

Together We CAN

A Publication of the DC Metro Intergroup of Overeaters Anonymous

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OUR STORIES OF RECOVERY

DON'T LEAVE BEFORE THE MIRACLE HAPPENS

My name is A., and I am a compulsive overeater. I undertake this writing with great fear and trembling and humility, and with prayers that what I say may be of help to someone out there. My story of recovery in Overeaters Anonymous has many ups and downs. This is not a story that one reads in the "Brown Book" or "Lifeline Sampler" where after many stops and starts someone finally "gets it" and never overeats again. That is not my story. I have had many successes and many failures, yet I have never, one time, regretted that I kept coming back. If you take nothing else from this story, I guess my central theme would be: my worst day in program and being part of this fellowship is better than my best day out of it. While I do not have years of "clean" recovery or abstinence, I have experienced tremendous personal healing, growth, love and insight with myself, my Higher Power whom I call God, and my friends and family.

A big part of my story is that I have a very close relative who was personally abusive toward me for much of my life and was an active member of OA for many years. This person received many calls at our home growing up from sponsees and others in

"One of the arguments we use for not writing is this: 'I have nothing to say. Whatever I might say, someone else has already said it, and better than I will ever be able to.' This however, is not a good argument. Each human being is unique and original, and nobody has lived what we have lived. Furthermore, what we have lived, we have lived not just for ourselves but for others as well. Writing can be a creative and invigorating way to make our lives available to ourselves and to others." — Henri Nouwen

OA, and was loving and kind to them, then would turn around and be abusive to our family. This person made a very destructive type of amends to me many years later, basically saying in vague terms that the person was sorry for "anything I might have done that hurt you." This hardly felt adequate for years of emotional and physical belittling, shaming and abuse. I vowed never to go to OA. It was just a big sham, I thought.

However, I was on an diet from age 14 or 15 onward. My immediate family shamed me because of my body size (though later I realized that I was just a bit overweight, not huge as I had been told). I stole food at home, stole money for food, starved myself and then binged, and stole food from my college roommate. She got so sick of me stealing food that she put a note in a tin of cookies I'd been raiding saying, "Dear A., please stop taking these cookies my mother sent me. Thanks." I felt so humiliated! I got into a long-term relationship with a man in college who reminded me of the abusive person in my life, rather than dealing with my emotional problems. My romantic partner enabled me in my eating, having an addiction of his own. We tried to break up

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THE POINT OF NO RETURN

I think the first time I remember hearing that phrase, I was in driver's education in high school. When we execute a left turn on green, the law means yield to oncoming traffic, and once we cross a certain literal and even figurative line we have come to the point of no return. You have to make the turn. Now. The point when you can't turn back. You can only go forward. At that point. You can no longer go back. No way out now. The only way "back" now is in. Not out. You can only go in. The point of no return is behind you now.

That's how I've heard many people describe a binge with food. But at a point of no return, it veered off into something else. The first diet I went on. It was supposed to just be a 3 week plan with my best friend, after our freshman semester in college, to see if we could last the 3 weeks together. To lose 10 lbs. tops. Who knew I would never return to pre-diet life. Ever. The point of no return.

But recovery *has* to be a return. And it

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Upcoming Events

Love and Fellowship Event
Sunday, May 18, 2008
See more info on page 2...

Love and Fellowship Event
Monday, March 26, 2008
Silver Spring, MD. See more info page 2...

8th Annual Wellspring Retreat,
June 20-22, 2008
Germantown, MD

is a return. I couldn't believe I went to a first OA meeting. The walls of a meeting room met me as an under eater. Not the compulsive *initial overeater*, but I understood that apparently, that little detail didn't matter! How could there be a better welcome than that? I went as an expert starver. Undereater. Deprivation gone totally off the radar screen. My only experience with binge eating and purging became when my body was so hungry that it seemed to require getting as much food inside it as possible, even if I didn't let my body keep in it there very long. Imagine: letting my body think it may be finally getting what it wanted, and then yanking it away faster than that becoming a reality.

This all may be just the tiniest slice of my story here. But it's a place to start. A place to share. To share *any* part of it. Here. Meetings provide that, at the core. For me, at least, I think OA meetings and all the tools and opportunities behind them are at the core. It has to be, or you wouldn't hear such a variety of linear and non linear words of strength, hope and experiences of different forms of recovery taking place on any given moment, day, week, month or

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year perhaps. Recovery from stories that may involve food as comfort as a little kid. Or later. Or even later than that. Or comfort that began in a way for me that offered a desperate need for solace in the everyday chaos of life as I felt it. Solace that I achieved through learning how to starve that revealed itself to be a way to control everything from nothing. What a relief—temporary, of course. Ultimately, what a devastating, almost death-ridden relief way beyond the point of no return.

Now I find other doors of relief here. If I want to live. And I do want to live. I choose to. It's slow, scary, and so many other things. And I don't know if I can do it. And

I don't know if I should just give up. But what it isn't, is alone. It's a point of return. Not a point of no return. And no matter how it goes, people say there is no right way or wrong way. But it is a way. I believe that, even when I don't think I do. Thank goodness others may too, because we keep coming back. Back to a meeting. Back to a tool. Back to something. Back to recovery. To keep learning how. Or no matter who else says different. Including the "who else" that may be our own other voice. Here I learn that I am enough, that my unique story is more than enough to qualify—enough to get the support I need to live with peace and joy and health.. —Lisa

2 ALL-NEW 'LOVE & FELLOWSHIP' events in May!!!

**"Call 5 to Keep them Alive" Telethon
Sunday, May 18th 1:30-3:00pm @ Leah's
House in Silver Spring**

"Call 5 to Keep them Alive" is part of a 12th Step Within effort in OA to call people you haven't seen at meetings in a while to see how they are doing and to encourage them to come back. We are also going to take this opportunity to invite these OA friends to another Love and Fellowship event at Barbara's lovely house and garden in Potomac, MD (see below). The invite will provide a great excuse to call our fellow sufferers and reach out the hand and heart of OA to them. Don't forget your personal phone lists and/or we care sheets from your meetings and your cell phones. Contact Leah at 301-593-7159 or 410-991-3221 with any questions.

**Please join us for the 11am meeting at Holy Cross Hospital and for lunch afterward (bring your own or order from the cafeteria) before heading over to Leah's house!

ADDRESS: 10229 Douglas Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20902 (301-593-7159) Directions from 495: Take exit 31, Georgia Avenue north toward Wheaton. Go about one mile and turn left at the light on Dennis. Take your first left onto Douglas Ave. It is the third house on the left.

**Memorial Day Garden Party
Monday, May 26th 1:00-4:00 pm @ Barb's
house in Potomac**

Who needs bbq-'s and cookouts?! Let's gather together to celebrate joy and recovery in a beautiful setting this memorial day! Join us at Barb's house for an afternoon of fun and fellowship. Bring your own food, there will be a meeting and much, much more. Have you seen Barb's garden?? It's like something out of a movie. A movie about HEAVEN! There will be indoor hanging-out too, if you're worried about allergies.

ADDRESS: 10009 Penfold Court, Potomac, MD (301-424-8264)

Directions from 495: Get on 270 going North, take Montrose exit, West to Potomac. Continue on Montrose to Falls Road. Make a left on Falls Road. Continue to Glen Road. Make a right turn (there is no left turn!). On Glen through about three streets to right, make right turn on Ambleside (there is no left turn!). Follow Ambleside over three or four speed bumps (sorry!) to first STOP sign. Make a left at the STOP sign onto St. James Road. It's a NO OUTLET left turn. Make first left onto Penfold Court. We are at 10009, third house on right. Park on street, not grass. Garden party is in back of house. Directions from 270 North: Go South to Falls Road. Exit Falls Road to West (Potomac). Continue to Glen Road, then follow directions as above.

A LONG-TIMER FINDS MANY GIFTS OF THE PROGRAM

I had plenty of doubt back in the 80s when I first came into contact with OA. I'd lost 100 lbs in Weight Watchers at that time, and came to the rooms probably at someone's suggestion. I remember not liking the atmosphere (depressing church basements) and thinking that it didn't apply to me because I couldn't be hopeless, hadn't I just lost all that weight? My disease encouraged me to identify out, which I did in two ways. I convinced myself that the fat people in the room hated me because I was thinner than they were, and the thin people hated me because I wasn't as skinny as they were. Of course I realize now that this feeling people didn't like me was really my own feelings about myself, and that I wasn't able to look clearly at my behavior at the time because I hadn't really put the food down, I had just gone on a really good diet and been faithful to it for several years. Even in Weight Watchers, I continued to eat compulsively. I was bingeing on things that couldn't hurt me, I thought, like popcorn, sugar free drinks & jello & desserts, gum. None of these things is an option for me today, partly because having had two cancer diagnoses has eliminated artificial sweeteners and partly because I'm unable to have a craving-free experience if I indulge in any of those things.

I was at the time convinced that Weight Watchers would work forever for me. However, it didn't. I can't place the exact moment I let go

of the weight watchers thing, but I remember slipping and sliding a lot once I got to a reasonable weight (175 ish) and then gradually, very gradually, beginning to inch up again. I never stopped drinking alcohol, I never stopped eating sugar, I just tried to moderate these and other foods, and was spectacularly unsuccessful at doing so over time. Eventually, I gained weight back to around 350 plus, more than I'd weighed before WW. The times I tried to go back to Weight Watchers were unsuccessful. Once I started slipping, I was unable to muster the huge amount of willpower needed to recommit to the weight watchers regime.

After a while, I became desperate again and went to a local hospital for their medically supervised fast program. This was a diet consisting of powdered protein shakes and no real food. I stayed on it for several months, and lost about 70 lbs. Eventually I couldn't take it anymore, and ended that diet with some of the most psychotic bingeing I'd ever experienced. Scary.

When I was going to OA meetings briefly in the 80s, I became active in ACOA fellowships. I'd been in Alateen as teenager, since my dad drank. ACOA made me feel better, and gave me a place to share my complaining about my life.

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several times, including a time when we were living apart from each other, but were too co-dependent. During this time, while living in a small mid-Western town, I tried an OA meeting. I was fatter than I'd ever been and driving through blizzards for food. However, I walked out of the meeting, not wanting to hear about God and all the weird terminology. Also, people did not reach out to me as a newcomer. This has imprinted on me the importance of welcoming newcomers at meetings and keeping on following up with them by phone or email. It has also made me aware of the danger of cliques at OA, and the ease with which we turn to greet familiar faces rather than new people in our meetings.

It took my moving to another continent with my romantic partner before I came to OA again! I was at my top weight. He had a job in Australia; but I had no ties at all. We fought all the time; my character defects of selfishness, anger, control and judgementalness were at an all-time high. OA meetings seemed the only place where I could find community outside my relationship. I found a new world of friends and unconditional love. I got a sponsor, started working the steps. I lost about 80 pounds. When I had to go into the hospital for appendectomy, the only people who came to see me were few OA members who I'd known a few weeks.

When I came back to this country, I ended my co-dependent, unhappy relationship with my partner and made detailed

My cravings and my disease are not a demon to be fought but a deprived, lonely child to be embraced....I hope that my story will encourage those still struggling with abstinence to keep coming back, no matter what is going on with the food.

amends to him with the help of a great sponsor. What has kept me abstinent: going to meetings, turning my food over to a sponsor, writing step work on a continuous basis, doing service, making OA a central part of my life, even if it means giving up other things I think are important, such as work or church or romantic commitments. If I do not make OA first on the list, I will have no list. I cannot be a good sister, daughter, lover, employee, aunt, citizen if I am not abstinent. I made living amends to my siblings and parents for years of controlling, angry, judgmental behavior and my relationships with friends and family improved mightily. I liked myself more than I thought possible. I felt healthy. I started working toward figuring out what career I wanted to pursue with all my heart. I maintained about an 80-lb. weight loss.

Unfortunately, after about two years I got complacent. I got down to within about twenty pounds of my goal weight was convinced I was "all better." I stopped making OA a priority. I gained weight back and settled into a kind of "fat serenity," in which I felt "okay" if I gained back forty or fifty pounds; I still had kept off at least twenty! I

"played around" with these pounds for about 8 years, while going to graduate school and then starting on my new career. In the last year, my weight has shot up again. However, this is what I want to emphasize: I never stopped coming to meetings, or giving service, or having a sponsor. I have not made OA the priority it deserved (if it had, I would be abstinent and be experiencing physical recovery more) yet I have achieved, even while struggling with abstinence the last eight years, HUGE spiritual and emotional growth. I have survived things I never thought I could without being spiteful or childish. As for the abusive person in my childhood, again by working the steps, I have forgiven that person and wish that person well, and even give service to him when needed. When anger crops up again, I use the steps to work through it. A sister from whom I have been estranged suddenly needed help through a serious illness. I had to use the steps to work through some resentments, but I am now able to help her out when needed. I have a much richer, more intimate and more "usable" definition of and relationship with my Higher Power than ever before. This came about again through step work, especially step two, when a sponsor had me really think out who my HP was and looked like (it turned out to be the abusive person in disguise!) and then "gave me permission" to let go of that HP and define one that would help me to stay abstinent. Love to all, A. M.

ONE LONG-TIMER'S STORY...continued from page 3

My turning point most recently came when my husband went into Suburban's lock-down detox unit to get off alcohol. He mostly was encouraged by his friends who were alarmed at his drinking to get help. I cried all the way home after leaving him there, and hunted through the garage for the alanon and OA literature I had planned to sell at my next yard sale. I got on the phone immediately and called Alanon and went to meetings nearly every day. At one of the meetings, a petite and trim woman talked to me and I shared that I might have a problem with my eating. Turns out she was an OA member for 14 years already, and she directed me to a meeting nearby. Busted!

I went to a meeting, where there were three women almost as large as I was, and they were so loving and supportive that I kept coming back. For the first time in a long time, I felt a tiny bit of hope. I also called the OA hotline, and spoke to 'Jim from Virginia', who had lost 100 lb and kept it off for 13 years. I met him about a week ago and finally got to thank him. He's still abstinent, and still coming back.

I went to the Sunday 9:30 am OA meeting at Holy Cross Hospital, and when I was there, a woman stood up and said 'my sponsor says I need to sponsor someone.' She was directly across from me at the meeting, and I thought she looked interesting, so I asked her to be my sponsor. I worked with her for over six years. We recently ended our sponsor-sponsee relationship, but her patience and persistence

How do I know this way is right for me? If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it works today, I have to assume it will work tomorrow. If not, I hope I have the willingness to do whatever is necessary to maintain abstinence. So far, I've been given all kinds of assistance in the willingness department....Why would I want to let go of something that has given me so much? I'm too curious to see what wonderful things HP has waiting for me as I continue to live the 12-step way of life. In my experience, there is nothing that can't be made better by using program.

with me made a critical impact. She made many suggestions, and I followed them all, except that she would regularly suggest writing, and I avoided that. After wandering absentmindedly into HOW, it occurred to me that HOW would force me to write, so I joined up. I've been writing every day since then, and the nutritionist my regular OA sponsor referred me to gave me a craving-free food plan that I still use, with some modifications, today.

I went to an OA long-timers event some years back, where many of the speakers were HOWsters, but not all. However, all the speakers, who had ten years or more of abstinence, did a number of things. Everyone weighed and measured their food, went to meetings, worked with a sponsor, wrote, worked all the steps, used the phone, did service and tried to practice the principles of OA in all their affairs. I felt safe when I realized that everything they were doing I was doing.

How do I know this way is right for me? If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it works today, I have to assume it will work tomorrow. If not, I hope I have the willingness to do whatever is necessary to maintain abstinence.

So far, I've been given all kinds of assistance in the willingness department. I had two primary late-stage cancers, that made it clear where I'd be without program. (Dead!) My parents have died since I've been in OA this time around, and that is a weight that the program helps me bear. I have more of the kind of solid peace and serenity that was alien to me when I used food to deal with everything. I still have problems with my moods and feelings, but they are less and I trust I'll be ok if I just wait them out, or use some of the tools or steps to manage the discomfort, or distract myself and lift myself out of places I don't want to stay emotionally.

So why would I want to let go of something that has given me so much? I'm too curious to see what wonderful things HP has waiting for me as I continue to live the 12-step way of life. In my experience, there is nothing that can't be made better by using program. I can't think of a better one than the twelve-step way of life. If there is something better, I was never able to find it in all those years of trying. I'm happy to settle for this, any time. Why wouldn't anyone want this kind of freedom? Love, Barb M

MY OWN STORY... I am so grateful to have volunteered for the service of editing and producing this newsletter. I have been coming back to OA for almost 20 years and much of my experience is reflected in what I have read and presented in this edition of the newsletter. I relate to the falling down and getting back up, over and over and over. Also, the story that represents a minority of those who come the rooms: one of strict deprivation. I have long operated (unconsciously, much of the time) on the belief that I am worthless—but just **maybe** if my body is in good shape, that would make up for (or maybe limit) the space I take up on this earth. It was a little salve on a life that has always felt out of control. Now I realize it felt out of control because, in my loneliness, I believed my need for connection is more than I or a higher power or anyone I loved could ever handle, and I was afraid to ask for what I needed. I wanted to be useful, not just unto myself, with a walled-in life, pretty and perfect. Motherhood has healed a lot of that, (ha ha)—guess what?

Life was **never** in my control, and it was never meant to be! My daughter has helped "smoke me out of my hole" as I have often said—I have had to ask for help at a more profound and honest level than ever. I realized that I crave intimacy in relationships more than achievement, money or mastery of any art form. My issues with food are just the thin crust of icing, if you will, over a lot of other scary feelings that I am ready now to deal with—and I **COULD NOT DEAL WITH THEM UNTIL** I got an ample, structured food plan and put down my drug of choice —sugar, and always work the steps. With my sugar addiction (and also with deprivation), I want what I want when I want it, and that is to avoid feelings of pain and powerlessness at all costs. The love and honesty I have found in this and other 12-step fellowships has helped to counteract all the shameful messages I had and still have floating around in my head. **BEST TO ALL OF YOU, AND MAY YOU FIND ALL THE LOVE AND FULFILLMENT YOU NEED AND DESERVE.**—Joanne

Share your story with **Together We Can**, your Intergroup publication. The July edition will focus on **taking your recovery on vacation—or anything else you need to write about.** Send your article to newsletter@oadcmetro.org by July 4, 2008.