

A NEW GENERATION FIGHTS ADDICTION

By Phoebe Hoban

"You know that ad 'the night belongs to Michelob'?" asks Marissa,* a 21-year-old gamine in a chartreuse sweater, torn jeans, and cowboy boots. "All my nights used to be like that." She stops in front of a liquor store window plastered with holiday displays about love, cheer, and tradition - amorous, glamorous couples toasting; neighbours swapping scotch. "It's everywhere. And the message is that drinking is fun, sexy, romantic."

I met Marissa in front of St. Monica's church on East 79th Street one Sunday before Christmas, when everyone else was out shopping. She and her "sponsor," a vivacious blonde named Tracy, were emerging from an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in the basement. The 79th Street Workshop is one of the most popular meetings in the city. More than 100 well-heeled people congregate here on weekends at 12:30, and many of them are very young. According to a 1986 AA survey, 21 per cent of AA members are under 30; 38 percent are also addicted to drugs.

Marissa and Tracy, 26, used to be party girls. They were good-looking and had money. They both had divorced parents, went to private schools, and were using drugs and alcohol by the time they were twelve years old. BY the time they were sixteen, their lives revolved around getting high and going to clubs. Marissa drank, did coke, and freebased; Tracy free-based and did speedballs. She hung out with a group of artists and actors, including the late John

Belushi. Her boyfriend was a doctor/dealer who eventually went to prison. She bounced checks, stole money from her boss, and ran up \$50,000 in debts.

Now the nights at Area, Save the Robots, The World, and Nell's are over. Marissa and Tracy don't go to clubs much anymore. They go to meetings - Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, Narcotics Anonymous meetings, Cocaine Anonymous meetings. And so do most of their friends. "There are so many people in recovery," says Tracy, "there's a joke that when Dalton has its next class reunion, it's going to be at Hazelden."

But they're not kidding about cleaning up. Marissa's been sober for eighteen months. Tracy's a three-and-a-half year veteran. On New Year's Eve, Marissa and Tracy and several hundred other people went to a dance organized by Cocaine Anonymous in a loft on West 17th Street. There was music and dancing, but when the Times Square ball fell, everyone toasted with soda. "The party was absolutely packed," says Tracy.

Last year's movie version was *Clean and Sober*, starring Michael Keaton. This year, it's *The Boost*, with James Woods and Sean Young. In 1988, Margaux Hemingway admitted to alcoholism on the cover of *People*;

* Names of recovering addicts and some identifying details have been changed, since anonymity is the founding principle of A.A. and all other twelve-step programs.

this year, it's thirteen-year-old Drew Barrymore. "A.A. has lost the image of unshaven bums," says Matthew, a 28-year-old actor who's been attending meetings for eight months." Everybody's in to it."

"Getting high is no longer hip," says Candy, a long-term pill popper who's been sober for seventeen months. "Now it's hip to be in recovery. The program is the best-kept secret in Manhattan."

Why the rush to "the rooms," as members call the meetings? Hipness has nothing to do with it; nobody hangs out in church basements for fun. While alcoholism takes its toll over the course of years, coke, free-basing, and crack are causing people to bottom out within months. "It's very simple," says Paul, a 45-year-old real-estate broker with a large investment firm, who became a born-again Christian when he kicked his coke habit. "There's a line you cross where it becomes impossible. It usually takes twenty years with alcohol, ten to fifteen years with pot, five years with snorting cocaine, six months for shooting it, and a matter of weeks for crack."

"Alcohol is a much slower route to addiction," says Nancy Dombrowski, a private therapist who is affiliated with the Alcoholism Council of Greater New York. "But when you mix alcohol with cocaine, you get there on the express train." In the past four years, the number of CA groups nationwide has gone from 169 to 1,043. In New York, the number of NA groups has doubled to 266.

On the Friday before New Year's Eve, Marissa and Tracy are at a an NA meeting in a church basement in the East Eighties, where their friends Max is celebrating his fourth year of sobriety or, as he prefers to call it, "being clean." The 75 people are mostly under 40 and range from

yuppies to obvious junkies. Marissa runs up to Max and gives him a stuffed dog. He gives her a big hug. One attractive couple has brought a new baby.

This is an anniversary meeting. The five speakers in the front of the room have been sober anywhere from a year to nine years. There's a chocolate cake to celebrate. A thin girl dressed in black is passing out slices. People help themselves to coffee from an urn in the back of the room. Others light up cigarettes in the smoking section.

"Don't compare drug stories," cautions Candy, the pixieish woman in the leopard-skin boots who is leading the meeting. "Just relax and identify. One of the best things about this program is the idea of a day at a time. Otherwise things look so big. All these days add up. What you see tonight are all these 'just for todays' adding up to one, four, nine years."

The speakers - two women and three men, ranging in age from 24 to 40 - take turns. They introduce themselves as addicts and say how long they've been clean. Everyone applauds, and then their stories begin: burnout tales from hell that all end up on a note of hope. This NA meeting seems raunchier than the A.A. meetings, a little more out of control. The word "death" comes up often. There's a sense of mortality that isn't dispelled by the Georgette Klinger bag passed around for donations. But there's also a feeling of victory and solidarity here. It's like a locker room full of athletes primed for the same goal: winning the game.

Max, 30, is one of the last to speak, "Hi, everybody. I'm Max, and I'm an addict, and today is four years." The room bursts into applause. Max's story is both banal and sad. With a little editing, his narrative could be another *Bright*

Lights, Big City. Max, a middle-class kid from Long Island, worked at a club in the city where drugs flowed as freely as Rolling Rock. Max indulged with the best of them. "Everyone at work did coke," he says. "People were always giving it to me to get in free. But I didn't know where to draw the line. I would end up in court every three months because I hadn't paid my rent. I had no phone or electricity. My girlfriend broke up with me. One of the guys I worked with died. I remember people used to leave NA stationary on my desk and it was like, 'How dare you think I have a problem?' People laughed in recognition.

"Then I hit rock bottom, I was taking money from my family. I forged a check to my father, who's an accountant. One day, I was sitting over this drawing board. My nose was stuffed and caked from doing blow, and then it started bleeding. It was like the beginning of the end. The next night it was my birthday. I had an eight of an ounce of coke, and I was with some girl whose name I didn't even know. The next morning, I called my parents and made them fly me down to Florida to get clean. My first meeting was in Florida."

Max winds up his story: "I always felt less than other people; I never felt like I fit in. I've learned how to be human in four years of recovery. I didn't do this alone. My recovery is about people; we have unity here. That's how all the healing is done. Now I have a beautiful midtown office. I laugh about it sometimes.

When the meeting ends, people join hands and recite a prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Keep coming back; it works if you work it." The ring

breaks up, and people stand around chatting, exchanging phone numbers.

"The key to the rooms," says Marissa, "is that there are guidelines; there are rules. And there's unconditional love. Nobody ever says, 'Don't come back,' No matter how sick you are, no matter what you've done. No one leaves you or abandons you. When I first started the program, I used to think it was a cult thing. But it's not. It's just a better way of living."

All over Manhattan, there are similar meetings around the clock. During lunch, midtown professionals flock to an A.A. group called Foglifters, at Fifth Avenue and 55th Street. On Sunday evenings, in a dimly lit, tiny room on Perry Street, there is a smaller, more intimate meeting. Every midnight in a building off Times Square, dozens of people climb the stairs to a *film noir*-ish room with a tin ceiling and slow-moving fan. At St. Bart's an Adult Children of Alcoholics group fills a classroom decorated with elementary-school drawings. And actors gravitate to the Studio Group at a church on the Upper East Side.

A.A. meetings and their various spinoffs are based on a twelve-step program that hasn't changed since it was created in 1935 by two "hopeless" drunks, Dr. Bob Smith and Bill Wilson, who had a heart-to-heart talk about their mutual problem. Wilson, a broker from New York who had made several fortunes and lost them to alcohol, was in Akron, Ohio, on business. He had been sober for three months, but when the proxy takeover he had come to town for failed, he wanted a drink. Wilson, who had been hospitalized for his last binge, learned two important things: that alcoholism is a disease, "an allergy of the body and an

obsession of the mind," and that relief would come only after he surrendered himself to God. (Wilson and his wife were members of the Oxford Group, an international organization that practiced the faith of the early Christians.) He called a local minister for advice, who in turn contacted a woman from the local Oxford Group. She introduced him to Dr. Bob Smith (known just as Dr. Bob), a surgeon who was also an incorrigible alcoholic. What he and Wilson came up with was powerful but simple: A.A. is based on both abstinence and the concept that talking about their addiction with fellow recovering alcoholics - real-life experts on the problem - is a potent form of reciprocal therapy. As Dr. Bob wrote about Wilson, "He was the first living human being who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language."

By June 10, 1935, Dr. Bob was stone-cold sober. He and Wilson began to spread the word, drunk by drunk. By 1939, the group had developed a guidebook. A *New Yorker* writer came up with the title *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Popularly referred to as "the big book," it lists the twelve basic steps for recovery.

It's these steps that give A.A. its "religious" reputation. After admitting that they are powerless over their problem and that their lives are unmanageable, alcoholics are exhorted to believe in a "higher power" and to turn their will to the care and direction of God.

But between the pious-sounding lines is a pragmatic program: A.A. forces alcoholics to admit they have a problem and provides them with a structural solution and support group. Arnold Washton, who runs Washton Institute, an

outpatient rehab center for addicts says, "Twelve-step programs help define the problem in a meaningful way and enforce honesty with oneself and others. They maintain a focus on realistic goals. And they provide the support of a community of friends and peers with special understanding and empathy. The rewards can be extraordinary."

Dr. Anne Geller, director of the Smithers Alcoholism Treatment and Training Center, says, "Going to these groups also gives people some activity to fill up the time when they are struggling to come off an addiction. It fills the void."

The program is free. The only requirement is a desire to stop drinking and drugging. This is especially important for those without insurance. Members are asked only to make voluntary donations to help rent the rooms and pay for literature and refreshments.

For many, however, A.A. still seems like some kind of religious order. First, there are all the references to God, and then there are the slogans. Talk to a member for more than fifteen minutes and a lot of homilies inevitably pop up: "First things first." "One day at a time." "Easy does it." "Keep it simple." "You're only as sick as your secrets." "One [drink] is too much and a thousand isn't enough." "Progress, not perfection." "Life on life's terms." "God is good, orderly direction."

Some people are turned off by the "God part" that never return for a second meeting. Others solve the problem by thinking of this higher power as the collective strength and wisdom of the people in the rooms. And then there are those who become truly religious.

"My sponsor said, 'Get on your knees before you go to bed, and talk things through,'" remembers

Max. "And I said, 'Jewish guys don't get down on their knees.' He said, "Did you ever get down on your knees to do a line of blow? I said I would have gotten on my belly. I call the higher power my spirit. There's nothing more spiritual than one person helping another."

"I hesitate to talk about a higher power because I am a very skeptical person to begin with," says Matthew. "For years, I thought of myself as an agnostic with no real ties to any kind of organized religion. But as the Big Book says, 'The hoop A.A. asks you to jump through is plenty wide.'"

Jay, 25, went from being agnostic to being fervently religious. "I remember going to my first meeting and seeing all these people that weren't religious fanatics. They weren't nuts, they weren't losers. They were hip people," he says. "They were happy, and they were talking about incredible things. If you go to these meetings for a year and you see somebody on their first day and then after six months, that's proof."

Just having lived long enough to get into the rooms can be proof of a higher power. "it wasn't hard for me to make that leap," says Anne, a 31-year-old sales representative. "Since I was fifteen, I can't tell you how many times I've been in a car with a drunk driver, and it always turned out okay."

But people are people, and the sacred sometimes becomes the profane. One step the founders didn't have in mind was the "Thirteenth Step" - when a member who's been in the program for a while picks up a newcomer. "A person is so vulnerable when they first come in. To hit on someone is just awful," says Paula. "Once a new girl raised her hand and said

she'd been clean 50 days, and I heard this guy say, "Good. Get them while they are still shaking.' This is not a social club. This is really a place to get better. It's medicine."

Max admits, "there are a lot of people who develop relationships in the rooms. But I'm sick enough on my own. The last thing I need to do is to find someone who is a similar thinker. Still, I know when I first came around, a pretty girl made it easier. Everybody's motives aren't that pure. Some people are looking for a lover. Some people are looking for a job."

"I remember people telling me that A.A. was 'in.' That it was the new scene," says Marissa. "That's not what it's about at all. Anyone who comes in thinking that loses so much. It's not a sex club or a singles club of the eighties. People are terrified of endangering the safety of the rooms. And anyway, everybody knows, it's so incestuous."

There's a unwritten rule that members should avoid major changes in their lives - including relationships - for the first year of recovery. But the social aspects of the twelve-step programs are important, especially since members are told to try to avoid the "people, places, and things" associated with their habit. "These people are going to have to eliminate large parts of their life-style," says Dr. Washton. "Having new people to socialize with is very important."

"I have had to cut off so many people I used to see," says Dan, a cocaine addict who hasn't used the drug for nine days. "I really need the people in A.A." Some members even begin finding it difficult, if not impossible, to deal with people outside the program. This can be a real problem for non-members who have intimate relationships with members.

One 33-year-old woman who recently separated from her husband says, "A.A. kept him alive but stole him from me. You expect problems to be solved, but they are replaced by a whole new set of problems. The irony is that if I could scrape him off the pavement when his heart was palpitating and his face was gray and his tongue was hanging out, you think I could deal with a healthy, sober person. But A.A. became a rival in the marriage. If he doesn't go to a meeting, he gets hypercritical, antsy, negative. He goes to a meeting and comes floating out. It's almost like a fix. But I still wouldn't trade his being in the program for anything in the world, because I know without it he would be dead."

The meeting can also bring people together. Jim, 31, is engaged to a woman he met in A.A., and he knows at least six other couples who met through the program. Most people find a healthy medium in handling relationships: The dealer has to go; friends who aren't only drugging or drinking pals can stay.

Until recently, drug addicts were not always welcome at A.A. Max remembers "going to a meeting in Florida and saying I was an addict and being asked not to share." Says Candy, "Eight years ago, I was thrown out of an A.A. meeting because I was a drug addict, and they said I had no right to be there. You still hear some resentment." But today, many young members identify themselves as cross-addicted: Most cocaine users are also alcoholics. "My husband used to say, 'I have a coke habit, not an alcohol problem.' Then he'd drink," says one woman. "But as soon as he had a drink, he'd lose control over his urge to do coke. Then he'd disappear." Fellowships like A.A. recommend complete abstinence from addictive

substances. "Once you start getting high, it brings you back to your drug of choice," says one member.

Some addicts prefer meetings such as CA or NA, that focus on their particular problem. Others are drawn to A.A. because its members tend to have longer histories of sobriety than those at the more recently founded fellowships. Many members rotate among several types of meetings to get the support they need.

New members try to do 90 meetings in 90 days. They are encouraged to call other members when they get cravings or urges, and there's a sponsorship program that provides one-on-one guidance. There are 1,800 A.A. meetings in Manhattan, varying in size and ambience.

This 54-year-old form of free therapy may have become a burgeoning subculture, but it's far from an instant panacea. It means a lifetime of hard work. Members know they can never drink or take drugs again: The "pink-cloud" high most newcomers get when they enter the program soon gives way to the realization that staying sober is just the beginning. Working the twelve Steps means transforming yourself. Like psychotherapy, it's a process that involves peeling back layers of personality.

It's easy for an outsider to parody the program. Often, it seems like a New Age Salvation Army or seventies-style group therapy run amok. There are meetings that are overly social, and some people become as addicted to the meetings as they once were to a substance. Others take on the fervent tone and jargon of the born-again.

That's because those who've gotten sober feel that they've been saved. For many, private therapy didn't work; dividing their stashes into cute little packets didn't work; rationing drinks didn't work. The alternatives were a totally

dysfunctional life, or death.

It's a Tuesday evening, and the A.A. meeting in the basement of a church on Park Avenue in the Sixties is bustling. The crowd is a mostly upscale mix of about 60 men and women. One woman seated in the front of the room has just finished "qualifying," or telling her story. She's obviously struck a chord. Hands shoot up all over the room. The first person to share is a pretty blonde. "Hi, I'm Paula, and I'm an addict and an alcoholic."

"Hi, Paula," the room booms back.

"Hi, everybody. I've seen you here a lot, but I never heard your story before," she says to the attractive brunette in her thirties who's just finished her own tale of drug abuse, abusive relationships, arrest, recovery, and professional success. "I really identified with you. I graduated from an Ivy League school, and I'd be sitting in a crack den saying, 'But I've got a Ph.D.,' and they'd be saying, 'Pass the pipe.'"

The meeting breaks up into small coed clusters. It's easy to pick up on some flirtation among members. "Sure I go to meetings when I have crushes on some of the guys," says Paula. "They say that whatever gets you here doesn't matter. People do date people in the program. But there's an old-timers' saying that there's a slip under every skirt. It's true that most people slip up because of relationships too early on. It takes the focus off yourself and your recovery."

A week later, in her office, Paula tells a wild but typical story. Paula, 32, works in the entertainment business. Posters of celebrities cover the walls, and the conversation is constantly

interrupted by the phone and fax machine. Like many in the program, Paula chainsmokes. "Basically, I'm a nice girl from the suburbs," she begins. "All I can say is my whole life, I felt something was just off. I always felt I was never good enough, and you'll hear this a lot from people in the program. From the minute I started getting high and drinking, I knew that's how I wanted to feel. They say that we have a disease, and the word is 'dis-ease,' you know. I knew that when I drank and did drugs I felt more comfortable. And if you go to enough meetings, you'll hear every alcoholic and drug addict say this. But once we take a drug or drink, it's like we have no stop button."

Paula did well in high school and went to college and then to graduate school. She moved to New York when she was 24. "I felt really lost, and that's when all the trouble started," she says. "I began by doing little teeny bits of coke. I felt so empty. And somebody turned me on to free-basing. I did one hit, and I thought, this is what normal people must feel like. I absolutely loved it. It rapidly started ruining my life."

She missed work and spent all her time hanging out with a dealer. "He was a disgusting sleazeball hairdresser," she says. "And there was this whole scene of washing your hair, cutting it, and free-basing and drinking champagne. I hated him, but the minute you free-base, you love everybody. Then there'd be these huge fights where he'd say everyone was using him and smash the free-base pipe. And I'd say, 'I'm never going to come back.' But then the craving would start."

Paula was fired from one job after another but always managed to scrounge up enough money for drugs. "I got money from my parents. I didn't pay bills. I charged roommates more rent than they

should have been paying. I used money I was supposed to pay my shrink with. And I got a new boyfriend, another dealer. We were like little hustlers down at Washington Square Park. By the end, we were cooking crack for rich people. I stole from him constantly." By now, Paula was a typical wreck.

"I weighed 95 pounds," she says. "My apartment was full of mice. My eyes were bulging out. I looked like Don Knotts. But I kept going. I was fired from my final job. I was going to be thrown out of my apartment. I had no lights or electricity. I would look outside, and it would always be this beautiful sunny day. You'd miss work, and it would be ten in the morning, and you'd want to die. You wish you were anybody but who you were. That was the worst feeling. Just hating yourself so much."

Eventually, Paula's parents sent her to a rehab clinic, where she stayed for five months. She moved back to New York and started going to CA meetings. "In the beginning, the fellowship of people is more important than the actual steps," she says. "I mean, all you really have to do is to remember that you are powerless over drugs and alcohol. But eventually the steps help you change. When it comes down to it, if you remain the same person, you're going to end up doing drugs and alcohol again. Basically, you're a sick person getting better. They say that whatever age you started drinking or drugging is when you really stopped growing emotionally. I've heard the program called 'growing up in public.'" Paula has now been sober two and a half years.

Sarah and Matthew are a rich, good-looking young couple. They could be out on a date, but this Wednesday night, they are at one of their favourite A.A. meetings, in

a church in the East Sixties. The elevator man is used to the activity and cheerfully takes the hordes up and down. The members are affluent, slinging their fur coats and leather jackets over the folding chairs, stashing their briefcases and shopping bags underneath. There are about 50 people in the room, and only five could be called skid-row types. Sarah and Matthew look perfectly at home.

Sarah, an investment broker, has been sober two years; Matthew, an actor, has been sober eight months. Both are trust-fund kids who went to prep schools. But somehow, their upbringing let them down. "You're enabled by your looks and your money," says Sarah, 24, who looks like a little Amy Irving. "But you are not given any foundation, any building blocks for living."

Sarah grew up in a "very high-society, party atmosphere." At ten, she was sampling the drinks she mixed for her parents. Her parents were divorced when she was twelve, and her mother, then in her late thirties, dated, partied, and hung out with her three daughters, all of whom are now in A.A. "She tried to play mother and best friend. I partied, drank, and did coke with her a lot," Sarah says. Sarah and her sisters were popular, athletic, seemingly together. The truth wasn't quite so pretty.

It wasn't until Sarah's older brother tried to commit suicide that anyone in the family was willing to take a closer look. Sarah's father stopped "enabling" his children with money. But Sarah continued to play the party girl. "I still looked good. I had money in the bank and lived in a beautiful apartment," she says. "I would go on binges. Then I would try to go to meetings. Finally, I was able to get sober for a year, but I didn't work the first step at all."

I didn't admit I was powerless over alcohol, and I thought I could control my drinking. Then I drank for three straight weeks, and I knew it was over. My life was a mess."

By now, Sarah's two sisters were sober, and Sarah began to take the program seriously. "Before, I didn't want to meet any of the people in the program," she says. "I thought I was different, better. This time, I embraced it in a totally different way. I was so relieved. I felt like this is where I belong. I'm an alcohol. I felt safe. The program gives you the tools to learn to function in the world, to learn to deal emotionally with things that used to baffle you, because you used alcohol to deal with emotions. It's a bridge back to life, but it's not life."

Pot smoking brought Matthew to the meetings. "I got through school on a combination of wit and charm," he says. "I thought it was a great joke to show up in class high. After a while, I could barely function. When I graduated, I wasn't getting any acting jobs. My life started to fall apart."

Matthew went to a rehab center on the West Coast. When he returned to the East Coast, he started going to meetings. "I knew I had a problem with pot for a long time," he says. "But I thought A.A. was a group of weaklings. The twelve steps are simple, not complicated, mystical, or cultish in any way. I have new friends, a new girlfriend, and my professional life has improved. I am hooking up with an agent as a result of taking some action I never would have taken if I weren't sober."

The Saturday night CA meeting in an auditorium in a hospital uptown is packed. Tonight the guy qualifying is a blue-collar worker with the timing and delivery of a stand-up comic. Before long,

everyone is laughing at his descriptions of life under the influence of coke: the hours he spent glued to the window, convinced that his car was being stolen or that the Feds were in the street. The times he ripped up the carpet looking for coke. The way he terrorized the family cat, or spent all his time in the bathroom pretending to shower or to slug Pepto Bismol for his ulcer. His transparent attempts to explain missing paychecks to his wife or get credit from his dealer, who lived, conveniently, on the first floor.

"They say the difference between an addict and an alcoholic is that the alcoholic will steal your money and the addict will steal it and help you look for it," he says, remembering how he rolled back his sleeve to show off his watch at the first meeting so nobody would think he was an out-of-work bum. He also remembers how his wife threatened to leave him. He's now the proud father of a newborn daughter.

From the comments in the room, it's clear that he's touched a lot of people. "I can't believe your growth," says one woman. "When I look at you, I see that I must have grown, too."

Dan, a sweet-faced 26-year-old, looks very nervous. This is his fourth meeting. His drinking and drug problem, which started in high school, has escalated into a full-scale coke and beer addiction. He used to consider himself a "literary druggie." Now he can't even get through a day at the small publishing house where he works without taking drug and drink breaks.

An eight ball (three and a half grams of coke) barely lasts him several days. Everything in his life is in jeopardy. "the physical urges are hell." he says. "But the program has given me a center, a

way to get out all the urges and talk about it. I don't have to isolate myself or worry about shocking people. Recovery is subsuming my life, in some ways, more than the drugs and alcohol. If I didn't have the program to take me one day at a time, I'd be overwhelmed. But the little applause you get makes you come back." For Dan, the program is a slender thread between his present and future that could snap at any minute.

We are in the midst of an answered prayer," says Tommy, 29, who's just completed four months of recovery. "I think the program is pretty miraculous. I see people who would be just totally trashed become really decent members of society." But the people in the rooms are only a tiny fraction of addicts, and there are far more "slips" than long-term recoveries.

Marissa's ex-boyfriend is still doing drugs. "He thinks the program is full of s___ and that the people are fake. How can someone just hug you and not even know you? He thinks the people talk a lot of bull___ and they don't really feel it. There are people who never grasp it, who miss something, and it's sad. It just

doesn't work for them. My ex has been in and out of the rooms for six years. The program is not for him right now. He needs something more."

Recently, an NA member who Max was sponsoring died. I'd wait for him at St. Mark's Place and he wouldn't show up. He stopped coming to meetings. He stopped calling me. I saw it coming, but I couldn't see him dying. People die from this." At some NA and CA meetings, a moment of silence is observed for those still out there.

Marissa, for one, counts herself lucky. Eighteen months ago she was a burned out v\club kid. Now she has a new apartment, is back in school, and has started a line of greeting cards that she says is being picked up by a major company. She's got a life of her own.

"When I first came in, I had no sense of self," Marissa says. "I felt I was a nonperson. For the first time, I'm honest with myself. I don't have to hide. There are many people who go in and out of these rooms for years and never make it. It's an action program; nothing is delivered to you. If you don't work, the program doesn't work for you."