A: The personal stories in the Basic Text.

We know NA can work for all addicts, but how can we best illustrate that? If we hope for a selection of personal stories that distills the broad variety of experience of our members, we will have to try a broad variety of approaches. When we say we will be collecting personal stories for a proposed new edition of the Basic Text, that does not simply mean we will send out a solicitation like a *News Flash*, see what we get, and select the best of the lot to include in a revised stories section. But that is only part of the story. We are talking through all kinds of new ideas for the revision itself and the means to accomplish the revision.

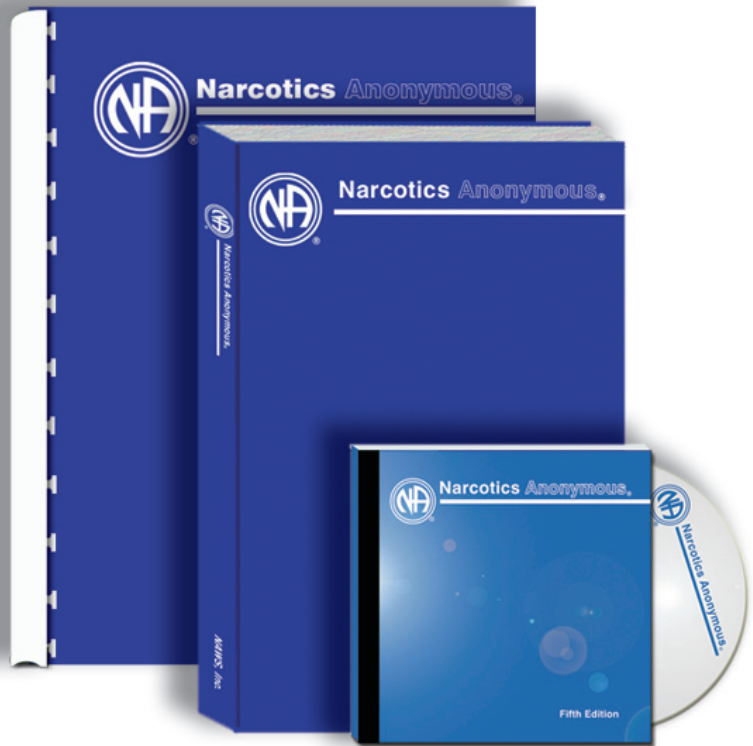
Some new ideas about content

As we reported in the *Conference Agenda Report*, one of the ideas we have is that all of the stories need not have the same structure: what it was like, what happened (how I found NA), how it is now. What if some stories began in later recovery or concentrated on a particular experience or spiritual principle? Should we divide the personal stories into sections? Should we include sections with a number of short experiences or quotes from members focused on one topic? These are some of the topics we are discussing. We should have more decisions to report as our work progresses.

Going to any lengths

In order to collect stories that truly represent the colorful and lively voices of our members, we know we will have to try a variety of approaches. A blanket solicitation like a *News Flash* won't capture it all. This project will force us to develop new and innovative ways of seeking the experience of members. Of course, we will want to cast a wide net by sending out a general call for stories in *The NA Way Magazine* and on our website, www.na.org. You can expect to see something posted sometime after the January World Board meeting.

This kind of general call for story submissions is a good start, but we want to remove as many obstacles as possible for people to share their experience. Members for whom English is a second



language, or members who are not skilled writers, or even members who are less likely to volunteer themselves may not respond to such a solicitation. To continue the metaphor, that wide net is a great vehicle to catch a certain kind of fish, but one net and one casting area is not the best way to catch the widest variety of sea life. We expect that key members of local NA communities may help us by having workshops or forwarding names of storytellers. We hope to draft tools to help people tell their stories, and we may interview specific members or help them to write their stories in other ways.

Just as many of us got involved in service not because we volunteered ourselves, but because we got a friendly "suggestion" from our sponsor or others, some of us may not step forward to tell our stories without encouragement. At this point, we aren't ruling out any method to collect our members' experience. Stayed tuned for updates as we continue to work on this exciting project. More will be revealed...

"The unity
described in our First Tradition
is not the same thing as uniformity.
Our membership is richly varied,
made up of many addicts from widely
differing backgrounds. These members bring with
them a variety of ideas and talents. That diversity
enriches the fellowship and gives rise to
new and creative ways to reach
addicts who need our help."

It Works: How and Why, pg. 127