

# My Years with Narcotics Anonymous

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*by Bob Stone*

A HISTORY OF N.A.

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## Introduction

I first heard the name Bob Stone in 1983. I was a member of Narcotics Anonymous living in the Upper Midwest with a few years clean, reading everything I could get my hands on published by NA world services. NA had just published the Basic Text the previous year. Even from my somewhat isolated vantage point, living in a small struggling NA community far from California, it was obvious that the previous year had been one of great controversy and difficulty for world services. With the first appearance of Bob Stone's name on reports from NA's World Service Office (WSO), however, something was changing.

The publishing of the Basic Text was a watershed event for NA in many ways, one of them being that we now had a vehicle by which to fund a serious World Service Office. Bob was hired during the 1983 World Service Conference to do that. He very quickly instituted the *Newsline*, a newsletter from the WSO to the fellowship at large, and began communicating openly about the current state of affairs and the progress that was being made in developing the office.

Many of us who were in the trenches of the fellowship during those times had been feeling a mixture of an exciting pioneer spirit on the one hand — our grass roots membership had written a book and were building a service structure in places where there hadn't been one before — and on the other hand a nagging fear that it just might all fall apart under the strain of our own controversies and inexperience.

In many local fellowships, members with much clean time often left NA, leaving the local groups struggling. And to add to the feeling of instability, the Basic Text had been written and published amid massive controversies and political fights, some of which seemed at times capable of tearing the fellowship apart. It was a highly charged mixture of lofty aspirations and committed service, as well as strong-willed personalities and bitter struggles. The voice of Bob Stone in those early *Newslines* and other reports was a breath of fresh air. It was clear that he was visionary, confident, honest, and willing to wade right in and tackle our most intractable problems. For many of us, Bob's voice brought renewed hope that NA was turning an important corner. We were maturing as an organization.

My subsequent experiences of Bob were much more personal. I received a call from NA's World Service Office in the summer of 1984. The call came right out of the blue, since their only experience of me was in the form of a few articles I had written for the fellowship's magazine, the *NA Way*. After some initial questions about my quali-

fications, Bob came to the phone and we had a long conversation, much like I later saw and heard Bob have with countless other members of NA. There was a lot of laughter and a real sense that this was a guy with something on the ball who cared deeply for NA. I was impressed by both his direct approach to business and his personal charm. By the end of the conversation, he had me talked into at least coming out for an interview and having a look at the WSO.

I ended up taking the job, moving to California and working for Bob and the WSO for five years. From that vantage point I had the opportunity to witness first hand much of what Bob writes about in the book. Those were thrilling, rewarding years for me personally and for the fellowship as a whole. Bob has captured it quite eloquently in the pages that follow.

In 1993, long after both he and I had left the WSO, Bob discovered that he had incurable cancer. He had the choice to undergo medical treatments which held out some small hope of success, but he chose not to do that. His position was that he would rather live to the fullest right up to the end than to endure the pain and suffering that these particular treatments brought — and then probably die anyway. It was a deeply personal decision for him, and one that many who loved him urged him not to make, but Bob was going to be Bob: he was clear, and his commitment was unwavering.

He kept this information and this decision mostly to himself for as long as possible. Early on, however, he called me at my office one afternoon. After an unusually long and personal conversation, he told me he had been diagnosed with cancer and would likely be dead in a year or two. After letting the shock of that one sink in, he said he had one last goal: to write a history of NA. He asked me if I would work as his editor and help him produce the book.

Throughout the years I knew Bob, I knew he was packing away documents and notes with the intent to produce a history of NA one day. He was a real history buff, and he also had a keen interest in politics. He had been involved himself on some level in city and county politics in LA. So he watched and participated in NA's developmental journey with the eye of a historian and the people skills of a politician. He was keenly aware that as time went on, the founding members of NA were getting more scarce. We were losing the wealth of memories and experiences of early NA, and our ability to tell this story was slowly slipping away. He made it his business to talk to these people, and to make notes of these conversations.

So when he learned of his terminal condition, he decided that he would spend his last year or two gifting us with this book. He had no profit motive, since he knew he would be gone before it ever got to print. He simply knew that he was in a unique position, being the

non-addict and non-member of NA who had the deepest personal experience and involvement with NA world services of anyone alive. No one else was or would ever likely be in a similar position. As he had done about ten years earlier in accepting the job as our WSO's Executive Director, he jumped right in. This book is the result.

It should be noted here that this book is being self-published. Hulon Pendleton Publishing has no affiliation with Narcotics Anonymous. Though we expect that many NA members will be interested in what Bob has written, we hope and trust that NA's traditions will be respected in keeping this book separate from NA, its meetings and its service structure. This is a book about, not by, Narcotics Anonymous.

The book has two parts. The first part is the result of an exhaustive research project on Bob's part. He scoured the documentary evidence available to him, interviewed everyone he could find who was still living and willing to be interviewed, and reconstructed the early years of NA as best he could. That was a massive challenge, and he would be the first to say he may have gotten certain things wrong. Sometimes memories differed, and other times memories agreed with each other, yet the documentary evidence showed something else. In some cases, documents and recordings were even withheld from him by people still hurt or bitter about certain events that happened during NA's more turbulent times. What he attempted to do was to either simply admit those limitations and offer various versions, or to try to state the most credible version based upon notes or articles from the day and consensus among those interviewed. In the end, some will differ with his version of things. It is even possible that future editions of this book will include corrections as more accurate documents become available. Bob was clear on that, though his efforts to get it right the first time were exhaustive.

The second part of this book, starting in Chapter 11, is a first-person account of Bob Stone's experiences with NA. His first actual involvement was much earlier, in 1976 when he was asked to be the parliamentarian of the first World Service Conference, and he speaks of those experiences in the first person as well, but he shifts fully to a first person account when in 1983 he began to have a daily involvement with world services as the Executive Director of the WSO.

Throughout both parts of the book, though it's obviously told from his own perspective, Bob attempts to be fair and objective, giving credit where credit is due and holding back from personal attacks. Still, he is open and forthcoming about the controversies and the personality struggles that were part of the fabric of our fellowship's history. The struggles around the writing of the Basic Text, the entanglements and factionalism which came to a head when Jimmy was replaced as the WSO Manager, the shock Bob experienced when his