

The History of N.A. In San Diego

June K., a woman who, as an addict/alcoholic member of A.A. in San Diego, saw a need for a place where drug addicts like herself could come and freely share about their addiction. She got in touch with Jack B. and other people from Cry Help in Los Angeles and in October, 1970, the first N.A. meeting in San Diego was held.

The first meeting was held at the Black Panther's Hall. In addition to Jack B. and the other people from Cry Help (who stayed in San Diego for awhile to help), June "enlisted" the aid of 2-3 A.A. members with long-term sobriety. This first group of N.A. in San Diego did not run smoothly. The early meetings were a "can you top this?" type. Members got loaded, swapped girlfriends/boyfriends, someone was always stealing the 7th Tradition money, etc., etc.

The next N.A. meeting in San Diego was a Step Study. The originators of this meeting took A.A.'s 12 & 12 book, re-typed it substituting the word "drugs" for alcohol. This meeting didn't last more than a couple of months.

N.A. in San Diego then moved from the Black Panther's Hall to a hall in Pacific Beach. June K. was still hanging in there, helping find the meeting place for the group. This was now January, 1971. The meeting location: Chalcedony & Cass Streets in Pacific Beach. Members for this meeting were recruited from County Mental Health, ex-boyfriends/girlfriends, etc. The meetings ran pretty crazy. One guy cursed at everyone for an hour, kicked the furniture, and so on. The attendance fluctuated from 2-12 members. Something was written to read at the beginning of the meeting. "What Is The N.A. Program?" was changed. "Responsible, productive members of society" was omitted from it. Finally one group member, a very charismatic sort of person who had 5-6 months clean & sober, took off with the group's money (\$45), by-laws, etc.

At the end of 1972 the group moved to Ocean Beach to the In-Between. This part of town was (and still is) probably the heart of heroin copulation in all of San Diego. A 3-foot sign was made (N.A. MEETING TONIGHT) and put outside on the street in front of the In-Between. The meeting was held in the upstairs part of the building. Downstairs was a crash pad complete with free lunches, loud music, shouting, and general mass confusion. A few addicts came up to the meeting but they never stayed for long. Don W. could go out into the street and pick up kids who even remotely looked like they might have a drug problem. He also would argue with judges to let guys go to N.A. meetings. Don was involved with Tranquility House (a co-ed halfway house for drug addicts). The attitude at that house (and incidentally in the San Diego N.A. community in general) was - if you're not shooting heroin, you're clean. This, needless to say, created many problems. The house eventually did not get along with N.A. very well. N.A. kept striving for "complete abstinence from all drugs" - the house continued to accept smoking dope, etc.

In June, 1973 ^{the} an N.A. meeting was ^{moved to} ~~started at~~ the Congregational Church on Beryl Street in Pacific Beach. Many people from Sunshine House (in Ocean Beach) attended and supported this meeting. Besides the Beryl Street meeting, in 1973 a number of other N.A. meetings were started in San Diego. They were: Tranquility House, Sunshine House, a meeting in El Cajon, Community Hospital on "J" Street, Camp Pendleton, Camp Barrett, the Navy Base in Point Loma, Miramar Naval Air Station, and a meeting at Nancy H's son's and daughter's house.

N.A. in San Diego at this time was a very loosely-knit group. They tried to expand, putting up cards, talking at schools, advertising, etc., etc. A small group of people tried to support all of the meetings. Things would go well for awhile and then fall apart. Sometimes the speakers and advertisements would attract people but the meetings were unable to support this influx. The reason ~~being~~ ^{was that} nobody really had any time clean & sober. There just wasn't enough support from any quality (or quantity) sobriety. The average attendance at a meeting was 5.

It was decided to just stick to Beryl Street and Camp Pendleton. The Navy at this time was begging for N.A. There was nobody to go. Beryl Street continued. It was basically a revolving door. No one was ever not accepted and the meeting went on. After two years the church asked for \$5 a week in rent. June wrote a letter to the church asking if we could pay what we were able - sometimes \$5 a week was impossible to pay. The church agreed and Beryl Street survived on a "pay what you can" basis. Ashtrays were bought from the Goodwill and sometimes coffee was acquired in ^a perhaps ~~a~~ less than honest manner.

In January, 1977 the Navy (NDRC) started bussing people to the Beryl Street meeting. At this time Beryl Street had an average attendance of about 12 regular members. NDRC brought about 40 each week and most of the NDRC people were very therapy-oriented. Daniel G. would stand up and tell them that, "this is not group therapy, I'll talk to you about Jesus after the meeting but right now we're having an N.A. meeting." Beryl Street seemed to be developing into a very good meeting for newcomers to identify their drug problem and to deal with the first two steps. A lot of identification, fellowship and hope went on there. (AUTHOR'S NOTE: I joined N.A. in February, 1977 and, in spite of the problems outlined here, N.A. in San Diego [Beryl Street] saved my life. It might not have been perfect and totally steps/spiritually oriented, but there was enough to get me one day clean & sober and then another and now I am over 4 years clean & sober and deeply grateful to the N.A. fellowship in San Diego). During 1977 the police had a short time in which they would cruise the parking lot of the meeting. I remember being inside and reading "we are under no surveillance at any time". I was new and it was very important for me to believe that so, in spite of the police cars I saw outside, I hung onto that belief and eventually the police stopped cruising the parking lot and they never did actually interfere in the meetings in any way.

An N.A. Step Study was started in 1977 using the same literature as before (A.A.'s 12 & 12 with the word alcohol replaced with drugs). It began on Hornblend in Pacific Beach and eventually moved to the church on Thomas Street in Pacific Beach because so many people started regularly attending, the room on Hornblend was too small.

Besides the Step Study two other meetings were started in 1979 and have survived. One was a Monday night meeting on 30th Street and the other was a Tuesday night meeting on Fairmont & Wightman. In 1979 the average attendance at these meetings fluctuated between 4 and 10. Today it is not unusual to see over 50 in attendance at these meetings.

The San Diego Area Service Committee was formed at the end of 1979. It consisted of 4 GSR's. Shortly after being established it formed (in 1979) the following subcommittees: H&I, Public Information, Literature, and Entertainment.

Many more subcommittees have since been added to the San Diego ASC. For example, in June, 1982 the Newsletter Committee was formed; in August, 1982 the Bylaws Committee began; and in January, 1983 the Sports Committee was formed.

Since 1979 N.A. in San Diego has grown so much. New meetings are started and they now get the support they need. Very few meetings have folded. Members in San Diego are getting time clean & sober and they are maintaining that clean & sober time and helping to carry the message to the addicts who still suffer.

To give you an idea of just how much N.A. in San Diego has grown, the following statistics speak for themselves. As of January, 1981 there were 15 N.A. meetings in San Diego. As of January, 1982, there were 32 N.A. meetings in San Diego, and as of March, 1983, there are 42 N.A. meetings in San Diego!

The Area Service Committee for Narcotics Anonymous in San Diego has continued to expand to meet the needs of those they serve. The average attendance each month has been over 20 meetings represented at the Area Service Committee meeting, ~~each month.~~

As I write this article I have just been informed that the Area Service Committee will again be required to change to meet the needs of those they serve because San Diego has just been named a Region! I suppose we shall now call our Service Committee the San Diego Regional Service Committee meeting.

Thank you for letting me share some of the history of N.A. in San Diego. All I can say is, I am thankful for all the support N.A. in San Diego has had. Through the good times as well as the not-so-good. And good luck to the new Region of N.A. in San Diego, California.