

CHARLES HAMER

I was born May 1st, 1903, in a small town in Oklahoma. My family background: I was the youngest of five children. My father died when I was an infant. We were poor. My mother had to work to support us. The rest of the children had married and moved away, and I was still living with my mother. Very little counseling, very little supervision. My mother neither had the time or the knowledge to do this. Looking back in retrospect, I sort of grew up on my own, and I suppose it was the same old thing. I got into the wrong kind of company, bad associates. So this began to happen.

My first encounter with narcotics came at about the age of nineteen. That would make it 1922. There was a Chinese family in my town who ran a restaurant, had some children my school age, and from the association with them, I was eventually introduced to opium. I smoked opium intermittently for about three years. My first injection, hypodermically, was from the residue of the opium pipe, which is called "yen-shee." That was my first experience with the needle.

This lasted a couple of years, and then I was

introduced to morphine. That's before there was any heroin, before anyone was using it. I used morphine for a good many years. Morphine was very cheap compared to what it costs today and it was the purer article. We were obtaining morphine from unethical doctors and unethical pharmaceutical houses and also peddlers. This went on for many years, as I said before.

There were, in the State of Oklahoma, many oil "booms," they called them in those days. People flocking to some small town where they had struck oil and which became a metropolis overnight. Naturally the boom attracted a lot of people, and there was a lot of drugs used during those periods.

I had married in 1925, sort of a school-day romance. It didn't last, it lasted about a year. Naturally, I was fooling around with drugs. I was divorced from my wife seven or eight years later. She got a divorce.

I lost my mother in 1928, and then I seemed to go from bad to worse. All the time, I was supporting this narcotic habit by theft, robbery, confidence game, procuring, the whole bit; but it didn't take too much to support a drug habit in those days. And when I say habit, I mean a real one. I was using fifteen to twenty-five grains a day of pure

morphine, something completely unheard of this day and time.

In 1933, that would make it about eleven years using drugs, I was completely at the end of my rope, morally, physically and financially. So, I decided on what we call a "geographical cure." I came to California, knowing no one, with a terrific narcotic habit. I had enough drugs to get me here and I withdrew from drugs in a strange city, Los Angeles, not knowing anyone, not wanting to know anyone, and I had a terrible time for about three weeks. I was just staggering around in a trance, but eventually I overcame it. If I remember, that was in 1933.

I got different little jobs to maintain myself, and got myself on my feet, physically, at least. Then I looked up some old friends that I had known back home; that I hadn't bothered with while I was withdrawing from drugs. One couple that I went to school with had a small business in California. I went over to see them. Of course, they knew about my problem, but I lived with them another four or five months and did nothing but just try to recuperate from the siege I'd had; and they were understanding.

Then I got to the point where I was ready to do something; had pretty good health and my mind had cleared. I looked up another friend who was in

business and I hadn't seen in many years and he gave me an opportunity. I was broke, without funds. He gave me an opportunity, and I started to work for him.

I guess I got what you would call "lucky," for a change. I made some money, started a few speculations, met a girl and married her. Everything I touched for a few years seemed to turn into money. So, I suppose I got addicted to making money. Some people do that. But I must admit that I was drinking to excess during this period. Looking back, I know that drugs entered my mind. I didn't know any drug addicts and didn't want to know any. Only my close friends knew about my past--and the girl I married, I told her. I was an ex-convict at that time. I was sent to the Oklahoma State Penitentiary from 1929 until '32.

But things went along real good until the war [WWII] came on. I had a couple of businesses and I was of draft age. I thought that I would probably be drafted. Instead of doing that, I shipped out in the Merchant Marine and I sailed all the South Pacific during the war, over to the Far East for a couple of years. I still had my business and my wife was half-way operating it.

I came back and started my business again, working



fifteen and sixteen hours a day and piling up quite a sizeable bank account. Everything seemed to be going fairly good. I was married to a very charming personable young woman, very pretty, very popular, and I was very contented--so I thought. I'd gotten enough money where I had a couple of pieces of property and thirty or forty thousand dollars in cash. It looked like I was on my way. I hadn't used any drugs in six years.

One day, a friend of mine came in to visit me, that I hadn't seen since I went to school with him. In the very beginning, we'd used narcotics together, but he'd been going to sea for many years and no longer used narcotics, habitually at least. He came to see me from a trip around the world; found out where I was. We had a long conversation and a few cocktails together, then he was going up to Los Angeles. I was in the harbor district, so he asked me if I would keep some money for him that he didn't want to carry with him. So I did. I took him back into my office and got an envelope and put his name on it and took this money and put it in my safe for him. He was going to pick it up later.

While he was getting the money out of his pocket, he ran into a small package, like a match box. We had, in our conversation up to this time,

never even mentioned narcotics or our past life. Of course, we were both evidently free from narcotics, obviously. So, as he was leaving, he said, "Well, I brought you something maybe you'd like," and he went on out the door. There was another mutual friend there at the time, who was also clean from narcotics, an ex-user. I thought maybe it was some little curio from India or something. I opened it up and there was a small bar of what they refer to as "Lim Kee" opium, which is the very best from the Persian Gulf.

I looked at it and I could feel the jar. It did something to me, to my insides; and I was frightened. I was sort of amused that he would do this and I took it over to our mutual friend, who was working for me, and said, "Well, look what I have."

He said, "Well. Isn't that funny? Wonder why he'd do that?"

I said, "Well, I don't know. I suppose he thought we wanted it."

We discussed it a few minutes, and I think that I really thought about flushing it down the toilet bowl; but then he said, "Well, what shall we do with it?"

And I said, "Well, I suggest you go buy a hypodermic syringe and let's do it."

Well, to make a long story short. The bottom fell out after six years. In eighteen months' time I was broke and on my way to the penitentiary and addicted to opium again.

I was sentenced to the United States Public Health Service in Lexington, Kentucky, for two years. I went down and served that; returned to drugs again immediately. Opium, going across the border and buying it. In fact, I was apprehended on the border, but not smuggling, because I had it delivered on this side of the border.

Then I started drinking opium. They refer to it by another Chinese name called "Sam Lo." I was drinking opium and taking it intravenously continually.

Then I started getting in brushes with the local Los Angeles Police. They're too numerous to mention, but I was arrested five or six times, and, as well as I can remember, I served about four and a half years in the County Jail. One year sentence, another year sentence, another year sentence, three six-month sentences; about four and a half years. Up until 1945, I had attorneys available and I kept getting these charges reduced, getting jail sentences rather than going to the penitentiary.

In the meantime, I'd introduced to heroin. Opium was no longer available. They started using heroin,

and I was arrested for possession of heroin in 1945 and sentenced to the United States Public Health Service Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas, for two years. I went down there and served that and came out with two years' parole.

By this time I am really fed up. I'm getting a little older and I think for the last four or five years, I have been searching for some sort of answer to my problem, but there didn't seem to be any. I forgot to mention that in the interim here, somewhere, I was twice in the California State Hospital for ninety days for addiction. There was nothing in the State Hospital. The group there at the institutions that I did time in, did not work for me. At one time, I had some expensive private sessions there, but I could establish no rapport with the analyst. That would not work for me. In fact, nothing would work, and I had about decided to agree with the old cliché, "once a drug addict, always a drug addict." They just about had me convinced.

I had this two years' probation. I didn't know how in the world I was going to ever live up to two years' probation. In fact, I discussed it with the Federal authorities when I came out and reported to them, to try to do the two years.

They told me frankly, "Well, you have a long

history of addiction, anti-social behavior. You can't possibly do your two years' probation. Your prognosis is very bad. I don't know anything we can do with you. About the only thing I can tell you to do is try not to get arrested. If you do, I have to violate you. I'm going to leave you alone. Just stay out of the clutches of the law."

He sort of gave me carte blanche, and I went and got a job in a sanitarium, for particular reasons. The job didn't pay very much. It was a live-in situation, doing very little work. It was rather a remote place, out in the suburbs of Los Angeles. I thought maybe I could stay away from old associates. So I went out there and went to work, and I still stayed clean for several months. But then I started using again.

I had a job where I went in at eleven at night and worked to seven in the morning. Gave me all of my daytime clean, and there was an opportunity to get my hands on some barbiturates and paregoric and a little bit of opiates now and then in the hospital. So, I stayed there three years, but the last two and a half years, I was addicted to drugs. I'd gotten into such a condition that I was completely fed up with the job and everything else, so I left the job in 1959, just about January, 1959, first of the year.

I went back to Los Angeles where I'm very well known, know most all the addicts in town--and there's many thousands of them.

All this time, while working, I didn't make enough money to support a drug habit, and I was working nights and stealing and robbing and conniving all day long. I gave this up and went right back into the same old life again.

In April, 1959, I had heard about Synanon on the streets from other drug addicts. One Sunday morning, I believe, I woke up completely smashed, in my opinion. I never made any attempt at suicide. I suppose I never had the courage. But I had reached this point, where I used to go to bed at night hoping that I didn't wake up in the morning. Unfortunately I did. On this particular morning, I suddenly used all the narcotics I had and jumped on a bus and came to Santa Monica. I thought the place was in Santa Monica. I barely heard of it. I found out it was in Ocean Park, about a couple of miles south of here. At that time, there was an Ocean Park, and I walked down the promenade looking for it.

I ran into a boy I'd known in the past and he said, "What are you doing down here?"

I said, "I'm looking for a place called Synanon."

He said, "Well, you found the right guy."

He took me right in. I found out he was a director. I didn't know this, but he was a director of the organization. So I went in and talked to the Board of Directors and a sort of a screening committee we had at that time, and was accepted.

Now I was very skeptical of this experiment. In the olden days, it looked like a hopjoint. They had no funds; starving to death; twenty or thirty addicts half-way staying clean, at least. But I did see a couple of boys that I had known in the past; had been in the penitentiary and jails with; that were apparently clean, and I wondered how they did it. Frankly, I thought there was some gimmick connected with it. There was something going on and maybe that I could get cut in on the action. Maybe a chance for me to make some money.

As I said before, I was extremely skeptical. I had no confidence in what they were trying to do, but I stuck around. Oh, every day I thought about leaving. I couldn't make up my mind. I decided that I would give it ninety days to see what happened. I stayed ninety days. In the meantime, I went to work.

Chuck Dederich, our founder, had, I think, used reverse psychology on me, probably on account of my age. I've never seen him, seen him use this particular

psychology on anyone else. He lived in a small apartment a block away from the dormitory that we had, and every night when he used to go to bed, he used to come around and shake my hand and say, "Well, I'm saying good-bye to you now, because I know you won't be here in the morning." And he used to come in in the morning and look at me and say, "Are you still here?"

I don't know. This did something to me. Maybe it presented a challenge to me, but I stuck around. In six months, he trusted me with what little funds we had. I was doing the procuring of groceries and doing part of the cooking. I never had anyone trust me before. I was treated with kindness and love and respect, something new. And, above all, I began to get a feeling of acceptance to a group. In my opinion then, and certainly a definite one later on, this particular group had a goal.

I, or any other addict, never belonged to any group, including our own families, because we are completely encapsulated people, and couldn't belong to any group if we chose. But with this group, I finally found myself in this thing with both feet. I began to enjoy what I was doing.

In 1960, about a year after coming here, I was appointed as a member of the Board of Directors, in



charge of Welfare. Well, this amazed me. I just couldn't believe it. In fact when they gave me the news, I tried to turn it down. I didn't have any particular feeling towards it. I didn't think I was capable. But anyhow, they told me that, in their opinion, I was the one for the job; so I took them at their word, and since this time, 1960 (it's been almost two years), I've been a member of the Board of Directors.

I've been in the Synanon experiment for about three years. In fact, three years and just a few days. I became deeply involved in this thing. I learned many things. I learned to verbalize my thoughts. I learned to communicate with others, to some extent. I got a few insights into my particular personality and it began to clear up, and many of my problems that I considered of extreme importance, I found out to be very trivial.

Another gimmick that worked for me is this open door. You're free to leave any time that you want. I had never run up against this. We were always locked up. So the worst thing that could happen to you around here is banishment. If you were guilty of some infractions or something, they threatened you with banishment.

We have a rather loose-knit policy, if we have

a policy at all, of saying around here that there's nothing constant here but change. We change every day. We believe in staying perfectly loose. We don't get locked in a position. We don't get rigid in our thinking, so we're forever changing, and I like this.

I'm particularly interested in youth groups and different classes of drug addiction and criminal behavior among the youth; especially interested in juvenile delinquency. I would like to do something about this. There are a couple of research programs being started here by some professors from UCLA; just maybe I will get in on this. At the present time I don't have any time for it, because I'm very busy as. We're very busy people down here, and especially the directors. We have much work to do, but if I ever have the opportunity, I think that I could make a great contribution in this particular facet of drug addiction. I like to think that I could be of some help to youth. I think that maybe it might be possible that they could learn from my experience, rather than have to go to jail as many times as I have, to be ridiculed and degraded all their lives, hit over the head with pistols, and what have you. I intend to pursue this thing if the opportunity ever presents itself.

My family background, as I mentioned before,

wasn't an ideal situation for a young boy. Of education, I had eight years of elementary school and four years of high school. I don't know how I staggered through that, but I made it, and I remember early I decided I wanted to go to college. By the time I got out of high school, I seemed to be already on my way and I did have some possibilities of going to college. Some people had offered to help me, but I never got around to it. By the time I got out of high school, I was already involved in petty crime and we used narcotics just shortly after that, anyhow. So, that's about it, as far as my story goes.

The mechanisms of Synanon are many-splintered. There are so many things going on down here. They're mostly intangible. Something that you can't definitely put your finger on. Every boy or girl in here might have a different interpretation of what worked for them; it might not work for another.

Most of these kids, after staying here awhile, become pretty well psychologically orientated. They read. We have group discussions all the time. We have seminars all the time. There is a possibility, if you apply yourself, that you might be able to get some sort of an insight of what's bothering you. These group discussions are really deep-level things. We break up into small groups and we're able to

communicate with each other on a deep feeling level rather than an intellectual level. This seems to work for me.

There seems to be a communication block, and always has been, between the drug addict and members of the larger society. So we're gradually breaking down those walls. We've had something like seven thousand individual visits last year. There's many guests in here. Saturday night's gotten to the point where you have to get a reservation to come here. It's just started in the last two weeks. We can't accommodate the friends and guests from the outside that want to come here on Saturday night visits. It's usually a little philosophical discussion. We discuss anything. We discuss religion, current events, philosophy, medical aspects. We don't really solve anything.

Well, I suppose, basically we're like AA, in some small degree. I feel that we have a little different and maybe a little deeper problem than alcoholism. Alcoholics Anonymous rather stresses higher power, where Synanon is more prone to lean towards self-reliance on the individual. Of course, if a boy or should a girl have a spiritual awakening here, it would be well and good. We have nothing against it, and some of them do have. But for me

and many other kids around here, it's a process of gradually making this transition back into the larger society, where one could be able to function as a somewhat useful, productive individual. We are doing it.

We have, I think, eight kids going to City College. We have twelve or fifteen living in what we call "Stage Three," who have been here long enough to work and live in the community, and come here and attend the meetings, visit with friends, and work with the newer kids. And we have another dozen who are in stage two, who work in the community and live here and pay a nominal boardage--sort of like a young boy with his first job out of high school, living at home a while.

It's a great big, huge, dynamic-- literally, a bunch of people with a common problem. There's much love and affection and empathy here. We don't have any formula, no magic wand. In fact, there's very little we can do, really. A person comes to our door and admits that he's in trouble and wants help; we accept him. We do have what we laughingly call an "indoctrination class." The only thing that could be determined there, if anything at all, is try to detect some degree of sincerity within an individual.

We're usually wrong. If we think they're the least bit sincere, we accept them, but the problem lies within the individual. He has to have some desire within himself to do something about his problem; otherwise, there's very little we can do. Our hands are tied. We don't keep them against their will. Of course, we can't lock them up.

Everyone is treated on an individual basis, naturally; and everyone shares and shares alike. We don't have any favorites here. Even our food is shared; our cigarettes are shared; even to the extent of our toilet articles--they're all put in one big washroom and everyone shares everything. We don't have any personal property around here. Even the clothes, to some extent, are shared if need be.

It's been referred to, by some people, as being a sort of a religion. There's no doubt about it--it's a communal living, cooperative living. Seems to be getting bigger and bigger as time goes by. We certainly, in the future, will have to relocate for many reasons. We still are in a little hassle with the municipal government in Santa Monica. We're in the wrong zone, they contend. We contend we're not.

But the main reason is that we've outgrown the facility. We're full. We have to have more room. We've gotten to the point, right as of today, that

we're going to have to refuse people admittance; and this is bad, because in a lot of cases, a boy or a girl comes to the door, almost on their hands and knees, no money, no place to go and with a bad problem. It's very hard to say, "I'm sorry. We can't accept you."

They have no place to go; they might go kill themselves. I don't know what we're going to do after today. We got three new kids yesterday. I suppose, if they were in real bad circumstances, and most of them are, we'd have to hang them on the wall somewhere.

It's a day-by-day struggle for existence; always has been. I suppose it always will be. We've never been able to accumulate any sizeable bank account. We exist on small donations from friends in the community. Some of the kids work and pay board.

But this constant struggle has its good points. I definitely believe it may be part of the therapy. We're always running out of money. We have to tighten our belt. We have to cut down on the cigarettes. Maybe cut down on the food a little; maybe have to cut out meat, or only have it a couple of times a week. There's many ways that we have to pull ourselves up.

Transportation is a big problem. Public

relations is a big problem here. It's a very busy place. I think we work six secretaries--a lot of letters to write, a lot of thank you notes to people who have been kind to us and who have donated goods and services. It's a real busy job.

Not to mention the many little interrelation problems that you have these twenty-four periods. People have problems, and they want to talk about them. They have to be counselled. This goes on all the time.

We have learned a great deal about narcotic addiction. We certainly don't have all the answers, but we've learned many things. We don't, by any stretch of the imagination, lay claims to having an answer to the problem, but we do know that we have about the first workable approach to it--the only one that I know of. We have the largest concentration of clean narcotic addicts that's ever been assembled on the face of the earth, outside of prison walls. That's a fact you can't escape.

The drug addict is a very peculiar individual. I've had some experience with him, being here three years, and having used drugs all my life. I don't think that there's (this is my personal opinion) too much wrong with the drug addict's intellect. Of course, it's always distorted. I also don't believe



that there is too much brain damage. I've read about everything that's available in the medical profession in regard to the brain damage on opiates, and there seems to be very little. I'm speaking particularly of opiates. There's many other facets of it in this particular time and age, right now. If you get into barbiturates, tranquilizers, psychic energizers, marijuana, many other things, there seems to be a great amount of cellular damage, brain damage; but there seems to be very little with use of opiates. Most of us here have been addicted to heroin, and I say again, I can't find anything particularly wrong with the addict's intellect.

Physically, there's not too much wrong with the addict once he gets himself well, in comparison to the chronic alcoholic, who usually winds up with sclerosis of the liver or something else. This doesn't usually happen in an addict, but you run into something else. You run into an emotional wreck--that's what you're up against. From six years old, maybe, emotionally, they haven't grown up. So that's what you have on your hands--a little child. So here, they're more-or-less given an opportunity to grow up emotionally.

Everyone works here. They are usually put in some menial job like washing dishes or scrubbing

floors, scrubbing bathrooms, when they first come in. We think this is important. One thing you must do with the addictive personality is to try to destroy the self-image that he has of himself and the encapsulation; so we deliberately do that. We try to break this down. There seems to be a great destructive force in the addictive personality, on an unconscious level. There's a will to die, or at least, a will to fail. There must be, or he wouldn't conduct himself like he does. It's a strong destructive force.

Coming to Synanon, we make an attempt to take this negative, destructive personality and make a complete flip with it. Point it in the positive direction and make a positive force out of it, rather than a negative force; and I've seen some miraculous changes. You take this addict and this strong positive force and channel it in a right direction. You've really got a dynamic personality on your hands, and a lot of drive, more so than the majority of people in the larger society. I've witnessed it around here.

The boys and girls that go to college always seem to come up with the best grades. We have two mothers, for example, who have been drug addicts and prostitutes for many years; they've both been

reunited with their families. We have nine children in our family, with their children, I should say. These two girls are members of the PTA, and the Parent-Teacher Association knows all about their past and they like them up there. They're putting a lot of new life into the PTA because they're strong, dominating force in the PTA, and, in my opinion, this can be used. Both of them are Den mothers with Scout groups, and one girl is teaching in nursery school and has one child here. She's been an addict all her life. In fact, she's teaching the President of the United State's niece in her nursery class. So there's been a lot of progress made.

Dixon: Would you tell us some of your experiences in supporting your own habit?

Hamer: Well, it's been by, well, mostly everything--a lot of armed robbery, a lot of theft, burglary, petty theft, mostly; and then small confidence games. There's many of them. I've used women. I've been a procurer. Most all drug addicts have at one time or the other. Most girl drug addicts some time or other resorted to prostitution. I did about everything you could do short of murder. Contrary to popular belief, drug addicts, as a rule, don't go in for crimes of violence. I guess I'm an exception, the robbery that I did. Most of them are petty

thieves--they have to be. They have to support their habit. They probably wouldn't be thieves at all if there were any other way of obtaining the stuff. In this day and age, if you have to accumulate fifty to a hundred dollars a day, naturally, you can't do it working.

Dixon: You said that you started smoking opium through this Chinese family. Did you just do it for kicks?

Hamer: Oh, yes, I think so, in the beginning. If I remember, a Chinese boy and a Chinese girl were about my age in school. There was an old saying going around (you probably heard it), "All Chinese smoke opium," which isn't true, but I believed it. I knew this family well. They ran a local cafe. I was in the kitchen, upstairs with them, running around with the kids. The older Chinese, who couldn't even speak English, would tolerate me back in the kitchen. I kept asking the younger ones, this boy, especially, "When are you going to turn me onto some 'pop?'" as they called it. And he used to laugh at me and tell me I didn't know what I was talking about. I remember one time, he was talking to some of the older ones and I asked him about this. He started talking to them in Chinese and they told him to get me out of there or something; but this went on for quite a long time, and one time I asked him again.

So he took me upstairs, and sure enough, they were smoking opium. So, I smoked some and got deathly sick; I smoked too much. But that was my first experience. I think it was just for kicks. There was no other reason, that I could see.

Dixon: Then did you buy from them later, or did you get it in other ways?

Hamer: I don't think I ever bought from them. They had their own supply. I had heard somewhere about the yen-shee, the residue in pipes. The Chinese don't use it. All they do is throw it away, and I asked them about it, and they said, "Yeah, if you want it."

Some other American kids told me to get the yen-shee because it could be used hypodermically. So they used to give me all their yen-shee and I'd take it over and these other American kids and myself began to use it hypodermically.

Dixon: What's the difference in the reaction that you get from opium and, say, heroin? Is there any difference?

Hamer: Oh, nothing really. Basically, they're the same drug. Heroin is an opium derivative. It effects you a little bit different in the way it strikes you in the very beginning. Opium, for example, in smoking it, comes on you sort of gradually. I guess it's a form of intoxication, suspended animation, or something. Taking a drug intravenously hits you with

a sort of shock which tingles you all over, and you're immediately sedated. It is a sedative opposed to other drugs, like cocaine, which are stimulant and hypnotics. That is always a stock question, "How does it make you feel?" No drug addict can answer that. I don't know how to answer it. It is the answer to your problems at that time. Let's put it that way. In the beginning, it's a feeling of exhilaration, intoxication, freedom from worry; but this is only in the beginning. For example, an addict who is pretty well strung out and has built up a large tolerance for drugs over a period of years, no longer gets this feeling. How shall I put it? In order to get drugs, when I get up in the morning and I get these drugs, I'm desperately sick, in all areas, physically ill, and when I get these drugs and inject them in my arm, it only makes me feel like you feel now. I'm only well again, nothing more.

Dixon: You don't have this "tingle" any more?

Hamer: Oh, no! It's a matter of getting well and that's all it amounts to. In three or four hours from then, you're sick again, and you must get well again. This is a strong compulsion and there's nothing that you can do about it.

You can't handle this alone. You've got to have help. I contend that the narcotic per se is only the

symptom. I don't know. I don't know enough about the unconscious mind or the field of psychiatry. I feel that it is only the symptom; it's a manifestation of something lying much deeper, something that's lacking in our life. Maybe the drug addict is an oversensitive person. I'm sure of it. Maybe there's other areas that I don't know about. I do know that it is an escape mechanism. I know that the addict personality is unable to cope with reality, such as it is in our culture, and he resorts to drugs. He just can't face it.

Dixon: Suppose I decided I wanted to try drugs, how would I go about finding somebody who would give them to me?

Hamer: Well, if right out of a clear sky, you decided you wanted to use drugs, you'd have to make an attempt to find someone who used them. You would probably inquire around. It wouldn't take you long. You would have to go down on the wrong side of the tracks, maybe. You go down to Los Angeles and get around on skid row or somewhere and ask somebody. A drug addict has no problems in this area. They recognize one another. They speak a language completely different. Many times in my life I went to strange cities, big, metropolitan cities like Chicago, knowing no one, and some way, I'll find out the particular area that drug addicts live in, and when

I see one, I know one. So I just go up and I try to prove myself to him, that I am an addict. He will soon find out that I'm either an addict or an undercover man. I've got to convince him by maybe showing him the marks on my arm, or maybe a mutual friend in some other city; but there's no trouble, I'll finally convince him. He's only got to determine whether I'm an undercover man or a real addict. Undercover men are trained in this. They simulate. They try to act like a drug addict and some of them are very successful.

Dixon: Of course, we've all read or seen TV shows about undercover men who simulate the needle marks.

Hamer: They do. They take needles and stick them in their arms. They go to all extents trying to arrest drug addicts; but that's about all they ever arrest. Unfortunately, it's the addicts. You don't get hold of the big peddler. How could you? A peddler, if he's big enough, maybe never even sees the drug, and it goes through ten or fifteen different hands before it is sold to the user. All addicts, at one time or other, are potential peddlers, but they peddle only to support their own habit. I think, fortunately, the judges usually take this into consideration. There is a difference. Don't go into Federal Court and be a non-using peddler. You'd better not. You better thank God when you have to



go to court, that you are a user; because I feel that it's taken into consideration. In fact, I know it is.

Dixon: Are the big peddlers usually non-users?

Hamer: Usually non-users. It's a very lucrative business.

The real big ones, probably without exception. Some fairly big ones, what we might refer to as middlemen, that are heading up a local syndicate, I have known a few of them who were users, and they're not too many.

Dixon: What about the problem of getting drugs inside the United States now?

Hamer: There is no problem. Well, it's a problem. They're doing the best they can. Someone advocates closing the Mexican border. Now, I don't know how many ports of entry there are, a hundred and seventy-one I think we have in the continental United States. The Mexican border is where all the Mexican opium comes across into the United States. This is only a local issue, believe me. If you go as far north as San Francisco, you don't find any more Mexican opium. It's browned. You finally get the Orient opium. You go to New York, you get the French opium. What happens if you close the Mexican border? Nothing. The good, the white opium is better. The white heroin is better, anyhow, and it would start coming in from other places. If you closed the border, well, what would

that constitute? Probably a foot soldier every ten feet. Then you'd have to assume he's honest. So how could you close the border?

It's a matter, as far as Mexico is concerned (and I think they're making much progress) of working hand-in-hand with the Mexican government. They seem to be making some progress in stamping out the opium derivative, but it's not a solution to the problem. They're not going to go to Persia and those other places--Turkey, Egypt.

I have no idea how to solve this problem. I think we're going to have to face it. It is a grave social problem. There are so many people that, basically in our little experiment down here, are very quick to pay you lip service: "Oh, you're doing a fine job. Very good! I'm very proud of you, but this is your problem, not mine." Which doesn't happen to be the case, really. It's everybody's problem.

If you're interested in your community and the youth in your community, it's your problem as much as it's the addict's problem, our group of addicts down here. We're certainly trying to do something about it, and we need a lot of help. We need more help than we're getting. We're gradually making more friends, luckily. People, thinking people, are

gradually becoming friends of ours, getting involved in this thing, willing to help in any way they know, but this is going to have to be done on a much larger scale.

I have visions of many Synanons throughout the United States. We sure need them. It's a good possibility we'll have one in New York in the next months, but this takes money.

I don't know what we're going to do about this plant. As I said before, we're going to relocate. We're thinking in terms of some property, maybe, in the country, where we can build a sort of "Synanon Community." Something like a campus. The plans we have call for half a million dollars and we don't have two hundred dollars, but we have friends in the Sponsor group made up of about between five and six hundred, mainly business and professional people in the community. They seem to think that they can raise it in the way of benefits and what have you.

But right now we're up against a situation requiring land. That is a real problem, not too much money involved; but finding anything suitable. We need four to eight acres. It's hard to get. We feel it has to be real close to an urban community. We can't be isolated. It doesn't make any difference about the addict. He can be as in the desert, if he

likes, because Lexington is three thousand miles away, and they're beating a path down there all the time. But we feel that we must be in close contact with the larger society. How would they ever make the transition back into it, which we hope to do?

Like living with the opposite sex--we have been criticized about our co-ed situation. We think it's a very important aspect. We feel we must live with the opposite sex. If we ever are able to go back into the larger society, we're certainly going to have to contend with the opposite sex. So why not learn to live with them here?

Dixon: What about the homosexual problem? Is there any here?

Hamer: Not really. There is a certain amount of latent homosexuality, but not overtly. I think most anyone, sometime in their life, has has a little experience with homosexuality, or a lot of people anyhow. But we have had people come in here, especially girls, who come out of state institutions and juvenile institutions for women, where there seems to be a lot of homosexuality going on. Well, they think that they are homosexuals or Lesbians or something. There's two here, for example, that are both married and one has two children. They're real women once again, but they weren't sure they were women when they came in here. But most of our homosexuality here is

latent. I can only remember one that was an outright homosexual and admitted it, and that happened to be a woman. We've had no men homosexuals, not to my knowledge.

Dixon: Do you think this is extraordinary, or is it just that the homosexual isn't an addict? He has his or her particular kind of addiction.

Hamer: It is unique with addicts. I have been in institutions where there was quite a few homosexual addicts, but, generally speaking, they're rare for many reasons. The drug addict is not interested in sexual activities in the first place. Most of the boys, after a long period of drug addiction, are impotent and inadequate and most of the girls are rather frigid. It's a big area that they have to work to. You see it publicized that the drug addict is a sex maniac. It's the exact opposite.

Dixon: I imagine you're too busy with the habit, just supporting it.

Hamer: You certainly are. No sexual act, no activities, no social activities. You don't even have time to say hello to your friends if you have any that don't use drugs, and certainly not your family. It is a continuous rat race that goes twenty-four hours around the clock, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. There's no letup in drug addiction. This has got to

go on all the time. You get sick at night the same as the day. If you get up in the morning and some way are able to accumulate forty dollars, we'll say for purposes of this discussion, you accumulate forty dollars, you go down and buy forty dollars worth of drugs. I don't mean you buy thirty-eight, because you don't think about breakfast, or anything else.