

## SHELL SHOCKED

### Another Victim of Addiction

By Art Stevens

The room I entered was spartan and dingy. It was a typical meeting room for individuals who suffered from shame, remorse, addiction and guilt. I was one of them. I had no choice. I was compelled to join these other unfortunates so that I could finally break the curse that had been plaguing me for years. For you see, I am now a member of AA.

I took my seat. There were about twenty other people sitting around in a circle. They were from all walks of life. The leader entered the room and took his seat among the circle of outcasts.

“Hello all of you. My name is Bill and I want to thank you for the courage you’re displaying in simply being here today. It does take courage to finally put an end to your long time addiction. I’m aware of how difficult this is going to be for each of you to literally bare your souls to total strangers. But please be aware that each of you is suffering from the same affliction so you will get plenty of support in this room. And remember also, what is said in this room stays in this room.”

Each of us settled into our chairs and tried not to look at one another. Guilt was rampant.

Bill then said, “I’m going to ask each of you to tell your story. I want you to get it out there so that we can all begin to help each other. Art, why don’t you start?”

This was my worst nightmare – to be the first person called on to share his miserable story. I took a deep breath and began to speak.

“My name is Art and I’m an accumulator.” The group applauded me for owning up to my misery and having the courage to join Accumulators Anonymous.

I continued: “It all started when I was ten. My parents gave me tons of toys for my birthday and I became so possessive of them that I still have them in my home to this day. The same is true for the clothes I had when I was fifteen. They were never thrown out and weren’t given to a neighbor’s kid when I outgrew them. I simply kept them. My parents thought that this was odd but didn’t discourage me from collecting things . They encouraged me to have hobbies.

“This habit continued as I got older. Whatever I got – from matchbooks to salt shakers, I never threw anything out. I have every shirt, tie, suit, and pair of shoes I ever owned. I have every magazine I ever read. I have every marble I played with as a child as well as every comic book. I understand that some of these comic books may be very valuable today but I can’t endure the thought of parting with any object I ever owned. I am a true accumulator and want to be helped.

“My wife wanted to help me and even tried throwing things out without my knowing about it. But I’ve always been suspicious of her motives and caught her in the act each time. At one time the garbage truck removed boxes of accumulated items that my wife secretly put outside the house but I saw the boxes in time and threw myself into the body of the truck to retrieve them.

“Yes, I was a bit filthy when I emerged from the truck. And I literally smelled like garbage. But it was worth it to me. Who knows what other rash deeds I might have

carried out to retrieve objects of my addiction? I showered for four hours following this episode and it left a deep scar in my heart. But I continued my addictive habit of accumulating. My marriage is falling apart as a result and no one will enter my house anymore. There's just no room to sit down."

Tears were filling the eyes of the AA group as they realized that they were not alone in their accumulation addiction. In time each member of the group related their own stories of accumulation and collectively we understood that we all had a common problem. One member of the group offered us gum from a small pack of Wrigley's that he had owned for forty years.

It was a start. There was a great deal of work to be done by each of us if we wanted to straighten out our lives and live happily. We needed to find a way to let go of the need to accumulate unnecessary objects. My joining AA was done in the nick of time. Pray for me. In the meantime, I took all the pencils home that were distributed at the meeting.

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