

OA DC INTERGROUP NEWSLETTER

December 2009

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Living Step Three – Leah M.

When I first started on Step 3 this time around, I was filled with fear and doubt. I was answering the questions in the OA workbook and felt like every time I answered a question I was sticking my toe into Step 3 and then pulling back, thinking I couldn't possibly trust God with everything. Even if I could trust, Step 3 seemed to mean not getting my way and not being able to do whatever I wanted. That seemed unacceptable. Never mind that what I wanted was usually unhealthy for me and made me miserable or put me in danger. Somehow, almost miraculously, by the end of writing on those questions, I realized that I actually was willing to make the decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of the God of my understanding.

I'm not entirely sure why I became ready, but a few things really helped. One was truly accepting that I am powerless over food. If I truly believe that picking up a compulsive bite will turn into uncontrollable binging that may never stop and if I truly believe that I have no power to stop myself from taking that first bite, I become a lot more willing to let a Higher Power step in. I've heard that Step 1 is the only one we have to do perfectly. Another was truly believing that God would restore me to sanity. Just as important was that I believed in a God who loves me unconditionally and always has my best interests at heart. It's a lot easier to turn my will and life over to that kind of God than it is to turn it over to a punishing, uncaring God who is too busy for my little problems. But I think the most important thing for me was realizing that Step 3 is making the decision to turn my will and life over, not the absolute perfect practice of this on a daily basis forever and ever. It was a relief to realize that this was something I could practice one day at a time and hopefully get better at over time. And by staying abstinent no matter what, I have the opportunity to learn from my mistakes,

grow, and have a new chance each day to live life better and more in alignment with what my Higher Power wants for me.

It also has really helped me to think of working Step 3 as similar to having a food plan. My food plan eliminates all my binge foods. Because of this, I don't have physical cravings. I still have emotional cravings, but the food plan I have makes staying abstinent so much easier because I don't have to worry about trying to eat foods that drive me insane and then to only eat them in small quantities. Similarly, trying to align my will with God's will for me makes working my program and walking through whatever life brings so much easier. Step 3 doesn't change what is happening externally, but it does change my reaction to it. Hard things happen in life. Things happen that could be very annoying. But with abstinence and the steps, I can choose to react to them in a way that causes me and others a lot of pain, or I can let it roll off me and find the joy and gratitude that is there in everything that may come my way.

In April, although I was abstinent, I was not trusting God very much. I went on a work trip and although I was shown all throughout the trip that God was taking care of me in every way, I was very much trying to control everything and everyone around me. Last week, I took the same exact trip. This time, living in Step 3, all the things that annoyed me in April happened again, but they didn't bother me. Instead of getting angry that the instructor budgeted time differently than I would have, I enjoyed the fact that we were done early each day and it gave me the opportunity to enjoy the woods in the last hours of daylight. I know that I was more happy, joyous and free throughout the week and that because I wasn't trying to control everyone and everything, those around me could also breathe a little easier. Thank you God for these steps and for abstinence.

Acronyms - Various Anonymous	12 Warning Signs of a Spiritual Awakening... Anonymous
<p>STAR Stop, Take a deep breath And Relax We need to get out of our heads, where our thinking, evaluating, judging, etc., are</p> <p>Ego Easing God/Goodness Out And get into our hearts, where, we are</p> <p>FROG Fully Relying On God/Goodness That's because we were made by Love, for Love ...each and every one of us ... and so when I look at another or within myself, honesty requires that I</p> <p>Love Look On Veritable Essence If I FEAR (False Evidence Appearing Real) that I cannot do that, or don't know how ... Here's how:</p> <p>FANS Feelings And Needs Sensing</p> <p>My feelings and your feelings point to our basic needs. Because they are basic, we have them in common, and our compassionate nature will guide us.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A tendency to think and act spontaneously rather than on fears based on past experiences. 2. An unmistakable ability to enjoy each moment. 3. A loss of interest in judging other people. 4. A loss of interest in judging myself. 5. A loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others. 6. A loss of interest in conflict. 7. A loss of ability to worry. (Beware, this is a serious symptom!) 8. Frequent, overwhelming episodes of appreciation. 9. Contented feeling of connectedness with others and nature. 10. Frequent attacks of smiling. 11. An increased tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen. 12. An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.

Focus on the Swing, or, What My Husband Has Taught Me About Sports and My Disease
by Rachel S., Washington, D.C.

I'm not a big sports fan, but my husband used to be a sports writer. As such, he's quick to offer sports metaphors for my recovery. I think it helps him understand my disease in a context he's comfortable with. A few of them stick with me:

Basketball: Before I joined OA in October 2004, I went to an eating disorders treatment facility to address my anorexia and bulimia. After a few weeks of doctors appointments, therapy and trying to follow my new food plan, it seemed that my bingeing and purging were worse than ever.

Despondent, I called my husband (then my boyfriend). He told me that in basketball games, when one team is getting crushed, it will often rally in the fourth quarter and score 10 points or so, but then still lose the game. Perhaps my bingeing was just my disease knowing it was about to get defeated and going on a run.

Golf: During a recent, blessedly brief, relapse, I was struggling to live "one day at a time." After bingeing and purging one night, it seemed pointless, almost disingenuous, to wake up the next morning and prepare an abstinent breakfast.

My husband told me that in golf, a player must keep his focus on one swing at a time or risk losing his cool—kicking himself over a missed putt three holes ago or thinking about how a rival is two strokes ahead of him. When I was trying to string together some abstinence after being knocked to my knees by this disease, my husband encouraged me to "focus on the swing." It keeps decisions small and helps me stay present.

Baseball: In 2004, the Yankees led a playoff series three games to zero over the Boston Red Sox. One more win and it was over. But then, the Red Sox won a game. Buoyed, they won another...and another...and one more to clinch the series. Watching this comeback made me believe in momentum—an invisible force that gives us the willingness and confidence to move forward. If I am abstinent on Monday, it's easier for me to stay abstinent on Tuesday.

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Talking with our Higher Power - In gratitude, Marsha K., Silver Spring, MD,

The Phone – Abbie B., Silver Spring, MD

I am a newcomer to OA, but not to prayer. Since I was a little girl I have participated in all kinds of prayer ranging from the “Now I lay me down to sleep” variety to drumming and chanting. I take to it all and I have found enough evidence to confirm my belief in a Higher Power who loves his creation and responds to our petitions.

I believe in selfish prayer – this is my time alone with God and regardless of world circumstances, I have a period of time with my creator where it is all about me. I have the disease of COE and only God can restore me. The more I am restored, the more I can be of service to others.

I pray both purposefully and spontaneously. I pray in the car, gym, office and in quiet places. No place is too sacred for the likes of me, nor too profane for the likes of God. My first prayer of the day is that God sustain me in my abstinence.

The value of prayer is identifying and turning over to God all that stands in the way between me and recovery. I have found there is a correlation between specificity regarding a struggle and the likelihood that God will respond positively to my prayer. For example, if one of my character defects is causing me or others pain, I say “God, please help me with this CD because it is interfering with my relationship with X.”

How do I know that my prayer has been answered? Well, prayer is always answered, and sometimes the answer is “no.” But when I am convinced that God has answered my prayer in the way I/he wants, I have experienced physical and emotional feelings of relief. This relief from suffering and changed circumstances (e.g. an improved friendship, a CD down-graded in intensity), tell me that my prayer was heard and answered.

People ask why do we make phone calls. The phone tool has helped me time and again to face difficult situations with honesty, acknowledge that I am in a slippery situation and get help! We say that the food is the last thing to; that we go "off the beam" in many ways before we pick up our substance. If we can see this begin to happen, get honest about it, we can reach out and get help. The program has helped me recognize all the ways I begin to isolate myself from human and spiritual support...as things are falling apart--I read less time literature, stop journaling, reaching out (making or returning phone calls, emails, (go to fewer meetings), stop doing service, and break the commitments of giving and receiving sponsorship.

I have a good story: I came back to program this month one year ago, having been gone for 7 years. I heard someone speak about a difficult situation at a local shopping mall's food court, and how the telephone saved the day for her. I was able to call her the next day when she "talked me down" from a difficult situation. I had run out of the house early without breakfast--and gone to a job interview. Firstly I was just hungry-- but also fearful, frazzled and depleted in many other ways. This woman walked me through slowing down, getting peaceful and then strategize with me to make food choices consistent with my eating guidelines. She helped me get grounded both emotionally and spiritually, which resulted sane eating.

It is important for me to open those phone lines and get to know people in the program so that when such trying do situations arise, I more easily pick up the phone.

As the eating season ramps up throughout the winter, let's remember that we don't have to do it alone. We can recover with the help of others.

Step 1 - Anonymous

Admitted we were powerless over food and our lives had become unmanageable.

I have been an overeater since I was a child. I used food as a comforter, often stealing food from the kitchen and hiding it under my pillow so I could overeat before I went to sleep. I seemed to have a normal childhood until I was five years old. That's when my father was diagnosed with schizophrenia. I remember coming home from a friend's house. My bags were packed, my aunts and uncles were there, my mom was in the living room crying. My dad had had a breakdown and was in the hospital. All three of us kids were sent away to live with different relatives for a few weeks. I enjoyed my time with my cousin, and I especially loved the food that I got to eat, foods that were not in our house. And it seemed that I could have all that I wanted.

Dad was out of work for a while after that. My mom kept the family together the best she could. We went to church every Sunday, sang in the children's choir, and were in ballet and tap classes. And every weekend or so we went on a family trip to the psychiatrist. By the time I was 10, we had been sent away again because of family illness. And by that time my mother was drinking to dull the pain in her head that the doctors did not seem to be able to cure. She started spending more and more time in bed with what I believe were probably migraine headaches. Dad took us grocery shopping and we ate TV dinners on tray tables in front of the TV, mostly. From time to time I would prepare a main dish, or my sister would prepare a dessert. And we ate all the desserts we wanted because mom was not there to supervise or tell us no.

I started working when I was 12, mostly house cleaning, and I did grocery shopping for a family. I remember finding binge foods in their cabinets and eating their food when they were not home.

By the time I was 15, mom had some surgery that seemed to relieve a lot of the pain and she started running the household again. But by this time I was a teenager and I did not want to be told what to do .

I was involved with an abusive boyfriend and felt that I was more a part of his family than of my own. After high school, I moved in with this boyfriend and started college. A year later I escaped from the abuse and By the time I was 15, mom had some surgery that seemed to relieve a lot of the pain and she started running the household again. But by this time I was a teenager and I did not want to be told what to do. I was involved with an abusive boyfriend and felt that I was more a part of his family than of my own. After high school, I moved in with this boyfriend and started lived with my sister for a few months. Then I met another man who was an alcoholic but was very kind and gentle, and moved in with him. I started a house cleaning business that helped pay my bills through college. I continued to steal food from the homes that I worked in. I remember one family left me a note telling me that the food they had was theirs and asking me not to eat it. I remember the shame I felt.

I continued my college education and eventually left my boyfriend and moved into an apartment with a roommate. This is when the real bingeing began. I lived across the street from a grocery store and I bought binge foods, took them home, and sat on the kitchen floor, eating all of the food until I felt sick. I started using laxatives to purge the extra food. I also tried drinking but found that the bottle of booze in my closet was calling to me. My former boyfriend was an alcoholic and I realized that I could be one too. I threw out the booze, but could not let go of the food.

I graduated from college and a month later my father committed suicide. I felt like my life had been turned upside down. I moved in with some friends and got a job at a local health food store. I continued to steal food, this time health food, and this seemed to be condoned by the assistant manager of the store. I was grieving the loss of my father and had one boyfriend after another. I fell in love with a man I met in a bar (another alcoholic), got pregnant, and got married.

Step 1 – Anonymous (cont)

After my daughter was born, I started attending 12 step meetings to help me cope with my husband's alcoholism. A few years later, I left my husband and became a single mother. The next year, my brother killed himself. I was furious and felt utterly deserted. My bingeing was out of control and, a year later, I found OA.

I started going to meetings, bringing along my daughter with some toys and a blanket. I didn't get abstinent right away. In fact, I was so afraid to give up my binge foods that I would go to a store and get binge foods and eat in the car after OA meetings. Eventually I got a sponsor and began working the steps, but did not become abstinent from compulsive overeating. I started working with a psychotherapist. I got married again and had a son. Then my mom was murdered in her home, and my sister and I had to deal with another horrific death. The men who killed my mother were apprehended, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to prison. I didn't realize that something had snapped inside me, but I started breaking things. Eventually my therapist encouraged me to seek additional through medication, and I started working with a psychiatrist. I have a strong will to live, and my psychiatrist and therapist continue to be key parts of my life, helping me stay sane and live in the present. OA is also a central part of my life.

In fact, OA has been the one constant in my life since my brother's death over 20 years ago. Even when I let go of OA after my second divorce, I kept in touch with some OA friends. Eventually, I found myself coming back to meetings just to see my best friend, who is in program. Before I knew it, I was attending OA meetings regularly, though I was still overeating. Two years ago, I came to the point where I could not face another weekend of bingeing. I got down on my knees and told God I would do whatever it took to get abstinent. God led me to a food plan of three meals a day with nothing in between. I got a sponsor and, within a year, I lost about 40 pounds

Life has continued to pose challenges, and, in the last year, my food plan changed and I added an evening snack to my three meals a day. Try as I might, I have not been willing to give up extra food after dinner, just

like when I was a little girl with cookies under my pillow. I continue to work with my sponsor and I write out my food plan every morning. I usually get to two meetings a week. And I am sponsoring others, and finding that being a sponsor is keeping me even more connected with OA.

Abstinence is one moment at a time for me. I still eat after dinner for the fullness it gives me, for the false sense of comfort, so I cannot say that I have so many days of back-to-back abstinence, because perfect abstinence for me would be refraining from overeating after dinner. I am not where I want to be, but I have to remember that I am not where I was. I no longer eat refined sugar. I refrain from desserts and overeating at work. I don't buy bags of groceries and eat them while sitting on the kitchen floor or in the car. And when I have contemplated going to the store and getting binge foods to cope with challenges of life, I have prayed and have allowed God to guide me home to an abstinent meal.

I leave you now with a reading from the OA Big Book, pages 98 and 99, which explains principles that I strive for.

“But I have learned to live with each of these facts and I have grown stronger because of them. Others have just as much to contend with and they do not choose to eat over it. Living in the past, bemoaning my fate, is just a way to justify my eating.

I have learned to see myself as one of God's children, neither the best nor the worst. I know I have talent, intelligence, and ability, and I have had many fine accomplishments. But my self-worth is not validated by any of these. I can love and accept my weaknesses as well as my strengths because they are part of me. I make many mistakes as I reach toward growth, but I no longer expect perfection from myself or anyone else.

My loving self has to work a very tough program to prevent my destroying self from taking over. I have learned to value more of the simple things such as the sheer joy of being alive. My happiness depends on my attitude, not on circumstances. Whether I am a compulsive overeater or not, life presents daily problems; how happy I want to be while dealing with them is up to me.”

Do I Trust Enough to Hear? - Neal S.

I heard a long time ago that that one of the primary reasons that the alcoholic drank was because he/she felt like they could not fit in, anywhere. They felt different, worse than everyone else and better than everyone else; at the same time. The drink took the edge off of everything, it made everything seem right, or at least right at that moment. As I heard two summers ago stated quite well, when after one character walked into a large room full of strangers, he heard "How about a glass of liquid courage?" That was what the food did for me....took the edge off everything. It was my social lubricant, my plate of courage. I could not relate to others without food there to give me support.

On this past IDEA Day, I was to speak on abstinence, but other circumstances took me on another journey. My Higher Power apparently had other IDEAs of his own for me that day. You see I am fairly recently engaged to my partner of the last 13 months and there is this thing called relationships and being part of a relationship, etc. and all the stuff that caused me to eat in first place (relating to people). I once heard that addicts don't have relationships, we take hostages. A process that doesn't work too well in any relationship that wants to function with a sense of harmony, trust and love.

Right before IDEA Day, my partner and I had some major disagreements and there was a lot tension and some heated words and I ended up storming out of the house and went to lunch (abstinently) and then on to the IDEA Day marathon. During lunch HP managed to get my attention by quietly whispering in my heart, "Did you hear what she (my partner) said to you right before you left?" Then her words came streaming into my head, "There is always hope?" There is always hope!; I've heard that before, from my own lips. And then HP asked me this question, "Are you and your story so important that someone else couldn't share their Experience, Strength and Hope in your stead?"

My Higher Power did not need to say another thing; I knew intuitively what I needed to do. I drove to the Wheaton Library and asked one of the marathon coordinators if they would ask one of the back up speakers to be available to speak if I was not back by 2:00 PM and promptly drove back home with a clear head.

My partner and I were able to work through our concerns without rancor, hearing what each other felt and needed to say; what a gift. I never made it back to IDEA Day that day, but I trusted that my Higher Power knew what was important that day and that was enough.

The only reason this worked and the only reason it ever works, is because I trusted my Higher Power completely. This has been a very slow process for me, truly trusting my Higher Power. Because I trust HP, I don't need the food as courage; I have my Higher Power to see me through and see me through anything. Whether it is a special relationship with my new fiancé, work, my sons or other family members and even the death of my father this past February, I don't have to do anything alone. I have my Higher Power, my Sponsor and all of you; I am never alone in my head because of that. The gift of the steps and the Fellowship is that I can stand on my feet and face the world without the need or desire for the food.....that's awesome!

Na Cre....Be Well.....In Fellowship, Service and Friendship,

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Hi All – A quick note from your Newsletter Editor. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to do this service. It truly helps me and I learn more every month. I truly appreciate all of the articles. Please keep them coming.

Thanks Victoria

HAPPY, SAFE & HEALTHY HOLIDAYS and NEW YEAR