

Hello my fellow OA friends!

Happy anniversary Step by Step! It's hard to believe we have now been publishing for a year – thank you all for your contributions, as it wouldn't have been possible without you, the members of this amazing Fellowship! Please keep your articles coming and share your experience, strength and hope with those who still suffer – together, we get better.

Let's hope that by the time this edition is published, summer is well and truly here, as it seems to have been a long time in coming this year (and come to think of it, we didn't exactly see much of it last year, either!). Don't you just love having a British OA newsletter? Bet you'd never read about anybody whingeing on about the weather in *Lifeline*!

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the co-authors of the articles on the topic of summer holidays which are featured in this edition of SBS, as they've had to wait rather a long time to see their writing published.

As we're on the subject, I just wanted to share briefly about some of the different experiences I've had with holidays, depending on whether or not I've chosen to continue working my Programme as normal and 'packed my Higher Power' too.

I've always been told that my disease never takes a holiday – if anything, I find that being out of my normal routine can easily jeopardise my recovery. It's so easy for me to get sucked into the hubbub of family activities and not prioritise working my Programme or utilising the Tools that enable me to successfully function in the world outside the OA Fellowship. Needless to say, some of those holidays have been fairly grim and I've ended up 'white-knuckling' my abstinence.

In sharp contrast, however, I've also experienced some absolutely fabulous holidays, when I've not only worked as many Tools as possible during that time, but have also 'gone to any lengths' to get to meetings in foreign countries. One meeting I went to in India was conducted entirely in Hindi – I didn't understand a word, but could nevertheless identify with the raw emotions expressed through the members' body language!

A couple of years ago I tried and tried to phone the contact person of an OA meeting in Innsbruck (Austria) to no avail and ended up making a 200-mile round trip to a meeting that either no longer existed or simply wasn't on that evening. I could've potentially been enraged with resentment over the seemingly 'wasted' journey, but instead chose to remember the words of the Serenity Prayer and had a thoroughly lovely time in a wonderful city that we hope to revisit in the future.

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Interestingly, the mere act of making such an effort to get to a meeting helped me remain abstinent throughout the mouth-watering, all-inclusive four star buffets that fortnight. It also made me realise just how important it is to inform World Service of any meeting changes we might have, too.

Here's wishing you all a fantastic summer, regardless of whether you're planning a vacation or a 'staycation' – the most important thing is to keep working your Programme throughout, because it's true what they say: 'It works if you work it' (and it doesn't if you don't!). Here's also to another inspiring year of SBS, one day at a time.

Love in Fellowship

*Lucy, SBS Editor  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

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For more information on the Steps and Traditions, visit

[www.oagb.org.uk](http://www.oagb.org.uk)

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 Autumn 2012  
edition is 17 August 2012. Topics:**

**'Harvesting the Fruits of Recovery'**

**Steps Eight and Nine**

**Tradition Six**

**Tool: Literature**

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

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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*.

## Step Seven

*"Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings."*

I am working Step Seven by consciously practising the opposite of my character defects. It is on my action plan to practise each of the 'opposites' below once daily as footwork.

**The Cause:** Fear that things will not work out for me or others.

**The Defect:** My No.1 character defect is trying to control situations and people to make sure that everything will come out right for everybody, including me.

**The Step Seven Footwork:** It is on my action plan to consciously NOT control one situation per day.

**The Cause:** Fear of not getting the most out of every day.

**The Defect:** My No.2 character defect is what my mother used to call 'over-inclusiveness', whereby I say to myself, "I'll just do these dishes before I go out," or, "I'll just pick up the laundry on the way to work," or, "I'll just make one more point to my pupil before the end of the lesson," or, "I'll just watch one more programme before I go to bed," or, "I'll just give the SBS readers one more example so that they will understand my article, and it will all work out for them to get their recovery." Am I back to controlling with that one? I think so!

This type of 'just' behaviour is practised because I think that achieving a bit more will make me feel a bit more satisfied, and by extension help me get the most out of the remainder of my life, but the truth is that practising over-inclusiveness has the effect of making me constantly time-stressed and having to rush in order not to be late for the next thing in my day. At night ("Just one more phone call, email or TV programme,") it makes me stay up to the point where I am too tired to have the willpower to resist compulsive eating, though I am not hungry.

**The Step Seven Footwork:** I don't have to get up early, so I have practised turning off the computer, TV and the phone earlier and earlier and have got my sleep time back from 2am to about 12.30am (or earlier some nights).

**The Cause:** Fear of financial insecurity.

**The Defect:** My No.3 character defect is dishonesty, (only) with respect to my taxes, and I am about to be found out.

**The Step Seven Footwork:** I am doing full disclosure and making amends by paying whatever is due and whatever penalties the taxman deems appropriate. I am surprised at how well I am sleeping since I decided **not** to try to wriggle out of it!

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Thanks, SBS team, for putting this magazine together. It is very helpful to write an article: it clarifies so much. As you can see, readers, lack of gratitude is not one of my character defects!

*Miriam*

### **It Works if You Work it!**

Dear friends in Fellowship

I have dipped in and out of OA since 2007, never really getting past Steps One, Two and Three, the Step waltz! I knew I had a problem with food and had some issues with resentments. I just didn't 'get it'. So when others said, "Don't leave before the miracle happens," I honestly thought I was a special case for whom the miracle would never happen. My time spent in meetings and attending workshops was never wasted, though, and I never gave up hope. Once I had been to OA I never ate in ignorance again - it ruined my eating career!

But even knowing what I had learned in OA, I still wanted a quick fix, so I left OA for good in November 2011. I went back to a diet club and initially started well, then the slips started happening. Gradually, my feelings of worthlessness returned, along with any weight I managed to get off. I started hiding food from my family, behind the washing machine, under the sofa; ashamed when I was discovered. I fell into a miserable existence. I had kept in touch with some friends in Fellowship but was too embarrassed to admit my misery so hid instead; food for company and self loathing on the side! My Higher Power (HP) had other plans, though. I met for coffee with a fellow OA-er and couldn't hide my pain any longer. She didn't judge me, or tell me what to do: she showed me that the door at OA is always open to those who suffer from our disease and that I would still find love and understanding if I chose to return.

So return I did, in April 2012. It's still early days but along with being more open to others, I have started to really 'work the Steps' and use the Tools. So this is what was meant by, 'It works **if** you work it!' I am praying to a God of my understanding, reading literature every day and I have had the abstinence that I thought would elude me. Writing my feelings down instead of stuffing them down under food; reaching out to others; and reading the amazing journeys and inspirational stories in this publication are all part of my action plan!

I know that I can do this journey as long as I put my hand in yours. I tried doing it alone and I couldn't, so thank you to all those who have gone before me, walk beside me and follow behind me. This is an amazing Fellowship and I pray that, one day at a time, I will never leave again.

Love in Fellowship.

*Claire, Southampton*

### **Holidaying Outside My Comfort Zone**

My name is Lisa and I'm a compulsive overeater. It feels good to say that, because life has changed so much in the last year or so that sometimes it's hard to remember who I am - but, whatever else changes, of one thing I can always be certain: I am a compulsive overeater.

I have been in recovery for four and half years, and by my HP's will, abstinent in all that time. I recently went on holiday and found that in spite of my (almost total) freedom from food obsession in recent months, it came back again, knocking loudly at my door, when I found myself outside my comfort zone.

I knew things were beginning to get difficult when I pointed out on a daily basis all the binge foods that my husband might like to try. Every café we went into was displaying great piles of homemade binge food and some cafés seemed to sell only that. Whilst at home, these days I can happily ignore them and sometimes not even notice them; on holiday I noticed them - a lot. Whilst I didn't actually eat any of them myself (I really wanted to), not being able to meant doing the next best thing, which was to purchase them as 'gifts to take home', or things to give my husband as little 'treats'. Somehow I got vicarious pleasure out of buying them, holding them, and watching others eat them - others who were really indifferent to them. On returning home, it took a few days for the obsession to subside - again very worrying - but eventually it did subside and one week on, food has its proper place again.

What I've learned from this is that I will never be 'recovered', only 'recovering', and that my head will always take me to these places when other things are not working so well for me.

So what was it that put me outside my comfort zone? Was it something hugely significant and important? As ever - no. It's the small stuff that gets me, so actually my discomfort was due to my recent hair cut - no more or less than that. I don't like my hair cut much - and that was enough to get my itchy trigger-finger going.

Thankfully now, I'm feeling pretty much normal again and have reminded myself that hair grows - as does my recovery, one day at a time.

*Lisa*

### **Sanity Whilst on Vacation**

My journey began in September 2007 and so as a family we have had four abstinent holidays.

My action plan starts with 'keep it simple' and 'easy does it'. I take time to connect and focus on the reason for the trip, which includes the people I am with, not the food at the airport and elsewhere.

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Packing is done with less fuss and worry of not having enough! I hand over my powerless over people, places and things and let go.

I continue to receive contact from sponsees and stay in touch with my own sponsor. This, for me, keeps me in the real world, where I am blessed to be around amazing fellows. My disease does not go on holiday, but instead tries to ambush mine, and so I have found that I need to be super vigilant.

All this is not hard work because I am worth coming home the same person that left.

This year, I packed my 'Tools' bag and used it. The Steps were climbed up, down and sideways and progress was made. To bask in the sunlight of the spirit, abstinent, is a miracle, the warmth from the sun penetrating into my being.

My eating plan was followed and deviations texted before. I am no angel and emotions were heightened some days but I did not panic. I sat quietly and teased out why I was off balance. Then, with dignity, I made apologies if needed and wrote my Tenth Step.

Usually I sit on the sun bed and project about what needs to be done when we return; however this year I kept it in the day, prayed and have thought about 'one day at a time'.

As we travel more, the need for excess possessions is lessening. I am becoming more content just being me.

The Fellowship of OA, abstinence and working the Steps and Traditions to the best of my ability means that I am nicer to be with on holiday.

There is no shortcut to continual good emotional, physical and spiritual health. I have made a choice which means I have disciplines that I follow which become good habits that cancel out the years of self-will run riot.

I am blessed to be tapping away, rather than frantically multi-tasking to get all the unpacking, washing and ironing done the day I return!! I am learning that patience is not a swear word.

Tolerance, love and compassion and the willingness to work my Programme with the same gusto that I used to binge with ... the Promises do happen.

Stay, listen and please know there is always hope. Recovery is unique and by the grace of God, mine is strong for today.

Many thanks for reading. May the God of your understanding be with you today and always.

*Suzanne, Stockport*

*"Happiness is not a place to travel to.  
It's the journey of living life on life's terms."*

## **We're All Going on a Summer Holiday!**

*Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2011*

As my summer holiday comes to an end, I am reflecting on my time in Austria over the past fortnight and I can't help but compare it with holidays prior to finding OA. We've had almost tropical temperatures up in the mid-late 30s (°C) all the time we've been here. Yes, at times that's felt quite oppressive, but it certainly hasn't stopped me from doing things, whereas before OA I simply couldn't have withstood such heat. Back then, the sun only had to show its face and I would expire, sweat profusely and be subjected to extremely painful thighs chafing together frantically. I could never dress appropriately, prevented either by the very limited range of plus-sized clothes back then or the humiliation I experienced and not wanting to expose my 21+ stone cumbersome body. I often covered up with a navy blue 'flasher's Mac' in the hope that nobody could tell that I'd reached the end of the line as far as dress sizes were concerned. I truly believed that wearing dark-coloured clothes took at least a couple of sizes off me and claimed that I was, "Fine," whenever anybody challenged me as to whether I might be too hot. Meanwhile, the sweat dripped down my back like a waterfall!

All in all, summer temperatures were an extremely unpleasant experience, as were holidays in general for that matter – apart from the food, of course! That's all I lived for and my main occupation whilst on holiday was eating! So much so, that even after just a week away, none of the clothes I'd brought with me would fit by the end of the break. It never ceases to amaze me how, since joining OA, I can still happily wear the same clothes at the end of the holiday that I did at the beginning – to me that's just one of the many miracles of recovery from compulsive overeating. And let me tell you about a few others, too:

Throughout the past fortnight I've done so many things that would have been totally beyond my wildest dreams, even during my childhood, let alone pre-OA. I've gone on adventure trails at the top of Alps; whizzed down waterslides; tobogganed down mountains and got up on stage and sung karaoke, to name but a few activities. I've been able to dress according to the weather and not worry about what I might look like. Long gone are the days of the 'flasher's Mac' – yesterday I even sported a pair of lemon-coloured denim shorts. Admittedly it probably wasn't the prettiest of sights, but what the hell! Nobody fell about laughing or even noticed, for that matter. Just for today, I'm quite comfortable in my own skin and not half as bothered by other people's opinions as I used to be, truly believing a lovely slogan that somebody quite pivotal to my recovery told me several years ago now, "Those who mind, don't matter, and those who matter, don't mind."

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"And what about the food?" you may ask. Well, that's in its proper place today. Normally my abstinence consists of three meals a day with a life in between and only ever having a meal when I am truly physically hungry. Throughout this particular holiday, that has needed adapting slightly. I've been staying in a wonderful hotel, all inclusive, and have found that I've only really needed two meals a day, with plenty of fluids in between.

Before now, I've never understood my husband and how he sometimes complains about it being 'too hot to eat' – I simply couldn't get my head around the fact that it could ever be too *anything* not to eat! However, I'm obviously getting better because this holiday I've finally understood that. Given that prior to recovery I would have perceived a four-star, all inclusive hotel as this compulsive overeater's paradise (nightmare?), I reckon my Higher Power has been working overtime and I've had to ask for guidance so as to not 'stockpile' at mealtimes in order to tide me over to the next meal.

However, it's actually worked out very well for me and ensured that I've drunk enough fluids in such stifling temperatures during this heat wave and experienced genuine physical hunger at mealtimes, which is vital for me to remain abstinent, because if I'm not hungry when I eat, I simply don't know when to stop!

Tomorrow we embark upon our journey back home, but we won't actually arrive home until the day after, which incidentally happens to be my OA birthday. From where I'm standing right now, I'm pretty confident that I'll be celebrating 17 years of back-to-back abstinence, one day at a time, thanks to my Higher Power, my sponsor, the OA Fellowship and everybody in it. God bless you all!

*Lucy, Newcastle upon Tyne*

### **Service is a Fundamental Part of my Recovery**

*New OAGB Communications Officer Gail shares her experience, strength and hope.*

My name is Gail and I'm a very grateful recovering compulsive overeater. I have been in OA since February 2008. I remain extremely thankful to the person who 'Twelfth-Stepped' me into OA, as without that initial step I may never have found OA and received the wonderful gift of abstinence and recovery.

Giving service is a fundamental part of my recovery. I started giving service initially in my home meeting: holding the key to the venue; committing to turning up early to set up; acting as Intergroup representative. After going to Intergroup for a few months, I volunteered to lead the North West Public Information committee. After doing this for two years, I started to consider giving service at a national level. After lengthy discussions with my sponsor and family and after much handing over to my Higher Power, I decided to put myself forward. *(continued page 10)*

*"Self-esteem comes from doing esteemable acts"*

I was elected onto the OA National Board in October 2011, where I currently hold the service position of Communications Officer. This is primarily looking at how we can share the message of OA both within and outside the Fellowship. I work with a great team of volunteers who support me in this role: developing and maintaining the OAGB website, managing the email loop and responding to any emails received via the OAGB website.

I am very passionate about spreading the message of OA as it constantly reminds me that helping to reach the still suffering compulsive overeater is our pledge and that is how I came into this amazing Fellowship.

By serving on the Board of OAGB, I feel I am doing my part to keep our Fellowship strong, attractive and healthy.

Giving service at this level is really enabling my recovery. Seeing the Traditions worked at this level is amazing and is helping me in my everyday life, especially in my work life, to apply the principles of the Programme in all my affairs, which I find incredibly challenging in my work environment.

It is a wonder to be surrounded by fellow compulsive overeaters who have such strong recovery.

Giving service is not always easy for me. I have had to face my fears of not knowing the answers and I continually have to strive to achieve balance in my life in all areas as I want to give 120% in everything I do! However, giving service helps me to play my part in maintaining and continuing this wonderful Fellowship which has saved my life. I have also had brilliant support and encouragement from my fellow Board members. I am learning as I go along, just trying to be the best that I can be.

I always encourage my sponsees and fellow compulsive overeaters to give service: it is at the very core of our amazing Fellowship. It helps me grow emotionally and spiritually and focuses my mind on helping others. I widen my circle of OA buddies, which enriches my life beyond my wildest dreams.

*Gail, OAGB*

### **Keep Coming Back!**

I'm writing this at 3.40am in the morning because I cannot sleep. I remember what I used to do at times like this before OA and during my 18-month on/off relapse...EAT! Instead of feeling full of food, I feel full of gratitude that I don't have to do that today.

But that's not the only reason why I feel reflective. I made a couple of calls last night: one to a newcomer and the other to a still suffering compulsive overeater. Sharing my experience, strength and hope and listening to others reminds me of what it used to be like for me and that I never have to go back. I remember being the newcomer

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and feeling overwhelmed at this Programme and thinking, "Where do I start?" and "I can't do that," but also feeling full of hope that a solution existed to my problem.

I also remember the pain of relapse - knowing that there was a solution, having experienced it for a year, but then falling apart and 'just not getting it'. Thank God, I kept coming back. I never lost faith that this Programme worked because there was living proof of it all around me! I knew the block was in me and there were still more changes that needed to occur in my old ways of thinking.

All I could do was keep coming back and eventually I heard what I needed to hear, when I was ready to hear it. To all the newcomers who are looking for a solution, to those who are struggling with getting their abstinence back and to those who are well and abstinent who can carry the message and pass on their experience, strength and hope - to all of you, please KEEP COMING BACK!

*Anonymous, London*

### **The Friend I thought loved me...**

I am in pain and feel trapped in my mind.  
I think, I obsess, I whine...  
To the Lord of my mind do I speak,  
Pretending it's Him that I seek.

The ramblings, the fear, the outside -  
The trappings of a futile mind,  
Stay locked inside of my brain,  
Saying, "eat, eat - you'll be sane".

This time the food will befriend -  
The pain in your heart that descends -  
In to a lie...that becomes truth that says,  
"This time, my friend...you'll be sane".

It's never enough, that last tiny bite -  
It pleads, it moans...  
So I decide...  
I might get right stuck in and blow the rest...  
The truth, the world, the abuse, the mess.

"Just one more bite, my friend,  
And the pain will pass away -  
No more craving -  
No more hurt...  
Food is the answer to pain".

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*"If you are looking for an easier, softer way, there are no directions."*

S T O P

Just for today I abstain,  
NO MATTER WHAT ANBODY SAYS...  
"You're either pregnant or you're not", someone said,  
"You're either clean or you're not or you're dead!"

This is my truth one day at a time –  
No more denial,  
No more crime.  
No more deceit,  
No more lies.  
There is no one more bite to sober the cries.

I have a God and a room, filled with people who know –  
The pain, the shame, in letting it go –  
No more smell, no high fats, no sugar, no wheat,  
The driving around screaming and desperately weak...  
In the dead of night or the early morn...  
...seeking, searching, lost and torn.  
Begging and pleading for just one more bite,  
No! Not today for Go is insight.

He has given, me tools, a fellowship, a home,  
To work my recovery, "together" not alone.  
The programme says "we" together shall be,  
Happy and joyous, blessed and free.  
So tell me, "My Friend", are you really for keeps?  
Cos I've found something better and it loves me for me!

Anonymous

### **Sponsorship**

In November 2011 I weighed over 280lbs (20st). I had managed to lose some weight to come down from an all time high of over 300lbs (21st 6lbs). I felt desperate, as I could see that the way I was eating, my weight was about to go right back up again. I knew I had a problem with food and that I was addicted to sugar. I knew I was a compulsive overeater and my bingeing was out of control, as was the rest of my life. I had had several episodes of bad health, both physically and mentally. I had borderline diabetes, was glucose intolerant, kept having chest pains and I had developed what I knew was sleep apnoea although I was too scared and embarrassed to go and see my doctor. My snoring kept my partner awake at night. I made every excuse under the sun not to go out for a walk because I just couldn't keep up. I hated being the one at the back all the time; not being able to fit in a normal seatbelt in an aeroplane; being frightened I was going to die. I woke up *(continued page 13)*

in the night breathless. I had to sit down every few minutes. I couldn't make it to the top of the stairs without being out of breath. I felt old and exhausted. My relationship was in a mess. I was angry, irritable and depressed. I cried all the time. I didn't do much housework and I resented everything I did do. I was barely functioning at work and kept wondering if I should leave/change jobs/how I would keep going.

I thought I had tried everything. And then tried it again. I felt like a failure. I couldn't do another diet. Some days I just wanted to die.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I remembered OA. I had heard of a local group somehow, maybe 20 years ago. Filed it. Never did anything with it. In my head was a fantasy of one fat woman sitting alone in a church hall. It never occurred to me that that fat woman could have been me. I was too proud, too stupid or too arrogant to look into it any further. And I got fatter and more desperate. So in November 2011 I looked online and found OA. I read everything I could find. I bought the AA Big Book and the OA 12 and 12 and I read them. I found that my local meeting was 10 minutes away on a Thursday night and I said to my partner, "I'm going to go." I was scared out of my mind, but I asked my vague and woolly God of my understanding to help me. And I got there.

I knew I needed a sponsor. I wasn't all that sure what one was but I had read enough to realise it was a part of the deal. I asked my vague and woolly God again.

That first meeting, I heard 'my' story several times. I knew I had come home. I didn't need six meetings to be sure. I didn't have that time to waste: I might be dead by then. I came home from that meeting abstinent. I still didn't know what I was doing but I thought I'd better just do what I was told. What did I know? My efforts had been noticeably unsuccessful so far. And I was beginning to understand that I had a disease and that only a Power greater than myself would restore me to sanity. That was just fine by me. Bring it on!

Professionally as a counsellor/social worker, I have had experience of supervision - receiving it and giving it - so I had some concept of the idea of helping another person to develop. But that is professional, not personal. I can talk and sound as if I'm sharing myself and never be intimate. I can appear honest and lie with style. I'm not very good at letting people see the real me. You might not like what you see and then you will leave me. My abandonment issues are well hidden but scratch the surface and there they are! So I knew my potential sponsor was going to have a task on her hands. Of course my 'specialness' meant that she was going to have to be especially clever as she wouldn't ever have dealt with anyone as manipulative or people-pleasing as me before!! *(continued page 14)*

*"Mean what you say, say what you mean"*

I made my own CV for my sponsor, a bit like looking for a fairy godmother:

- Abstinent - even in my food self obsessed fog I knew that was important
- Good recovery
- Kind but clear
- Able to challenge me and cut through my crap
- Spiritual but not preachy or religious
- Sense of humour
- Won't judge me
- Not a friend - although I found one

And I turned all that over to my God. I did sort of remember to say, "Oh, and whatever you think is best." I had a way to go.

God told me to ask someone to sponsor me. I asked her. She said yes. She met all of my criteria and then some. God did for me what I couldn't do for myself.

My sponsor was very clear. She made me go away and do some work. I had to read my Big Book. She directed me towards a Big Book study and suggested I work my way through it to do the Steps.

She told me what her expectations were. They went something like this:

- Abstinence - no messing about, abstinence comes first
- I hand my food over to God and my sponsor every day
- I email her every day to say what is going on; any work I'm doing on the Steps; thoughts; feelings; questions.
- We talk every week; sometimes we meet, too. We meet to do specific Step work together.

My sponsor doesn't do it *for* me. She does support me; shares her Programme with me. She shares her experience, strength and hope. She asks me pertinent questions. She suggests I pray or ask God for answers. She asks me if I've asked God what to do. Often the answer is no. There is silence at the other end of the phone, or she laughs. She encourages me. She suggested I phone someone every day (I'm still working on that one). That I go to meetings every week. That I do service - from the start. She told me that service is helping out at meetings. She told me to read OA books, to listen to CDs and podcasts. We agreed that if I stop working my Programme, then we won't waste each others' time. I have to commit.

What have I got from this relationship? Clarity about my Programme. An understanding of the Steps. A reminder not to get obsessive - do I need to weigh and measure everything? Do I need a very rigid Programme? What should my Programme look like for me?

A recognition of my other addictions (so far). Compulsive spending is one; arguing with my partner was another. Oh, the addiction to drama and pain. She has taught me to do the first three Steps on those too, to hand them over to God. I have learnt how to do an inventory

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and what it means to give away a Step Five with another person.

I have shared things I never thought I would say out loud. And it was fine. I am working on my Step Nine, making amends one at a time, living amends one day at a time.

I have to work my Programme every day, one Step at a time. For me, that means using the Tools. My sponsor is a key part of my action plan. Since November, I have lost 38lbs (2st 10lbs). My relationship with my partner has changed from fighting and misery to enjoying our time together; being kinder to each other; having fun together.

My relationship with the God of my understanding has changed too. It's a lot less vague and woolly. I use the word 'God' here to describe something I don't really understand. It is a sort of shorthand. Whatever it is, it works. I have reconnected with some spiritual practices like prayer and meditation; like gratitude; like meeting with other people for prayer and meditation. God talks, I listen. I try to let go and hand things over. I am hoping my control freak character defect will melt away, but I know God will take care of that.

My body has changed: I am lighter, fitter and I can move. Last week, I went to London and loved how I could walk all day and have a spring in my step. I don't snore any more. I have caught myself running up the stairs. I have lost my sense of isolation. I have started to join in more, to be part of other community events and projects. My work life has improved. I am enjoying my job again and I'm learning how to be more balanced about it. I hand the future over to God on a daily basis: for my family; friends; in relation to myself. I'm learning that to keep my recovery, I have to give it away. And that means doing the Steps, One to Twelve, and being a sponsor myself when the time is right. I can't wait. Life just keeps getting better.

God did for me what I could not do for myself. Sponsorship means I have a hand to hold and I am very, very grateful.

*Julia, Stoke on Trent*

### **Been there, done that, got the tee-shirt!**

To write about sponsorship fills me with excitement as I share my experience, strength and hope. This Tool is one of nine and when I returned to OA in 2007, I was very resistant, as I had fixed ideas. My thoughts were that I did not need anyone telling me what to do.

Stubbornness, pride, self-will, fear and resentment are but a few reasons for not engaging with a sponsor. I was attending one small meeting per week with mixed recovery and I did not see what I wanted.

The July Birmingham Convention was my turning point. The thing I heard was 'God of your understanding' - it was my light bulb moment. I was also in awe of the size of the Fellowship and I was obviously ready to jump in fully.

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*"There are no victims, only volunteers"*

I returned, felt the fear but had the courage to attend other meetings. I saw what I wanted and asked that member if we could work together. I needed identification and someone in quite similar circumstances. Since that time, I have had a healthy, honest relationship with my sponsor which grows daily. My Steps were taken with the enthusiasm I used to have for bingeing. The Programme and Steps enabled me to have a psyche change and I continue to work on my recovery. Twelve Steps completed in twelve months: it seemed appropriate to do one a month. To enable my Step work to be rigorously honest, my eating plan is water tight and my abstinence has been a daily gift from September 2007.

Having a sponsor means that a fellow compulsive eater gives me unconditional acceptance and equally will make suggestions when I am struggling with an issue, like telling me to look at my part only. Knowing that someone is willing you to grow spiritually, emotionally and maintain a healthy body weight is very empowering. My sponsor is laid-back and rarely directs me. My progressive recovery belongs to me and most of what I do has been self-motivated - this is right for me. Each sponsor has different methods and I know I could not work with a directive member, as my resistance would be strong!

When I engaged with my sponsor I already had physical recovery, maintaining a seven-stone weight loss. What has become very apparent is my need to be guided, as emotional recovery is my area of most work now. Thankfully, all this is achieved by the grace of my God and my willingness to take the actions that keep me well each day.

Having access to a member in strong recovery, working the Steps and Traditions to the best of their ability, keeps me inspired and constantly moving forward. I have gained many relationship skills: respect for another's time; coping with unavailability; boundaries. Wording of texts, emails and even content of conversations is mindful, compared to the old days when I'd just do and say what I wanted. All this keeps my recovery in order.

The essence of our Programme is to help others, and my sponsees get my full attention. I sponsor the Programme, which works if you work it, and so it always returns to principles, not personalities. Helping a compulsive overeater gives me a bigger buzz than excess food ever used to. Being involved with recovery - quick or slow - is truly humbling and the soul food I need so much. God does talk through me and a time pause is taken before replying, enabling an intuitive response to a query. Patience, tolerance, love and compassion are the main things sponsoring has taught me.

The way I sponsor now is different from the beginning. I have no urge to fix anyone but am willing to share what works for me, along with hope and strength. As Step work is completed with newcomers, it fuels my need to read around it and be most helpful. Sponsees go *(continued page 17)*

at their own pace but they know that there needs to be progress in order for them to help others. I love to get 'ESP' reports (emotional, spiritual and physical) as recovery is threefold, with all areas needing balance.

Giving support and encouragement in a non-judgemental way is amazing. Perseverance is important, as the first two sponsees did not stay and I could have stopped. Full of gratitude, I know I have a message to share and am very proud to give back what I have so lovingly received. Boundaries and balance are important though, as my family and work life must not suffer.

The approach I take with a newcomer has changed and this works beautifully for me. If asked to sponsor, I ask for daily contact for two weeks and a commitment to meetings, the Steps and service. Actions speak louder than words, though, and if only sporadic contact is made, the suggestion is made that they are not ready.

The most important thing is that a sponsee relies upon the God of their understanding, as I gave up playing God - a long time ago! In my experience, it is having and being a sponsor that keeps me connected with my disease and living in the solution. All encouragement is given for the cycle to continue and when sponsees have achieved a certain level of recovery, they are nudged very strongly to be a sponsor.

Honesty is paramount with the relationship and I will compassionately confront eating plans and portion sizes to enable the OA definition of abstinence to be achieved. If this is not done, I am enabling the disease and it is progressive and deadly. Learning to say things lovingly and then letting go is amazing progress. How people take what I suggest is their business. Working a daily Step Ten assists my recovery, as I am always able to improve. I learn so much from listening to other members who may have different symptoms but share my disease.

Together we get well, one day at a time. To sponsor well certainly gets you out of your own way and interested in other people. Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness are all that is needed.

Thank you for the opportunity to use the Tool of writing to emphasise the benefit of the Tool of sponsorship.

Much love to all who share my compulsion. We do recover.

*Suzi, Manchester*

*"There are no victims, only volunteers"*

## **Sponsorship**

For me, sponsorship is a real blessing as well as a really important Tool. Being sponsored has been and is such a gift that I really wanted to share it with others, as soon as my sponsor felt I was ready. Talking to my sponsor and sponsees helps me keep on track with my Programme and reminds me to work my Programme every day.

In my early days in Programme, my sponsor kept nudging me gently to get on with the Steps, especially Step Four, when I procrastinated rather. My sponsor helped me to know how to do Step Four, a little at a time, and then I handed it over to her. It felt like such a relief, and I knew then that 'together we could do what we could never do alone'.

Once I was on Step Ten, my sponsor encouraged me to start sponsoring - I feel privileged to sponsor - and try to remember always that I am not meant to have all the answers - only God has. I know it is important to recognise that each of my sponsees has her own Programme to work, and at her own pace. Some sponsees like to discuss every Step; others like to text and phone; others meet face to face. The important thing for me is that like any good friendship, a sponsor/sponsee relationship is built on trust and honesty - whether someone's Programme is going well, or whether someone is struggling.

For me, sponsoring has also strengthened my abstinence, because I know that supporting others in Programme needs to be done with a clear head, focussed on God, with the serenity God gives me, one day at a time.

*Katharine, Rawdon and Sheffield*

## **Tradition 5 - To keep OA alive, follow Tradition Five!**

*"Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers."*

The fellowship from being an active member within OA fills up the hole that used to be stuffed with excess food. The desire to stop compulsive eating ensures that my membership is current and valid.

The OA pledge to extend my heart and hand to those who share my compulsion is beautifully backed up by Tradition Five. In order to progress with the recovery I have so graciously been blessed with, I must give back what was freely shared with me.

The sanity and clarity received through abstinence, working the Steps and being a sponsor means I willingly 'Twelfth Step' as often as God presents the opportunity. The humility received cancels any fear that may be lurking.

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When I share at meetings, the focus is on my experience, strength and hope, highlighting how the Steps and Traditions are my design for living. This message must stay strong in order for members to get well and help others. Our disease is one of self-absorption and working with newcomers keeps me living in the solution.

The spiritual principles of each Step are what my recovery is based on: honesty; hope; faith; courage; integrity; willingness; humility; self-discipline; love; perseverance; spiritual awareness; and service. These principles help me see that to keep my recovery, I must share the fellowship that saved my sanity.

The friends I have within OA are amazing but the meetings are not support groups and it is not healthy for me not to be honest. Step Five connects us with the human race and Tradition Five maintains that meaning and purpose to life.

The newcomer with issues with food needs to hear loud and clear that there is a solution which works if followed. No other person is able to share the message like another compulsive overeater. Identification is so key to continuing with the programme of recovery.

Members attending meetings whilst in relapse need to hear what works for those with continuing abstinence. The latest OA definition of abstinence gives focus and hope for threefold recovery. Public Information is a vital part that groups need to be active with. Remembering how you heard about OA helps ensure that no-one has to live in ignorance of the fantastic Fellowship that truly saves souls. Tell people who will listen in a simple way for the seed to be planted.

We are not alone as groups: the service structure within OA keeps us supported beyond our wildest dreams. OAGB, Region 9 and World Service are all working to strengthen the Fellowship and we owe it to ourselves and others to do what we can to help.

Obesity is becoming such a problem within society that I feel very proud to share the only thing that has worked for me. Maintaining my healthy body weight enables me to illustrate how the Twelve Step spiritual Programme works. My emotional balance as a result of working the Steps enables me to happily do God's will. Giving hope to a sufferer is far more rewarding than any food. The spiritual growth achieved on a daily basis by working the maintenance Steps ensures the principles of the Twelve Traditions can be followed in all my affairs.

The OA pledge and Tradition Five keep me moving forward and keep me abstinent. In order to keep my recovery, I absolutely have to work with others. It is a privilege to work with a newcomer and it makes me very humble. The ripple effect of sharing what has worked for you ensures that other people have the same chance if they choose to!

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Everyone is a vital cog in the wheel of Fellowship and I thank my God I never tire of talking about the solution that saved me from the progressive disease of compulsive overeating. We can and do recover.

Many thanks to the Step by Step committee, as their service ensures that the message is read and hope is given to those who still suffer.

Love to all.

*Anonymous*

**DO YOU SUSPECT FOOD RULES YOUR LIFE?**

Do you worry about the way you eat?

**OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS**

may be the answer for you.

OA is not a diet club.  
NO weigh-ins  
NO dues or fees

Scarborough meeting starting  
**Monday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2012, 7pm**  
**Emmanuel St. John's Church,**  
St. John's Road, Scarborough, YO12 5ES.

Contact us for more information:

Wendy 07946 731915  
John 01723 370293

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

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

# Calendar of Events

*Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...*

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Saturday 30 <sup>th</sup> June 2012 11am – 4pm	Abstinence – If it ain't practical, it ain't spiritual Workshop	United Reformed Church, 30 Fisherton Street, Salisbury, SP2 7RG	Marion 01722 238381/ 07898 474570  salisburyoa@gmail.com  <b>Sponsored by Salisbury OA</b>
Friday 13 <sup>th</sup> to Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	12th Annual OA Recovery Convention - Steps 7, 8 and 9	Hilton Metropole Hotel, NEC, Birmingham, B40 1PP	Rachel: 01384 891678 Pam: 07971 968430 Email: <a href="mailto:victoria.derrick@gmail.com">victoria.derrick@gmail.com</a>  <b>Sponsored by Heart of England Intergroup</b>
Friday 10 <sup>th</sup> (4pm onwards) to Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> August 2012 (finish at 5pm)	'It works, if you work it' - Work all 12 Steps* in a weekend  <small>*Participants will make clear, achievable commitments to complete Step 9 amends after returning home from the weekend</small>	Ladywell Retreat & Spirituality Centre, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 1ST	Sarah 07779 433752  <b>Sponsored by South Coast Intergroup</b>
Saturday 15 <sup>th</sup> September 2012 2pm – 5pm	Sponsorship Workshop	The Hall, Hinde Street Methodist Church, Corner of Hinde Street and Thayer Street, London, W1U 2QJ	Caroline 07876 193116 Email: <a href="mailto:sponsorshipworkshop@hotmail.co.uk">sponsorshipworkshop@hotmail.co.uk</a>  <b>Sponsored by OA South and East Intergroup</b>
Friday 19 <sup>th</sup> to Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> October 2012	27 <sup>th</sup> 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 168945  <b>Sponsored by OAGB</b>

*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](mailto: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.*