

Together We Can



A Publication of the Overeaters Anonymous Metro DC Intergroup

December 2013

STAYING ABSTINENT THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS

The winter holidays present a challenging time for many compulsive eaters, both because of the abundance of food available through the season, as well as the social and familial issues that arise around the holidays. Fortunately, there are steps we can take to safeguard our abstinence:

1. Make abstinence your priority: a program fellow describes abstinence and her program as the “keel on her ship.” It is what keeps her upright when the sea gets stormy. Prioritize and envision staying abstinent over the holiday season and you will be more likely to achieve your goal.
2. Use your tools! Stay in touch with your sponsor and make time each day for reading program literature, writing step work and making outreach calls.
3. Increase your meeting attendance, either in person or via telephone or online meetings. You can find the login information for OA meetings happening around the clock at <http://www.oa.org>.
4. Similarly, make use of the numerous free OA podcasts and speakers online to bolster your recovery.
5. Be honest about where you are in your program when you are planning your social obligations. If you are struggling, perhaps going to a party you feel ambivalent about where there also will be tons of emptying food might not be in your

interest. If you do attend, make sure you eat an abstinent meal ahead of time.

6. Make use of the bookending technique: before a challenging social or familial obligation, call or text a program buddy to check in and commit to staying abstinent. After the event, contact the same person to let him/her know how it went.
7. Pay extra attention to HALT during the holidays. Getting too hungry, angry, lonely or tired will jeopardize your abstinence.
8. Remember that the focus of the season should be on shared relationships and celebrations, not on food. Practice Step 11 daily and rely on your Higher Power!

I start each day with a prayer thanking God for my abstinence yesterday, and, in advance, for my abstinence today.

Sarah B., Intergroup Events Chair

STEP TWELVE

“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

Three people that I know of Twelfth stepped me over a period of years – a co-worker who used to attend regularly, the nutritionist who was the first professional to describe my eating as compulsive, and then the woman who told me how helpful a support group as in her life. That support group was OA. When I first heard about OA I thought it sounded interesting and possibly helpful. I went to several meetings, made no

connection and thought the meetings were weird. When it was mentioned again, I could not stand the thought of spending more time talking about my problem which I was convinced would not have been helpful anyway. By the third time I was ready. The information came to me not because I “had a problem and needed it.” It arrived through someone else, as a very important part of her life that she depended on and it helped her tremendously. I was attracted to what she had to say and it just so happened that I was suffering with physical problems. My eating was out of control, I had nothing to blame it on, I was desperate and I somehow got up enough courage to ask about OA.

She invited me to her house, told me her story, answered my questions and listened to how much I was able to share. She also had gotten permission from folks to pass on their names and numbers to me. Before I left, she told me they would be expecting my call. She had not given them my name and referred to me as a possible new person. I was trapped. I could not say no! They were expecting my call. I was so freaked out by my eating and my weight and I wanted to know more about OA. I was so scared yet desperate so I actually really appreciated feeling as though I had no choice.

I did make the calls which helped me learn more about OA, get my courage up and pave the way for attending my first week of meetings. I remember how nice, open and helpful the people were that I spoke to. My first meeting was on February 13, 2006, and by the grace of God and the love of the fellowship I have been coming back since.

For the first several years in program I thought I needed to work the steps in order and that I had to reach some level of acceptable recovery before I could “do” step twelve. I have since broadened my thinking. In the AA Step Twelve, it says

on page 106 that “when a man or woman has a spiritual awakening, the most important meaning of it is that he has now become able to do, feel, and believe that which he could not do before on his unaided strength and resources alone.” And, in the Big Book on page 567 the terms “spiritual experience” and “spiritual awakening” are described in more detail to not just mean the “spectacular upheavals” in one’s life but also the smaller, slower growing changes in one’s life.

In addition to formally working all of the steps, I believe all of us have had some kind of spiritual awakening just by the fact we are able to walk in the door, share, pick up the phone or put down the food. I also believe that we all “twelve step” each other when we are kind to one another, warmly greet one another and when we pass on our love and acceptance to people in and out of the rooms. I often hear that weighing and measuring food in public is a way of twelve stepping and doing service. We might even twelve step someone when we keep our mouths shut instead of saying something that would be harmful.

In addition to the OA Twelfth Step, I find the AA Twelfth Step to be really helpful to read as well as Working with Others (page 89) and Spiritual Experience (page 567), both in the Big Book. It is always a blessing to hear how others were twelfth stepped and to witness the many spiritual awakenings happening all of the time. Thank you so much for letting me share!

Katrina

WHY A STRUCTURED FOOD PLAN?

(Reprinted with permission from the Baltimore OA Newsletter)

As you all know, OA does not subscribe to any specific food plan – what IS essential is that we have one, and that we stick to it.

All good things in recovery grow from the roots of that tree.

Why a Weighed and Measured Food Plan? Being able to state honestly what is eaten also helps stop the devastating isolation of food dependency. Now there is an understandable and precise way to talk about food. If one is “only as sick as their secrets,” the need for secrets has vanished.

Perfectionism will get attention as an individual lives abstinently. A food plan measures the food precisely, accurately, scrupulously – perfectly – if you will, as the rest of life is surely imperfectly human. The past’s unrealistic expectations will bubble to the surface to be resolved.

A food plan can be the essential anchor, the constant when nothing else in a life of recovery is predictable or unchanging. It provides steady, stable ground on which to stand as the flow of feelings and experiences becomes more fluid. People, places, things and emotions will change while a food plan can be safe, dependable and consistent.

Food plans are also instrumental in learning to “let go.” Genuine recovery requires that the loss of friend food and the resulting grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance) must be dealt with. A food plan delineates an end-point at each meal. It becomes more than good intentions: it is a plan, a statement, a decision, a commitment. A food plan pushes against whatever resistance to, and ambivalence about, change and surrender remains.

Detractors vehemently argue that a food plan fosters deprivation. Certainly the feeling of “there is never enough” is exacerbated – to be repeatedly challenged by a visceral experience of enough food at every abstinent meal.

The sense of deprivation is not about food and never has been. Once food is no longer the focus of all needs, the insight can begin to dawn that what has been so painfully absent is nurturing, attention and love.

The food and eating rituals which are an integral part of the progression of food dependency are embarrassing, even bizarre and humiliating. Using a food plan, the obsession is replaced with healthy new behaviors. Where food has been truly out of control, a food plan is concrete and symbolic evidence of a new self-respect.

The holidays will be upon us before we know it. Getting well-grounded in your food-related disciplines will prevent the rising pressures and obligations from overwhelming you.

Mary F., Phil .W and Raynea M.

MY DISEASE

I was fortunate enough to attend the IDEA "Day" at Holy Cross Hospital Saturday night November 16th. It was very inspiring to me. At first my character defect of being judgmental went into gear saying, "The program tonight is not for me because these people with 10+ years of abstinence are all so thin. Besides, they have been abstinent for so long they are "cured" for all intents and purposes. How can I possibly relate to them?" My compulsive comparing voice said, "These people's interesting, dramatic and cleverly told stories are not at all like mine. After all, my parents really did not make an issue of food. I never did some of the extreme things that these people have done with food. My story is really somewhat ordinary, dull and even boring. I could not be a poster child for OA like these people could be."

Despite the frequent negative voice in my head, another character defect, I stayed and tried to give the presenters a chance. I listened and it seemed that my mind was open enough to hear them. What I

heard is: though the storyline can be radically different - even though I was hardly mistreated by my family or peer group concerning food - I developed this disease. Then my negative voice tentatively reasoned, "It must be your fault."

THAT is insanity. I did no more choose this disease, than a person with high blood pressure chooses to be hypertensive, than a person with cancer chooses to have cancer, than a person with diabetes chooses that disease either. My rationalizing voice chimed in, "Okay, you did not choose this cunning, baffling, powerful disease, but your disease is mild compared to theirs. You never ate out of the trash, ate stale or spoiled food or have done many of the other behaviors mentioned in the elaborations of steps one and two. Then it hit me like a ton of bricks; a doctor once told me about another "mild" medical condition that I have, "It's like being a little pregnant. Either you are or you aren't!"

Indeed, I have this disease. I may be fortunate that I never had the will to starve or purge. I never was successful in my attempts to attain my personally conceived of, desired weight. I always cheated. For much of my life, I was "only" 5-15 pounds overweight. I only gained a lot of my excess weight in my thirties when I had to take a medication that had the side effect of packing on pounds. I again rationalized that being overweight was not really fault. I was a victim of a medication, fat-genes or lack of willpower.

Now I realize that I was down in that place in Egypt--DeNile. I had a problem. What my personal circumstances did not do to me, cultural influences did. Some fantasy body between Twiggy and Marilyn Monroe's was my ideal. The girls that looked like one of them were beautiful to me. My life was far from

perfect, but it would be much better if I could just lose my excess weight. I liked food too much. For me it is not really liking or enjoying. Eating is potentially a pleasurable activity. However, when I eat to deal with problems, swallow painful feelings, eat with an unhealthy sense of abandon, it is anything but a pleasure. It is self-abuse. It is avoidant behavior. It is self-justification. Besides, it is not the spiritual experience that I believe it is meant to be.

I think that eating is a gift of our Higher Power/G-d. A friend of mine once said that He could have set us up to be fed by IV lines. However, we are indeed different from animals, although we both ingest food. The difference is that are sentient beings. We are capable of stopping and thinking before we ingest our sustenance. We are capable of appreciating the benevolent gift that food is. If I eat to live I can have a healthy relationship with food, rather than "use" food as a drug to quell my feelings of having a less than perfect life, discontent, and suffering, and to carry this message of recovery to those who still suffer.

Nancy G.

MEETINGS THAT NEED SUPPORT:

TUESDAY 7:00p
SILVER SPRING OASIS
St. Luke's Lutheran Church

FRIDAY 6:30pm
N.W. FRIENDS
St. Margaret's Episcopal Church
1830 Connecticut Ave. NW.

SATURDAY 5:00p
N.W. LGBT & Everyone Welcome
St. Thomas Episcopal Church
1772 Church St, NW



ACCEPTANCE IS THE KEY...

Acceptance is the key to all my difficulties: I used to detest the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous when I began in OA in 1988. This is not my disease, I continually thought, so why am I reading about alcoholism? It was nearly 20 years later when I got it – the BB is about compulsion, and it doesn't matter what that compulsion is. Being in any one of the Anonymous programs means we are compulsive about something, and this primer, first written in 1939, offers guidance to all of us compulsive people.

There is a particular chapter I refer too much of the time. It was originally titled "Bronze Moccasins", then retitled "Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict," for the AA Grapevine newsletter, and now is easy to find: the chapter (16) is titled "Acceptance was the Answer."

The frequent re-reading of this chapter has enabled me to (eventually) come to an understanding that I can't change what I can't accept. First I have to look at the facts of a situation, dispassionately, and see what is, before I can begin to change anything about the situation. I have to notice what is being elicited within me, the thoughts and feelings that are coming up. It can take days, sometimes, to get out of the strong, dramatic reaction I have to a situation. Ultimately, however, when I get to a sense of peace and non-reactivity, I receive guidance to the next action. My Higher Power is leading the way because I got out of the way.

Sealani W.

OA REACHES OUT TO THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Carrying the message of recovery directly to the compulsive eater, anorexic, and bulimic who still suffers is our primary purpose; however, another way to reach those who still suffer is to inform the professional community that serves them about OA. Letting the health care community know about OA as well as educators, clergy, and members of the business community, national associations, the judicial system, and professional organizations can lead them to refer their patients, clients, colleagues, students, and friends to OA.

One way that OA promotes outreach to these groups is through The Professional Community Courier Newsletter ("the *Courier*"). The *Courier* is an annual OA publication containing short articles written by professionals to professionals as well as general information about OA. In it, professionals describe first-hand the changes that they have seen in the lives of their patients as a result of OA. Some stories describe how clients and patients have maintained long-term weight loss, reduced or eliminated the need for a surgery and/or medications, or how they have developed a new way of life centered in peace, harmony, and a focus on the needs of others.

For 2013, the World Service Business Conference (WSBC) Professional Outreach Committee has made it one of their priorities to increase awareness of the *Courier* among OA members so that they can in turn share it with the professional community members that they interact with.

Copies of the *Courier* can be downloaded directly from the [OA.org](http://www.oa.org) website without permission (<http://www.oa.org/mediaprofessionals/the-courier-newsletter/>) or can be purchased for a nominal fee through the [OA.org](http://www.oa.org) bookstore. Individuals interested in receiving new issues as they

are published can also contact OA and ask to be put on a mailing list.

The WSBC Professional Outreach Committee is also seeking articles for the next edition of the *Courier*. If you or someone you know is interested in contributing a short article or would like more information, please contact OA at info@oa.org.

The *Courier* – spread the word!
Metro DC Area
Outreach Committee

STEP THREE WRITING

Written during the OA Friday Night Writing Meeting in College Park, Md., Dec. 7, 2012, after reading Step 3: “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him,” from the AA 12&12.

It was extremely interesting to read the original Step 3 from AA. There are subtle differences from the OA 12 & 12 version, and reading from a different source offered new insights. The image of the “juggernaut of self will” was incredible to me, especially in the context of meeting it head on and being run over by it.

We all know the saying, “A saint is just a sinner who falls down, then gets back up to try again.” To consciously make a decision to turn my will and life over to God is getting back up again. Each time I do it, I am made fresh once more – truly endless grace.

Then there’s the final statement of the serenity prayer – Thy will, not mine, be done . . . a statement we don’t use in our OA opening prayers. But the statement is a poignant reminder, every day, that I’m not in control; don’t need to be in control; don’t want to be in control; can’t be in control. My control is that juggernaut . . . and there’s no serenity when it thinks that it’s in control.

Wisdom, courage, serenity – that’s what comes when God is in control. That’s why we pray for it at the start of every meeting. That’s what I seek at the dawn of each new, God-given day. I just need to remember that, as I fall down, and gather myself once again, and get back up.

I know this will be the pattern that I will follow for all time. I’m just a guy. I make mistakes. I fall down. And I struggle again and again to get back up, only through God’s help. Endless grace – my hope – my consolation – my peace. Thanks for listening.

Frank R.

OA AND SEXUALITY WORKSHOP

The Monday night Greenbelt meeting is creating a workshop on recovery and issues around sexuality. It is anticipated that the workshop will take place on a Saturday evening, beginning at 7:30, before the end of March 2014.* The timing is to allow those who worship on Saturdays and Sundays to be able to attend.

Complete information will be featured in the next newsletter.

**Addendum: The date for the workshop is March 1, 2014.*

GRATITUDE

Our Overeaters Anonymous DC Metro Intergroup now has a full board to conduct its monthly Business Meeting. This is a big accomplishment – members have stepped up to perform this service. Thank you, our Board Members and Committee Chairs – you are the engines that help propel our OAer’s moving forward.