

Hello my fellow OA friends!

I hope you all had a good summer and basked in the British Olympic glory. I'm writing this as the Paralympics are coming to a close and once and for all we say goodbye to the London 2012 Olympics. As a nation, we're often so accustomed to losing that it has made such a nice change to be able to share in our athletes' victory for once!

Similarly, my disease made me so used to failing that it's absolutely amazing to be able to accompany fellow OAs on their recovery journey and celebrate significant OA milestones/anniversaries with them. This week my group presented me with a shiny, silver-plated coin to commemorate 18 years of abstinence. I'll be the first to admit that my abstinence hasn't always been squeaky clean throughout that time, but I have nevertheless remained binge-free since the day I walked into these wonderful rooms. It's highly unlikely that I'll ever become an award-winning Olympic athlete, but as far as I'm concerned, that shiny new coin and all the hard work and 'persistent perseverance' that's gone into earning it over the past 18 years represents my own personal 'gold medal' and for that I will always remain eternally grateful.

However, once this edition of Step By Step (SBS) goes live, Halloween will be fast approaching –the first of a whole series of celebrations centring around food. As many of us 'batten down the hatches' as the nights draw in and move from the sunshine of the summer (for those of us who were actually lucky enough to relish in any!), how about focusing on the 'sunlight of the Spirit' (Alcoholics Anonymous, AA World Services, Inc. (2001), Fourth Edition, p.66) by stepping up your Programme and submitting an article for the Winter 2012 edition of SBS?

We hope you enjoy the Autumn 2012 edition of SBS. To continue with the metaphor of this edition's topic, "Harvesting the Fruits of Recovery", we definitely feel we've had a bumper crop this issue!

Love in Fellowship

Lucy, SBS Editor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

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We need YOU to submit your shares, stories, letters, artwork, illustrations and poetry.

Share with fellow OA-ers around Great Britain.

Do some fun service and keep our Fellowship thriving.

Email all submissions to
stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

OR, write to
**SBS c/o OAGB, 483 Green Lanes
London N13 4BS**

Submissions deadline for SBS Winter 2012 edition is Friday, 2 November 2012. Topics:

'Tis the season to be jolly...?' (Share your experience, strength and hope on the festive period)

Step Ten

Tradition Seven

Tool: Telephone

or any topic of your choice; review a favourite piece of OA approved literature; or share your experience of an OA Event/Retreat/Workshop

Submissions sent to Step By Step are assumed to be intended for publication and may be subject to editing. All submissions become the property of OAGB for publication and copyright purposes. Submission does not guarantee publication. We do not publish stories that contain outside issues or that do not demonstrate recovery through the OA Programme. Please note your contribution may be held and published in a future edition of Step By Step.

We also forward published editions of Step By Step to the Lifeline publication team; therefore articles that are submitted to Step By Step may be reproduced in future editions of Lifeline.

"Forgiveness is giving up all hope for a better past"

Steps Eight and Nine

"Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

Step Eight was quick, as I already had a good start on the list of amends to make from my Fifth Step. As I had reviewed my resentments with my sponsor, she had had me write a large red 'A' next to anyone to whom an amend might be appropriate. So I just went back to my written Fourth Step and took from it the names of people and institutions. (At the time, it was popular to burn one's Fourth Step, so I was glad I hadn't done that.) I knew this process would be ego-reducing, but I also knew this is what those who 'had what I wanted' had done, and I had sincerely taken Step Three, so I was willing to proceed on that basis of trust.

In addition to all the amends arising from resentments, I had a house full of stolen goods and university degrees received through cheating. So I had a lot of cleaning up ahead of me. This does involve a drastic self-appraisal, as the AA Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) directions outline. But I needed drastic measures to free me from the grips of compulsive overeating. I had learned that my life was run on dishonesty, self-centeredness and fear, and now I could see how it was these I would need to counter in order to do Step Nine. And I would have to rely on my Higher Power to have the wisdom, courage and desire to move ahead, the willingness to be hard on myself, again from the Big Book. I used the Step Seven prayer on p.76 - the prayer for willingness - often.

Steps Eight and Nine were closely interlocked for me. I started on Step Nine, trying out a few amends, before I had complete willingness to do all my amends. The experience of freedom helped me be willing to continue. Working closely with my sponsor (I always ran my amends by her first), I tried to be calm, frank and open, with a 'sincere desire to set right the wrong.' I repaid face-to-face all the shops and businesses, the museums and the government from whom I had stolen. I presented myself face-to-face to the faculty of the university from which I had received my degree through dishonest means. I explained to everyone what I was doing, that I am a member of Overeaters Anonymous and was cleaning up my past.

It was like coming out of the closet: telling store managers and university professors that I am a compulsive overeater and a thief. I initially thought I would feel ashamed or that they would be embarrassed. I then saw that for what it was: justification for not moving forward honestly. I was afraid of the possibility of going to jail, of losing my degrees, of losing my job, but I wanted to stay abstinent, and I wanted to keep my new life, so I was willing to go to any lengths. And I'm so grateful I did!

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Today I do not live in a house full of stolen goods. I hold down a job that I have an honest right to. I can walk down the street and not be afraid of meeting anyone. And, as The Promises of Step Nine (Alcoholics Anonymous, pp.83-4) say, my fears fell from me. Without secrets, there is so much less to be afraid of! And now it doesn't matter who else learns of my past, for I have cleaned it up and have nothing left to be ashamed of. I can look people in the eye, and be at perfect peace. And best of all, I can be of true service to God and my fellows, not just on the surface, but profoundly, by being an authentic – honest - person.

It took me about nine months to complete Step Nine, which I completed 29 years ago. A couple of stolen goods appeared two years later when I moved, and I made those amends as part of my ongoing Step Ten, which covers anything that arises from the present or the past.

Step Nine is my favourite Step. I became a new person, acting on the trust that I had built up (in my Higher Power) in Steps Two - Seven. I have never had to look back with fear or regret again. This Programme is a miracle, and I'm grateful that it's how I live my life today.

Clean and grateful, one day at a time.

Heard said at a meeting:

"Step Nine: from punishment to nourishment." (At first making amends feels like punishment, but eventually it feels like nourishment!)

Ana, London

No Such Thing As Coincidence

It is ironic that after a trip away specifically to carry out a big amend, Step By Step is asking for submissions about Steps Eight and Nine. What more encouragement does one need to sit down and submit a piece of writing? Almost like it was meant to be and, as a very cherished friend in OA once told me, there is no such thing as coincidence.

When I got to Step Eight, I was not willing to make amends to certain people, and this caused me to dither over even making my list. Why should I apologise to certain people when they had wronged me much more than I wronged them? My sponsor at the time pointed out that even at this stage, I didn't have to be willing - all I had to do was make the list and the rest would come. The spoilt child in me didn't really want to listen but I have also learnt that people who came to OA before me know what they are talking about, so I started my list anyway, even if not very enthusiastically.

Things came up in my Step Four that I never even thought I carried guilt over. A big one was my guilt over my Granny. Before I came into OA, I had gone through a series of episodes of depression and had not thought about people I cared about. This caused me not to see my much-loved Granny for four years. I finally booked a trip to Scotland to go and see her in the March but she fell ill during that February. I convinced myself she would be fine and didn't go to see her in hospital. She died, though, and I was not with her. I carried this guilt for years. I never even went to

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"Making an amends is like taking an inside shower"

her funeral and blamed it on lack of money but I could have gone if I had asked family members for help. I honestly did not know I felt bad about this and I didn't even grieve properly for her death. Food sedated me instead.

So amends to my Granny were on my list and my sponsor and I worked out how I would make this amend. I wrote her a letter, which was quite emotional, apologising for not visiting her and for not being with her or my family when she passed away. I could have left it there, but as I had not been to her funeral, I had no closure, so I decided that when the opportunity arose, I would visit where her ashes were kept, lay one of her favourite flowers there, and read out the letter. In the back of my mind, I felt that I wouldn't be able to visit there for a long time anyway, but I was willing.

My Higher Power had different ideas, though, and my parents phoned me recently to ask if I wanted to visit my aunty who happens to live where my Granny's ashes are kept. I would love to say I felt that this was the perfect opportunity, but even then I really did not want to do it. However, I knew that I was still carrying guilt, as my emotions are rife in my abstinence and I would often cry about my guilt and grieve like any other normal person about my Granny's death, so I said yes.

My uncle still lives in the house my Granny lived in, so visiting him was very emotional. I still expected my Granny to be sitting knitting in her chair or pottering about her garden and I found myself being very tearful, even though she died four years ago. My disease had blocked out my emotions but finally, because I am abstinent and well, I could express them. It isn't nice being tearful, but anyone would be tearful about the death of a much loved family member - only in my disease, I did not feel feelings like I do now. My tears are a sign that I am healing.

The following day I visited where her ashes were and made my amends as planned. It was more of a ceremony for me than anything else, because as I looked at the plaque, it dawned on me that my Granny is not there. She is in my heart and lives on in her children and grandchildren. We are her legacy - in looks, in sayings, even in mannerisms. She once told me never to put up with disrespect and always believe that I am worth it, so part of my living amends to my Granny is to take her advice. In my disease I felt worthless and put up with a lot of things because I didn't think I deserved any better. My Granny knew how I felt, even with food, because she recognised part of me in herself.

So, as I write this a week after I have made my amends with my Granny, I feel a sense of peace and serenity. I know that if she could speak to me, she would forgive me and give me a hug, but also because of this, I am able to forgive myself. Since returning, my abstinence is even less effort than before because I am healing emotionally. All this is a gift from Overeaters Anonymous and the miracle that is the Twelve Steps.

Angela, Newcastle upon Tyne

Harvesting the Fruits of My Recovery

The title 'Harvesting the Fruits of Recovery' spoke to me because nature metaphors have played a big part in my recovery process. In my very early days, I shared the same thing at every meeting – that I wanted multiple years of abstinence today, "Right now!" Yup – I actually wanted to use my self-will to defy the laws of time. A long-timer tried to comfort me with the metaphor of me being like a seedling in the greenhouse of recovery, but I didn't find it comforting, I found it infuriating. "I DON'T WANT TO BE A SEEDLING!" (piped the seedling). I lacked humility, though I didn't know what this meant.

As I had wanted, I seemingly grew up fast in recovery, becoming an expert in the Steps, the Big Book and recovery culture. Three months in, I thought I was no longer a newcomer. I thought I was winning, that I was ahead of the game, but it was only when I remained depressed that I realised I was moving too fast to enjoy my recovery and to breathe. I was where I needed to be at the time, but as my recovery has progressed, so has my humility, and today I allow myself to treat each day as new.

I have grown spiritually, regained physical health and I have a better practice of sane thinking, but I am humble and able to honour this sanity as a gift contingent on my spiritual condition. By not trying to outrun life, I am truly able to appreciate all that I have. Windows of opportunity open up each day to have fun, to nourish myself properly and to feel peace. Today I can be present for them; today I don't have to rush off to the next thing; and today I can be grateful that my Higher Power only hands me one day at a time. When I'm running around trying to micro-manage my own recovery, I miss all the miracles of daily living. Today, I can wait patiently with my hands open; I can be gentle with myself; I can delicately harvest for myself the fruits of each present moment; and I can enjoy them as my Higher Power intends me to.

Anonymous

The Fruits of My Recovery (or Pulling Out The Weeds of Disease?)

The Big Book promises that "if we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through"(Alcoholics Anonymous, p.83). Over ten months ago, I was saved by OA and I am not even a quarter of the way through. Already I am harvesting the fruits of recovery - and what a bumper crop!

The 'fruits' of my recovery are the physical, emotional and spiritual gifts that I have been given since committing to the OA programme. I have lost five stone [32 kg] (and counting) since coming to OA. The physical recovery is wonderful. However, the true blessing is my emotional and spiritual recovery. My whole life, I was enslaved to "the bondage of self" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p.63) and found myself unable to cope with people, places and institutions in a mature and rational way. I always felt that there was some puppeteer in the sky purposely messing with me. How self-absorbed! How dramatic! Through using OA's Tools and God's help, I am able to pull out these weeds of disease.

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“Faith is our greatest gift. Sharing it with others is our greatest responsibility”

Like a farmer, this has been a process of hard work and action. Yet, how much work and action did I put into eating and food? My Programme today reminds me of how there needs to be that equality. I would have left the house at 2am for food, so if I need to do something Programme-related at 2am, I'd better do it!

As I look over my bounty, OA has and continues to give me the gift of hope for a better life, freed from the obsession of food. Today I am honest. Nothing worked before OA. I couldn't do it alone. Today I have a faith. Also, the love and camaraderie of my fellow OAs are the roots that support me daily.

The beauty of optimism is my favourite fruit in my OA hamper. I see the positive in 'life on life's terms'. I know that I can cope with whatever may come my way through faith, support and working the Tools.

I am so incredibly grateful and thankful.

Sharon K, London

Harvesting the Fruits of Recovery

From the day I walked through the door of OA, I got hope. OA lifted me out of my pit of self-loathing and desperation and showed me how to live life differently. It taught me that I didn't have to binge anymore and I didn't have to be perfect; that 'good enough' was just fine. This wasn't an easy lesson!

I learned to eat three healthy and mostly moderate meals a day. I introduced snacks to cope with my fluctuating blood sugar. I put down refined sugar as it was too compulsive for me. The freedom from excess food and my food obsession was nothing short of a miracle. Having lost the initial weight, going to my wardrobe and knowing that every item of clothing would fit me was incredible.

There were inevitably tough days, where the mantra of 'Nothing Tastes Nicer than Abstinence Feels' and the Serenity Prayer kept me on the right path. I had to accept that sometimes my food would not be 'perfect', but instead of saying, "Sod it!" and bingeing, I simply tidied up the rough edges of my food and carried on along the path of abstinence.

Contracting chronic fatigue, with the resulting inactivity, caused a slight weight gain, which after many years at the same weight, I have found incredibly hard to accept. Swallowing my pride, being honest about where I am, adjusting my food, asking for God's help and finally buying a couple of pairs of larger jeans has helped me to come to terms with my current situation. I don't like it, but I am still abstinent and I have to learn to live with it one day at a time. Isn't that the Serenity Prayer in action?

Working through the Steps with my sponsor, I started to change emotionally. The Big Book promises that "We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us" (p.84). How true this is.

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Before OA, I was a 'yes girl'. I avoided confrontation, I smiled and then I got angry all alone, after the event. I did not take responsibility for myself and I did not know who I was or have the confidence to be me. How things have changed.

I have two children, one of whom has multiple diagnoses: autism, ADHD, dyspraxia (co-ordination difficulties), dyslexia and a genetic medical condition called Neurofibromatosis 1, which means that throughout his life, he will get tumours of the nervous system. No-one can predict how many or where, how big or small, or how much damage they will do. I don't know how I would have coped without the support of meetings, my friends in OA and God.

Keeping it in the day is the only way for me to deal with his medical condition. For today, he is okay and I have to leave the future to God. When I start projecting, and believe me, there are days when I do - when I discover a new lump or take him to yet another consultation which highlights the reality of his condition - I am dragged back down temporarily to a dark place of despair.

I have discarded the 'yes girl' and in her place is someone who has learned to be assertive. I spent two years fighting the school and local authority, ending in a one-day trial at the special educational needs and disability tribunal which resulted in my son getting the help he needed at school. I can challenge a consultant if they are not giving me sufficient information or referring him for the tests or care which I believe he needs. The difference today is that I don't do it with anger. I calmly state my point, which is backed up with solid research, and because of that, the consultants listen to what I have to say. They take me seriously.

Most of the time, I like myself. In fact, there are days when I feel love for the person I hated the most in the world - me. I am able to still the old punishing voice, which is never that far away, much quicker. I try to take care of myself and be kind to myself, and that way everyone benefits.

But I could do none of this without my Higher Power, without God. He is the hub of my wheel, without which all the spokes of my life would collapse. The days I forget God and whizz off into my day, running on that powerful engine of self-will: those are the days when chaos is more likely to ensue; when negativity and disappointment feature more strongly.

Throughout the day, I try to remember God. When my youngest son is protesting loudly for the twentieth time that he should be allowed more sweets and I have reached boiling point, I say the Serenity Prayer a few times in my head and it calms me down. Before I go into a meeting with the intimidating headmistress at my son's secondary school to tell her that the level of bullying at the school is unacceptable, I take God (and my husband!) by the hand and we go in together. When I sit at the hockey arena at the Olympic Park, watching my youngest son's face light up with excitement, I gulp back the tears and thank God for all the gifts I have been given.

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"Know God; know peace. No God; no peace."

The Serenity Prayer is all-powerful. My son has only one friend, who moved to Wales last month. My heart breaks for him each day he sits in his room on his own; each day no-one calls for him. I can't change that. I can't make other children like him. What I can do is arrange to meet up with other families who have children with similar diagnoses. What I can do is take him out to the cinema or swimming. What I can do is take him to the Computer Club and the Youth Club for autistic children. What I can do is arrange for the children of friends of mine to accompany us on outings. That, for me, is the Serenity Prayer in action. The days I feel distressed about the reality of his life are the days when the "Wisdom to know the difference" is eluding me.

Through OA, I have moved from the dark into the light. Whenever shadows conceal the joy which recovery brings, I have the Twelve Steps and the Tools of the Programme, the meetings, fellow OAs and my beloved sponsor to draw on. I have been given a second chance at life and I never, ever, ever want to go back to where I came from. If I keep coming to OA and keep myself immersed in the Fellowship, I don't have to.

Nicky, Reading

Tough Steps Made Easy

I was asked to speak on the topic, 'Tough Steps Made Easy.' As I prepared, I realised there is no such thing as a 'tough' Step in OA. All Twelve Steps are fairly simple and easy, but our defects make them tough. In fact, our defects make them look tough. When our desire to recover (to stop overeating and stay stopped) is greater than our desire to hold on to our old ways and our old selves, we become willing to follow directions, and the directions don't seem that tough any more.

'Tough' is really in the eye of the beholder. For example, when we finish writing out our entire Fourth Step inventory, the directions say, "We pocket our pride and go to it" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p.75). It is not tough to "go to it." Rather, it is tough to "pocket our pride." Step Eight calls for a "drastic self-appraisal" (p.76). While this may sound scary initially, it need not be 'tough'. Each Step has at least one prayer in the Big Book which can help us move forward when things feel tough. And The Promises for each of the first nine Steps remind us it will always be worth it to let go of our defects, and follow the directions.

The Big Book also directs that when things do feel really tough, we are to "throw ourselves the harder into helping others" (p.70). The directions are clear: "we must not shrink" (p.80), "don't delay" (p.83). I'm glad my first sponsor, who led me through the first nine Steps 30 years ago, helped me keep it simple and easy. And I'm grateful for the willingness to work Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve every day since, even when they feel tough.

Easy Does It, London

On the Ocean Wave

I read somewhere in a piece of Programme literature that one woman, when she couldn't quite decide how to define her Higher Power, resolved to think of it as the ocean. It was something stronger than her, which could take her defects. "Let the ocean take each one," she thought. "Let the ocean wash it away and disperse it into the infinite ocean."

So I was jumping waves with my kids and husband on holiday. Great big breakers some of them, although others just rolled by without moving me much, or making me lose my footing. But if I took my eyes off them for a moment, one would sneak up on me. And you could bet your life it'd be a massive one that would knock my sunglasses and hat right off my head and leave me gasping for air.

So I started to think of these waves as my emotions, and how I handled them.

If I didn't watch them building, changing direction and then cresting just before they got to me, I'd be overwhelmed and battered. But if I watched them calmly and saw how they were developing, I could ride them easily and come out none the worse for wear.

Some of them I handled by standing with my back towards them (although looking over my shoulder to see when they would hit) and they would gently lower and break into foam all around me, creating a pleasant, cleansing, tingling sensation.

Some of them built to a massive wall, twice my height. I pinched my nose with one hand, held my breath, shut my eyes tightly and bobbed down just before they moved over me. This was a surprisingly easy way to take the waves. No spray up my sinuses, no hat or sunglasses to fall off (I'd left them on the beach by this stage: I realised that trying to maintain a 'look' inappropriate to the situation wasn't working). I had to be free to move with the flow, to react with the ocean's movements and currents. I saw that this method, having faith that I'd be OK if I faced a wave head on, after gauging the speed, force and direction of it, was the same as facing difficult emotional, work or social situations. Do the preparation, do the spiritual work, trust that I will be taken care of and 'held' by my Higher Power – and things will be OK.

Some waves looked terrifying from a distance but by the time they'd got to me, they'd petered out. They rolled over me quietly, barely noticeable. This is definitely a defect of mine, stressing and worrying about things in the future. But when it comes to it, they go fine. I've learnt though, that it's good to acknowledge the fear when it comes up, and to remind myself that I will be OK if I walk through the whole situation holding my HP's hand.

Some waves I chose not to fight. I lifted up my toes slightly from the seabed as they gently rolled across me at neck height. In the same way, I don't have to tackle a lot of battles. They're not my concern and I can choose to stay out of them: my friends' problems, how other people behave, neighbours' gripes. This is a lesson I am constantly having to

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"The only thing you can control in your life is your attitude"

learn, because one of my defects is, "If only everyone did everything my way, the world would be a better place." Self-righteousness.

As if reading my mind, my elder daughter hit on the idea of jumping over some of the smaller waves. Quite right! Pick your battles. Some problems we can just leave well alone.

I dived right into the middle of some waves, taking them head-on and feeling the exhilaration. This was also a surprisingly calm and easy way to take them. I emerged refreshed on the other side, my head bobbing up to check what was coming next. I avoided all the churning, crashing anger at the top of the wave, where all the fury was. I slipped into the smooth water just underneath. If I handle certain situations right, remaining 'held', serene and connected to my Higher Power (who will always tell me what's right, if I listen), then I will be OK.

I wasn't in the ideal position to take some waves. I was half kneeling from the previous wave, half turning, wiping seawater from my eyes and hair off my face. In this way, like with my emotions, I could be taken by surprise and had to do the best I could in the time I had. It might be a split second to angle my body, shut my eyes tightly and either jump up or duck down. I might not get it right. I'd be swamped with a jet of seawater up my sinuses (I have problems with my sinuses) giving me a sharp pain, like 'brain freeze' when you eat ice-cream.

But the worst ones came when I was distracted, not noticing what was coming. I was pausing to help my children, to check my belongings weren't blowing away or being stolen, or I was looking at the view, the sunshine on the cliffs or other holidaymakers getting ready to swim. Now, these are all valid demands on my time. But I have to pay attention to what emotions are building in me, otherwise they crash down, catch me unawares and send me into a spin (and into the food).

If I can see that I am getting anxious or resentful about x or y situation or person, I can write about it or call an OAer to determine my feelings. Which defects of mine are coming up and which part of me is affected? Do I feel 'less than' because someone is criticising me, unloved because I imagine someone has snubbed me, or am I in fear about an upcoming work project or social event? Perhaps I am not trusting that if I do the spiritual work, 'move my arms and legs' (i.e. do the actual preparation for the work project, because God won't do for me what I can do for myself) then the outcome will be taken care of. Once I have thought each situation through, I can calmly face it without fear or resentment. I'll be OK so long as I trust, remain mindful and 'present' with my feelings.

The sea on that day was beautiful and vast, the sun shining and sparkling on the green-glass water. But of course, it had the power to kill me if I didn't watch out, to suck me back and under and deeper until I couldn't get up for air. The waves rolled in, one after the other, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. But they never stopped coming. Hour after hour, day after day. And even when I was long gone, back in my bed and

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asleep, they'd be rolling in, in the dark, seen only by the seagulls, the moon and the stars, and the softly swaying dune grasses.

My emotions are going to keep on coming and I have to be mindful of what they're doing: how they're building, twisting, developing and overlapping, sometimes many mixed together. This will keep me sane, serene, calm and recovered. And out of the food.

Now, on another day at the beach, there weren't any waves. It was calm. The water lapped lazily at the beach, warmly caressing my toes and gently sifting the smaller shells and little stones. In the same way, in my emotional life, some days are calm. I am not going through some great drama. I don't panic or worry or fret. I am untroubled and serene. Life is good. Daughters are happy, husband is doing what makes him happy. I do not feel I need to fix them, friends, neighbours or anyone else. This is recovery, when I pause and think, "Hey, I'm OK today, things are good." I almost can't believe it, because I am so used to stressing about things or being in fear. But these are The Promises (Alcoholics Anonymous, pp.83-84) if we do the spiritual work:

"We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness...

We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace."

Sarah H



"I am not responsible for my feelings - just my behaviour"

Feelings

Tomorrow is my nine-month anniversary of my first OA meeting. I am also celebrating nine months of abstinence. This week I have been having 'feelings'. Nine months ago felt like a mass of misery. It was a big, dark, mucky cloud that I carried around with me. My head was full of fog from my drug of choice – food – and although I spent an awful lot of time worrying about, obsessing about and getting sucked in by other people's feelings, I really wasn't too good at dealing with my own. Quite often, my partner would suggest to me that I was upset or anxious about an event. Mostly I denied it. Not just denied it because I didn't want to deal with it, but genuinely had no idea that that was the feeling I had. Three days later (it sort of seemed to be a magic number), I would go into meltdown. Usually in the meantime, I had been numb, irritable or created drama to give me a reason to let go and rage or cry. That way, I could create a situation that meant I might have feelings.

I am sure that to a non-addictive, non-compulsive overeater, that will all seem like insanity. And it is. And I am fairly sure that you know what I am talking about. This week, I have felt sad. I have felt anger. I have felt bored. I have felt happy. I have 'felt'. And I have experienced those feelings at the time I was having them and I have known what they were. I have even been able to deal with them appropriately. Not perfectly, but I am still a work in progress. Just over 12 months ago, my Mum died. She had just had her 87th birthday. I found it hard to cry. I ate a lot of chocolate and binged instead of grieving. This week would have been her birthday. I was sad, I missed her and I knew it. I bought some beautiful roses and put them on the fireplace next to a picture of her on her birthday with her four grandsons. On her birthday, I went with two of the boys to her grave and we remembered her together. And I shared about the feelings at my meeting. To me, that was a miracle. It was like being a grown up and I am only 54.

Yesterday, my partner did and said something that hurt my feelings and made me angry. I didn't get into a fight. I spent some time by myself feeling that anger in my body. I don't know that I have ever felt angry like that before, so that the feeling is just 'there'. I asked the God of my understanding to take the anger away. I prayed to be of help to my partner and to be shown what I could do. And I let that feeling just be there. And it passed. I wrote about it. I looked at myself. And this morning, I woke up and there was no drama, no aftermath, no sulking for the weekend, no game-playing. Life without the drama.

So what changed? Well, it changes every day. Working the Twelve Steps has given me emotional and spiritual recovery as well as physical recovery. I am well on my way to a healthy body weight and that is a miracle. The Steps show me how to deal with my feelings on a daily basis. Nothing else I have found in my search through nutrition, self-help, religion and therapy comes close to this. We really do have a guide for living in these Steps. When I do my Step Ten at night, I can look at my

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day and see where things have gone wrong and right. It is a daily balance sheet with a straightforward set of instructions to deal with any mistakes. I am learning that the feeling of peace and serenity I have is priceless. So when I get those feelings of anger and resentment, or fear making amends, taking an inventory, talking to my Higher Power and using the Tools of this Programme are just what I need to restore me to sanity and peace of mind.

So at this nine-month anniversary, I am celebrating feelings, with gratitude being right at the top.

Julia

'Act As If'

I came across OA a while ago but dismissed it because of the references to God - a hardy atheist such as me couldn't countenance being involved! And then my Higher Power got involved and sat me next to an OA member at a completely unrelated work dinner. Her telling me that I could create an HP for myself and just attend six meetings before making up my mind felt reasonable, so I found a meeting and started attending.

That was nearly five months ago now and whilst my abstinence is not yet continuous, my journey toward recovery is well underway. With my sponsor (aka my inspiration and Rock of Gibraltar all at once!), I have just completed Step Three, which, if I am honest, I didn't think I would ever get to. Once again, the 'God thing' got in the way but my sponsor suggested I 'act as if' and see what happens. I'd recommend anyone to 'act as if' because since I have done so, there have been many days when my HP decides to have a laugh with me and make choices that I hadn't previously considered. And things work out wonderfully! No longer am I 'acting as if' because I truly believe in a Power greater than myself.

It's all a bit strange, this having an HP that I am prepared and happy to hand over to. I do so each morning in the shower and I give thanks every evening for another wonderful day of being alive. So far, I have lost a stone [6.4 kg] and have a way to go, but this time (unlike my many previous attempts at using self-will to control the food intake) I am content to take things at the pace my HP determines. I am dreading and looking forward to doing Step Four but I know that doing so will take me on the next stage of this wonderful journey of acceptance - accepting myself and accepting my HP being in charge.

As someone who has reached the age of 46 and been on and off hundreds of diets since the age of 14, I thought I knew everything there was to know about dieting, nutrition and calories. What I had missed was the whole picture. OA has taught me that the physical recovery is only one element of that whole picture. The Tools of recovery have helped me to realise I need to work with my HP on my physical, mental AND spiritual recovery. Wish me luck on the rest of my journey!

Kim, Staffordshire

“Sometimes I think my mind honestly believes it can kill me and get away with it”

Poetry in Motion

In early April, I was lying on our couch, watching TV and thinking about how to end my miserable life. I had just rung a local gun shop to discover that hand guns weren't legal in the UK. Any other gun would be far too heavy for me.

But my Higher Power was at work. I picked up the phone and called a wise old member of my spiritual group and explained about my state and the gun. She said simply, “Don't help your son to commit suicide.” That was it. I could, possibly, kill myself, but not my son.

I rang an old friend in OA, from which I had been a drop-out for about three years. On the Tuesday I was at a meeting and on the Saturday, I met my new sponsor. Now, about four months later, I have lost over two stone [13 kg] and enjoy cooking attractive, healthy meals (I had always hated cooking before). I have also nearly finished Step Five.

I have loved writing for a long time. Of course, that all stopped when I was in my 'food-couch-TV-sleep' pattern. But now I am writing poetry and I would really like to offer a little of that to you.

The first one I wrote when I was concentrating on the appearance of my food, rather than guzzling it down. That was just after I got back into OA.

Strawberry tops, with your crowns of green,
Was a prettier sight ever seen?
Bless me now as you blessed me then;
Send wonders to my humble pen.

The second one is quite recent, since I started to realise I could love my body, with all its foibles.

Oh, rosy flesh,
I breathe into you...
And from there, I am inspired
To move forward
In the game of Life.

With much love and gratitude.

Arpana

Till Death Do Us Part

In this Programme of recovery, a positive attitude comes from continuing to use the Tools to work the Steps. So that's what I do: through two pregnancies; when diagnosed with Hepatitis B; when I was rushed to Casualty with kidney disease; when I have the flu...nothing changes in my Programme. I stay in touch with my sponsor, I follow my food plan (even on a hospital drip for a week - a food plan is essential for my head and body), and I continue to reach out in service to those who still suffer. And, most importantly, I work Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve today – each day. (I completed Steps One - Nine during my first 18 months in OA, and

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have been working Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve for the past 24 years.) I continue to look for dishonesty, fear, self-centredness and resentment, and ask God to remove them. Then I 'resolutely turn my thoughts to someone I can help.'

I don't do anything original or creative; I just follow the AA Big Book directions. I continue to 'improve my conscious contact' (Alcoholics Anonymous, p.59) with my Higher Power, which is essential when facing labour or hearing the fatal diagnosis of Hepatitis B. Self-pity and bitterness will send me back to the food, so I resolutely consider what I can be grateful for, and continue to do whatever it takes to get out of myself. As I try to 'practice these principles in all my affairs,' (Alcoholics Anonymous, p.60) including how I speak to the medical staff and my family when I'm feeling full of self-pity, I find ways to carry the message that recovery from compulsive overeating is possible, no matter what ailment befalls us. When asked why I don't eat sugar, I can share with a nurse or a room-mate what OA has done for me. When a doctor marvels at how calm I am, I share that it's the Steps of OA that enable me to face calamity with serenity.

When I was pregnant, I had the Serenity Prayer (stitched) hanging where I could see it during contractions. If I want to go back to the food, I don't need a fatal illness or pregnancy to give me an excuse. And if I want to stay abstinent, nothing can happen to me to make me go back to the hell of overeating. I am grateful for 30 years of continuous abstinence, and I look forward to staying abstinent through sickness and health, in poverty and wealth, till death do us part.

A very grateful abstinent member of OA

Tool: Literature

I have been in OA for over 14 years and am mostly abstinent and maintaining a weight loss of 32 lbs [14.5 kg]. I use almost all the Tools almost all the time, but, at a recent 'Ask-it Basket' meeting, when the question, "Which is the Tool you use least and why?" was asked, my answer was, "Literature". This was due to all the pride in me and the fact that I like reading. I think I know all about what's in the 'Anonymous' literature and since I have read and re-read everything available, I had kind of run out of something new to read.

Then it occurred to me what I had not read - the literature of my own making. My 23 journals: full of observations, of insights, of pearls of wisdom gathered, of my and others' shares and all my hundreds of written Step Tens over the years. I started to re-read them, and to put marks in the margins by the 'really good bits', the revelations, the tips, notes about what works best for me, and also all the miseries and moans of the past. In there are all the difficulties I used to have with other people (whose actions and personalities were, of course, responsible for all my problems and resentments and the cause of my overeating!). This 'literature' reminds me how far I have come and what are the most useful actions and thoughts to help me go on further in personal development. Best of all, it is targeted directly at and for me.

Do you have that piece of literature too?

Miriam

"If you stay humble, you will not stumble"

Literature – My tool of choice

"We study and read OA-approved [literature]...and the "Big Book"...Many members find that when read on a daily basis, the literature further reinforces how to live the Twelve Steps...[the literature is] ever-available tools which provide insight into our problem of eating compulsively, strength to deal with it, and the very real hope that there is a solution for us." (The Tools of Recovery pamphlet, WSO (UK edition, 2011), p.5)

I wanted to share my reflections on literature, my very favourite Tool of recovery. First, I will share what I used to be like (reading-wise!). I have always been a passionate reader of books, mostly fiction. However, as I got older and more entangled in the disease of compulsive overeating, I began to compulsively consume books that I thought were going to solve the problem of 'me'.

I would read the latest diet book or self-help book and I would think this way of eating or living was going to cure me. They never did. I would lose faith in them, often before having even finished the last page, and I would be off, hunting for the next book that would 'save' me. Or I would practise this new way of behaving or eating for a short period, still feel 'unwhole' or uniquely bad about myself and return to old habits and disease patterns.

And then I came into OA. And thankfully my attitude was changed (not consciously or by my own power, I would stress). Initially I was quite critical of the literature. I especially found the Big Book hard to swallow in terms of its ostensibly religious and archaic language and attitudes – or so I thought then. Now I often turn to the Big Book for comfort and wisdom.

I have learned to let go of my critical faculties when reading the literature; instead, I approach it with a view to how I can learn from what I am reading. What do I identify with? How can I make this meaningful to me? And if I disagree with something I read, I either learn from it, or I let it go.

Some stories and sections are particularly special to me. "Acceptance is the answer" (Alcoholics Anonymous, p.407) is my desert-island story. Every time I read it, I gain new inspiration and insight. Most of all, this story teaches me how negative thinking can weigh me down and how just changing my focus can improve my life and my feelings that day in a profound way.

In addition, when I find I am struggling with some particular problem, instead of looking for new answers in new books, I know I have the answers I'm looking for in the literature I already have. I will find inspiration, healing and guidance – and I invariably get it. This applies to 'life' problems as well as 'food' ones (though to me they are the same).

For example, this week I have been scouring the index (the indices for me are invaluable) of my books looking for inspiration around footwork. I have an interview for a new job coming up, and my disease would have me planning far ahead, conjecturing obsessively on 'what ifs' instead of

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preparing for the interview and potentially turning to food when it all got overwhelming.

But accessing literature, as well as the other Tools, reminds me that I can 'keep it in the day': all I need to do is take the necessary actions for this day, for my recovery and abstinence first, and then also preparing for interview. I can leave the results to my Higher Power; they will be as they are. The Voices of Recovery index sends me to June 3rd: "It is the long view that overwhelms me. If I remember to pray for the willingness to do one small thing, I am living evidence that mountains can be moved by results. I pray to be willing to do something for my recovery today. I pray to let go of the results and be willing to take the action" (Voices of Recovery, WSO (2002) p.155).

And I do what I have to do today – which is spend some time preparing for my interview, and then I sit down and write this: an expression of my deep gratitude to this Programme and to the literature that saves me and keeps me sane. Every day. And for today only.

Anthony S

Kathleen – a trusted servant of the OAGB Literature Service - shares her experience, strength and hope

I am writing this article about the OAGB Literature Service, not the story of my recovery in OA – that will have to be an article for another time! I am one of the literature packers, and I also serve as the print liaison officer. I think I joined this service in 2006.

There is so much I want to tell you about our OAGB Literature Service, and so much about OA literature in general, that I realise it will need a number of articles to say it all! But for now I will tell you a bit about how the service is administered, then some current information about literature.

Administration of OAGB Literature

As most of you will know, our literature service is run as a small mail-order business. All the stock we hold is the property of OAGB. Any surplus we may make on selling the literature belongs to OAGB and is used to more effectively carry the OA message, and serve all of you better. The literature service has one paid (part-time) Administrator.

It is essential that we have someone with the necessary skills to administer the service; it is very unlikely we could find a volunteer with the necessary skills who would be able to give enough time to administer the service without being paid. (World Service Office [WSO] employs a staff of skilled people.)

Deborah, our Administrator, does a great and sensitive job in the way she guides and supports us packers, as well as all the book-keeping, ordering stock, dealing with the staff at WSO, and the National Service Board of OAGB. Those of us who give our services to OAGB literature give our time; we packers also donate some space in our homes to store stock and packing materials.

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“Practice love and service at work and at home and not just in meetings”

When you send in your order for literature, Deborah receives it and sets up your invoice. That invoice is then sent electronically to one of the packers, who makes up the order and posts it to you. As your order goes through the system, first Deborah and then the packer record details of the passage of your order through the system.

Some current literature information

As you may know, the World Service Business Conference (WSBC) is the global group conscience of OA. At WSBC, OA's growing understanding of our disease and recovery is taken forward and policies developed. Some recent changes have been the addition of a ninth Tool, greater inclusiveness of all forms of compulsive eating, and the inclusion of virtual OA meetings in the service structure of OA.

All of these changes have to be accommodated in the literature. This means that there are often slight changes made to the literature.

As some of you will know, WSO is changing the design of the pamphlets, but you cannot tell if the literature has been updated simply by whether or not it has the new design. When literature is re-printed, it is now printed with the new design, even if there has been no change to the text. For example, the Tools of Recovery pamphlet has the current text (that is, it includes the Plan of Action Tool) but still has the old design, whereas the text of Dignity of Choice has not changed, but the current printing does have the new design.

What is 'OA-Approved' literature?

OA policy suggests that in our meetings we only use and sell OA-approved literature. But there are various terms used to describe OA literature: OA-Approved, Conference-Approved, Board-Approved. What do they all mean?

* Conference-Approved

Conference-Approved literature is literature that has been thoroughly tested by the world-wide Group Conscience of OA. First, a need is expressed; then a draft is produced. The draft is considered by OA members in various committees, and at each stage suggestions are made, in the light of which it is re-drafted. Eventually a draft is presented to delegates at WSBC, who may approve it – after which it will become Conference-Approved. If the draft is rejected, however, those delegates who voted to reject it give written comments to the members re-drafting the document.

This can be a long, drawn-out process. An outline is given of some of the process through which The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, WSO (2002) went, on p.124 of that same book. (The page number is the same in both the standard and the pocket edition.)

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* Board-Approved

Board-Approved literature is literature that has been approved by the Board of Trustees – that is, it has not been tested by the whole Conference. The kinds of literature that may be Board-Approved are limited. The Board of Trustees alone may not introduce new Programme material in Board-Approved literature: such literature must always be tested by the world-wide Group Conscience of OA at WSBC.

Board-Approved literature includes collections of articles from Lifeline (for example *A New Beginning – Stories of Recovery from Relapse*, WSO (1998)), manuals about how to do things (for example the PI Manual), and a few other minor items.

* OA-Approved

OA-Approved literature is a generic term used to describe all OA-Approved literature, however it may have been approved. In addition to these two categories, all AA Conference-Approved literature is treated as OA-approved.

* How Can I Recognise OA-Approved literature?

To check if certain literature is OA-Approved, look at the small print. All OA-approved literature will have on it somewhere a statement that it is OA literature – very likely a copyright date followed by the words “Overeaters Anonymous Inc.” OA Conference-Approved literature will also have the special Conference-Approved logo.

* Why nothing else?

In OA meetings, it is strongly suggested that we use only OA-Approved literature. Other pieces of literature may be of value to some members but damaging for others; however, the Twelve Step Programme is our common lifeline.

“Beyond Our Wildest Dreams”

SBS suggested that I tell you about a personal favourite piece of literature, but instead, I will tell you something about a book that seems to me to be neglected, but which has taught me a lot. That book is “Beyond Our Wildest Dreams – A History of Overeaters Anonymous as Seen by a Cofounder”, WSO (2005). This book shows me the service others have given to OA – that helps me to serve. But very importantly, it also shows how OA’s growing understanding has evolved through many people and many mistakes, and how through it all we learn to practice the fit spiritual condition that gives us our daily reprieve. It also demonstrates to me that what each of us learns on our individual journeys of recovery is contributing to this worldwide joint enterprise of recovery. What a privilege to be on this journey together!

Kathleen
OAGB Literature Service

"The difference between feeling grateful and being grateful is action"

Heart of England Convention July 2012

My name's Emily and I am a compulsive overeater. One year ago, I had a picture taken on holiday and not only did I finally see my weight – at 5'6" I was 14½ stone [92 kg] and a size 18 in denial - I saw the pain, desperation and misery I was feeling deep inside that I was desperately trying to mask by a fake smile. Another five months of battling with my food, low self-esteem and self-worth and obsessive food thoughts and I was done, defeated and ready for the only help I knew would work. In December 2011 I returned to OA (after going for a few months in 2010) and I am grateful to say I have been abstinent since then, resulting in physical recovery of a 3½ stone [22 kg] weight loss. In July, I went to the Heart of England Convention. I have no idea how I put into words everything I gained from the experience but I felt compelled to try, so here goes...

When I was first asked if I was going to the Convention, fear and my character defects blocked me. "I can't do that - I've only been in the Programme a few months. Everyone there will be really skinny and will have been in OA for years and do loads of service on 'high levels' like boards and committees. It's not for a newbie like me!" Oh, how wrong I was and how grateful I am for putting down my fear one day at a time, through working this amazing Programme that impacts on every area of my life. Not only did I attend the Convention, I gave service, even though I was nervous and unsure. Through the guidance of my sponsor's kind words, I asked, "What would my Higher Power want for me?" My answer: to choose life over fear, and so that is what I did, and what I continue to try and do, one day at a time.

An important thing I learned at the Convention is that there is no 'them' and 'us' in OA. We really are all in this together, trying our best to face this cunning and baffling disease. I had to let go of the idea that others 'more qualified' were those responsible for giving service. How would I ever stay well if I wasn't willing to learn? Another amazing thing I realised through attending the Convention is that it is OK to love yourself - I never knew this - and what a revelation! Today I love myself and I have OA to thank for that.

As I sat in a darkened room lit by candles at the OA celebration event on the Sunday evening of the Convention, I was filled with such peace and I asked myself, "Why have I been fighting this disease for so long? Why was I so scared of admitting I am a compulsive overeater? Look where it has got me - look where I am today, sitting in this room filled with love, acceptance and understanding."

I had total acceptance of my disease and the painful journey I had been through to get to where I am today. I fully accepted it was all God's will and now have absolute faith and trust that for today I am exactly where I am meant to be. I realised I had reached a new phase of my recovery. I think in that room I experienced the deep emotional and spiritual recovery OA promises - what a blessing. I thank OA, I thank my HP and I thank all of those involved in making the Convention what it was - and for me, it was everything I needed.

Emily, Cannock

Heart of England Convention July 2012

Hi. My name is Danny and I am a compulsive overeater. I have tried for 27 years to arrest my compulsive eating with dozens of different modalities in clung psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, gurus, retreats you name it. In January of this year, after trying OA many years ago and simply not 'getting it', I was struck with abstinence and have been working the Programme to the best of my ability since. And The Promises (Alcoholics Anonymous, pp.83-84) are coming true as promised, although of course the addict in me wants more and wants it now!

The Heart of England OA Convention is the first of its kind I have been to. I have been to many other retreats and workshops and spent thousands on them. The registration fee for the OA weekend cost £20, as opposed to £300-£400 which was the average of the other things I tried. It was such a beautiful experience that is difficult to put into words. I felt so at home in the room with people who I knew understood me and whom I understood. There was so much laughter in the room because our minds and the resultant thoughts and behaviour are funny when honestly shared. But there were also tears and the space was safe enough for that too. Just like meetings, there was a space of acceptance and love for everyone in the room. The sharing was full of honesty, gratitude, humility, wisdom, humour and love. I found myself happily going to early morning meetings and late night meetings too. It was such a pleasure and privilege and I didn't have to travel miles to get to them!

A big thank you to all those who gave service and made the event possible.

Loving regards

Danny S

'Spring into Recovery' Workshop Newcastle upon Tyne March 2012

Attending the 'Spring into Recovery' workshop was just the jump-start I needed. I had been to OA about four years ago for about six months, but was not able to maintain abstinence for more than one day (if that, even! When I moved to the UK again, I did not re-enter OA initially – so two years and 35 pounds [16 kg] later, I admitted that I did have an addiction to food and I could not 'go it alone', and so returned to OA meetings.

The workshop was truly a gift, arriving at the perfect time: we did an activity naming the actions we want to put or keep in place, and what they would then help us have or develop in our lives. It was an art/craft activity (my favourite!) in the form of cutting, pasting, colouring, and glittering a paper flower. On the leaves of the flower, we wrote the actions, and on the petals we wrote what we would receive, e.g. I wrote 'make a daily food plan', 'find my feelings and express some at each meeting', 'talk every day to my Higher Power' and on some of the petals 'hope', 'courage to face the day and my future', 'receive encouragement and kindness', and 'peace – a chance to recover'. It was so great to see how other members completed the activity – very inspiring and

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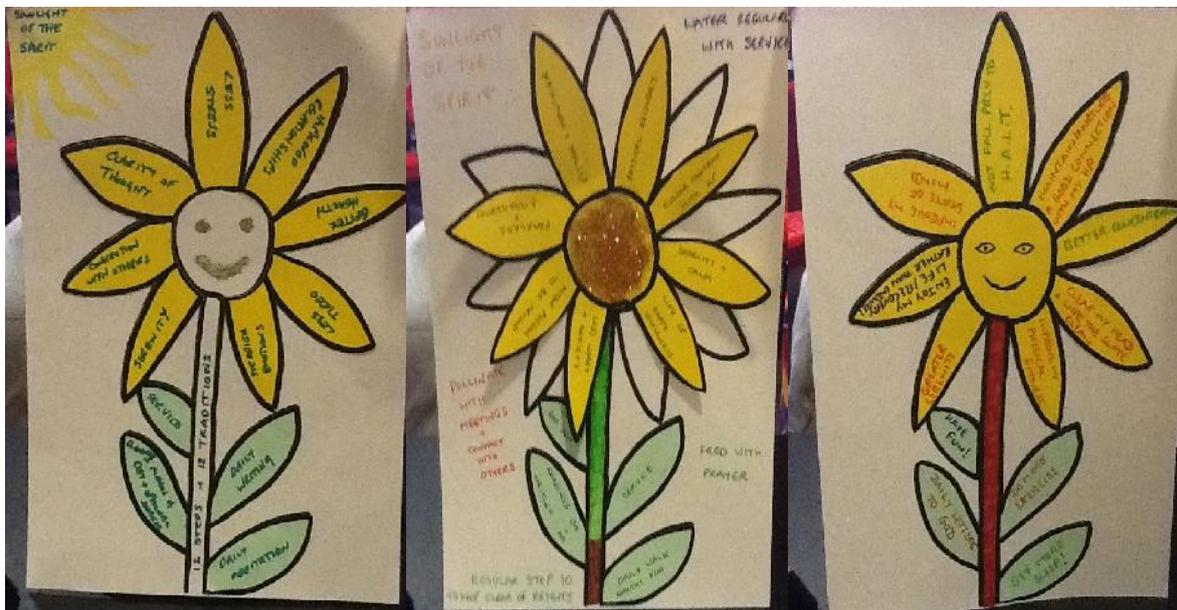
“Nothing is as sweet as the smell of hope in the air”

comforting. After the workshop, I promptly put the paper flower up next to the mirror I get ready in front of in the morning. This has been instrumental as it has been a constant positive reminder of the structure that I need to stick to, and what I am getting as a result.

We were also given ribbon to make a pin that we could wear, symbolising some aspect of recovery. I made one to symbolise the OA group, their support, understanding and the hope that this was giving me. I love how I can attach the pin to a scarf, a handbag, or put in a pocket to remind me of the support from OA. As it turns out, I currently keep it on my bedside table so I can see it before I fall asleep and when I wake up – and now I have a few recovery coins beside it too!

It was a powerful workshop that I really needed...and the tangible ‘take home’ results continue to help me as I see them daily. Thank you to the workshop leaders, the group members, and my HP!

Grateful OA member, Newcastle upon Tyne



Flowers of Recovery

Flowers created during the Newcastle upon Tyne Thursday OA group “Spring into Recovery” workshop in March 2012.

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

(please don't simply reply to the OAGB emails)

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Friday 19 th to Sunday 21 st October 2012	27 th Annual OA National Assembly and Convention – A Programme of Action	Best Western Reading Moat House Hotel, Mill Lane, Sindlesham, Nr Wokingham, Berkshire RG41 5DF	Catherine 07916 168 945 Sponsored by OAGB

Publicise your OA event for free!

Let SBS know if your group or other service body is organising a workshop or other OA event that you'd like advertised on this page. (Just send an email to stepbystep@oagb.org.uk with details of the date, event, venue and a contact number and/or email address, stating which registered OA group or other service body is sponsoring this event.)

*God, grant me the
serenity to accept the things
I cannot change,
courage to change the
things I can and wisdom
to know the difference.*