

**FORWARD TO THE 2001 EDITION**

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF  
MARIJUANA ANONYMOUS**

In June of 1989, delegates from Marijuana Smokers Anonymous (Orange County, California), Marijuana Addicts Anonymous (the San Francisco Bay area), and Marijuana Anonymous (Los Angeles County) met to establish a unified twelve-step recovery program for marijuana addicts. A smaller Marijuana Anonymous group in Seattle had been unable to send delegates because of the cost, and another small Marijuana Addicts Anonymous group, in New York, was heard from later. That first conference was held in a crowded motel room halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, in Morro Bay.

Until unification at the first conference, Marijuana Anonymous, Marijuana Smokers Anonymous, and Marijuana Addicts Anonymous were three distinct organizations. They had only recently begun hearing about the existence of each other, although the oldest fellowship was three years old. Each group was apprehensive, worried that the others would not see things as they did. Were they all twelve-step programs? Did they all work the same kind of program? Did they follow the Twelve Traditions? Even the body language of the delegates at that first small conference revealed these conflicts and concerns.

It was a highly emotional, exhausting, and gratifying weekend. The eleven representatives had each arrived with their own fellowship's particular agenda, yet they somehow managed to come away with satisfactory working compromises. As a result of this hard work, one group —

Marijuana Anonymous — was born. The stage was set for the next conference, to be held in October.

The second Marijuana Anonymous Unity Conference was held that fall with delegates from Seattle joining the others. Two years later, the New York chapter was finally able to send a delegate. Shortly after the unification of the US programs, MA was contacted by another Marijuana Anonymous organization in New Zealand. All of a sudden, MA was happening...and it was happening worldwide.

All of these small groups had started one at a time, almost simultaneously, not even knowing of any other group's existence. But they had all started for one reason: their members did not feel comfortable in any other twelve-step groups or self-help programs. In the areas where these meetings started, recovering marijuana addicts either felt unwelcome or disrespected in other programs. And, occasionally, some members of other groups were still using marijuana. That was no help at all.

For years, marijuana was thought to be non-addicting. If people got addicted it was either all in their imagination or because there was something really wrong with them. Perception of the drug had swung from the hysterical Reefer Madness mentality of the 1930s to the belief that it was totally innocuous. For many of us the truth lies somewhere in between. As is the case with addiction to many other substances, marijuana addiction can be a slow process. Some users never cross from using to abusing to addiction. For those that did become addicts, there was very little help, let alone understanding. And so, because it was needed and its time had come, Marijuana Anonymous began springing up here and there, almost like the plant itself.

In Orange County, one marijuana addict sat alone for weeks, waiting for another pothead to join him at a facility

where other twelve-step meetings were taking place. Eventually one did, then two, and then a roomful. And soon, the room was too small. In Oakland, one pothead stood up in another twelve-step meeting and asked if there was anyone else in the room that had been smoking his brains out. There was. Meetings started in the addicts' living rooms. And soon, their living rooms were too small. In Los Angeles, a marijuana addict went to a psychologist who sent her to twelve-step meetings, where she couldn't relate. So, with his help, she and a couple of other patients with marijuana problems started a meeting in his office. And soon, the office was too small.

At the first Unity Conferences, each group had its own ideas about what was best for all. Some favored a singleness of purpose concept, some questioned religious and gender distinctions within the Steps and other literature. In the end, MA chose to adopt and adapt the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, because they have worked for so long and for so many. Like the other twelve-step programs, Marijuana Anonymous is a program of recovery — recovery from bondage to a substance.

The compromises reached at those first conferences included a singleness of purpose (see "Tradition Three") within the Steps and Traditions, but a requirement of full sobriety for World Service commitments. The group also adapted the Steps and Traditions, changing the name of the substance, and attempting to remove gender references when referring to God. Because this is a spiritual, not a religious, program, members tried to avoid defining what the word God could possibly mean. Thus, each member, regardless of his or her religion or philosophy, may develop his or her own understanding of a Higher Power.

MA has come a long way from those first few hundred members that made up the new unified Marijuana Anonymous. There are more than eleven thousand copies of the First Edition of *Life with Hope* in circulation. The stories in this Second Edition share the experiences of some of our members. They were written for the newcomer, for the addict who's still using, for anyone interested in marijuana addiction's effect on a person's life. They were written to let the readers know that a "life with hope" is truly possible.

THE LITERATURE COMMITTEE  
OF MARIJUANA ANONYMOUS  
WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE