

Season's Greetings to you all!

Writing this editorial mid-November, to be honest, the last thing I really want to focus on right now is the festive season. However, outside the rooms of Overeaters Anonymous, I seem to be surrounded by a lot of people who are more than happy to do so – some have even gone to great lengths to decorate their houses already!

Thank goodness for our slogan 'one day at a time' and as the festive season approaches, I find it's more important than ever to try and 'keep it in the day'. Prior to joining OA, my disease never allowed me to experience the present day. I was either ruminating over past events or projecting way ahead into the future.

Just for today, I choose to remain abstinent and work the Programme to the best of my ability in order to hold on tightly to that most precious of gifts and maintain a fit spiritual condition. One of the topics covered in this edition of SBS enables me to do just that – Step Ten. I heard it mentioned at a Big Book Study I attended a couple of years ago that by completing a regular Step Ten, we are able to keep our sanity and our closeness to our Higher Power and, moreover, that failure to do so can very often lead to relapse. I don't know about you, but I'm simply not willing to take that risk!

On behalf of the SBS Committee I would like to wish you all a peaceful, abstinent festive season and all the best for 2013, one day at a time. We hope you have enjoyed reading SBS this year and that this current edition helps you get through the holidays.

Many thanks to the many who have submitted articles to SBS throughout the year and we look forward to receiving your articles for the Spring 2013 edition.

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 Spring 2013 edition
is Friday, 8 February 2013. Topics:**

**'Planting the seed...reaching out to newcomers,
returning members and each other'**

Step Eleven

Tradition Eight

Tool: Meetings

**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*.

Step Ten

"Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

Yesterday I saw an email asking for submissions for Step by Step, saying that only three articles had been submitted so far. I shrugged and deleted it. I couldn't possibly write anything, I thought, I was far too busy visiting my brother in New York, plus my recovery has been pretty up and down and my abstinence far from consistent. Who am I to write something to help others? Today, however, I found my thoughts coming back to the email. Maybe I could write something? After all, I'm going to be stuck here for a bit longer, thanks to a hurricane that's on its way, and anyway, the editors are the best people to judge whether my piece is worth using. So here goes...

I tend to think of Step Ten as something I do at the end of the day. My Step Ten varies. Some evenings I settle down to write and surprise myself with the amount and the detail of my writing. Occasionally I stumble upon some real discoveries: a new realisation about myself, perhaps, a deeper understanding of the fears that run through my daily life. Other times, my Step Ten is sketchy, to say the least. A few scrawled lines, a short list of fears, resentments, and a comment on my food for the day. And I must admit that too often my Step Ten is not even written; it's a mental scan of the day as I relax into sleep. One thing that I always make sure I include is a list of my character assets, as well as defects. For me, this is important, as it gives me a more balanced and rounded view of myself and helps make it harder for me to beat myself up or blame-and-shame myself. It's also important as it helps me to see the tangible results of my recovery: it shows me the progress I have made.

Here in New York, I have been struggling with a resentment that has threatened to eat away at my enjoyment, at my limited time with my brother, and has shaken my abstinence. I have been nursing a resentment towards my sister-in-law since I got here. This resentment may be understandable - she neither acknowledged nor thanked me for the gifts I'd brought her, nor showed any interest in our family in the UK, or in fact in me and my life. But resentments like this have no place in my new life, based on 'a design for living' (*Big Book*, p.81) which depends on acceptance, forgiveness and compassion.

I hadn't realised quite how much this resentment was dominating me until I did some Step Ten writing one night. I began to see the extent to which this resentment had taken over and was making my life unmanageable. What was I to do?

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After stewing for a few days, guidance came through via an issue of *Lifeline* I was reading. It referred to 'spot check' inventories on specific issues which pop up. I settled down to write about the resentment. I listed my defects at play: anger, fear, self-righteousness and more. I also listed my assets: the fact that I had not acted out on the resentment; the fact that I had repeatedly tried to focus on the things I liked about my sister-in-law. By 'writing it out' I realised that this resentment came back to one of my core issues: I feared being unheard, unseen, not valued. I also faced up to the fact that I couldn't change anyone or anything other than my own behaviour and approach. I also realised that I would have to let go of my expectations of my sister-in-law. I then offered up my spot-check to my HP, and moved on.

I can't say that the resentment was instantaneously or completely removed - but I can say that in the days since, I have thought about it far less. And I have managed to enjoy some fun moments with my sister-in-law by letting go of my unrealistic expectations. A few days ago, the thought of being stuck indoors with her for 24 hours, while the storm passes over, would have felt unbearable. Now, as I write this, waiting for the storm to hit New York, I can genuinely feel at ease and at peace with my sister-in-law, myself and my HP. Writing both a daily and a spot-check inventory was a key part of reaching this point, and I thank my HP that I remembered to practice this Step during my stay here.

Maya S, Manchester

Tradition Seven Workshop at the 2006 Region 9 Assembly in Barcelona

Members shared at this meeting/workshop about how they felt about their recovery in general and also about the Seventh Tradition. Comments were made to the effect that we as a Fellowship did not speak about this topic often enough in our meetings and workshops. Below is a copy of my report to my Intergroup about the session.

Seventh Tradition session – 'It Takes Two'

There were two speakers who spoke from different viewpoints. Both shared from the heart on their personal story and 'debt' to OA in their recovery from the disease of compulsive overeating and more. Both speakers' personal pictures were circulated, showing 'before and after' coming into and working the Programme. The 'Promises' (*Big Book*, pp83-84) were read in English and in Spanish.

The first speaker used the following questions while speaking, which focused on the Seventh Tradition from a service viewpoint, and then asked the members to take them away with them for answering at a later stage.

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"I was sick and tired of the high cost of low living"

Questions used in the session

1. Am I in recovery/do I want to be in recovery?
2. What do I have to do to stay in recovery/get recovery?
3. Do I see people in the rooms who have what I want in relation to freedom from the obsession of food?
4. If you have a HP who loves you, what qualities/skills would that HP see in you? What gifts have you been given?
5. How enthusiastic about OA am I?
6. Do you have a skill that could be of use in OA?
7. Do I know the structure of OA service?
8. What does your Intergroup spend money on?
9. What does Region 9 spend money on?
10. What does World Service Office (WSO) spend money on?
11. What message will you bring home with you for yourself from this convention?
12. What message will you bring home to your group from this convention?

The second speaker worked through the questions in *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous* on the Seventh Tradition (pp.168-169).

The template on the next page was circulated at the OAGB National Assembly convention in Reading in October as an example of what one group had come up with to demonstrate the importance of the Seventh Tradition.

Anonymous

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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)

The Seventh Tradition states: <i>"Every OA Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."</i>
As well as making sure that sufficient is put 'in the pot' each week, do we:
Send a Group Rep. to IG meetings?
Send a delegate to National Assembly?
Consider the service provided by our Intergroup?
Consider the service provided by our National Service Board?
When there is an Intergroup meeting followed by a workshop - do several members of our group attend?
Does our Intergroup run regular workshops to cover service?
Will we consider a position in Intergroup?
Will we consider a position on the National Service Board?
Encourage our members to subscribe to <i>Lifeline</i> and read <i>Step by Step</i> ?
Are we self-supporting in all our affairs?

MEETING COSTS	
Rent	
Literature	
Intergroup Rep. expenses to IG meetings	
Delegate expenses to National Assembly	
Services provided by our Intergroup	
Services provided by our Nat. Service Board	
Services provided by our Region 9 Assembly & Board	
Services provided by our World Service Office	
<u>Total required each week in the 7th Tradition 'pot'</u>	

"If you're not doing enough for OA, you're not doing enough for yourself"

Tradition Seven

"Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions."

I have difficulty in spending money. It comes from the same inner fear as my anorexia: fear that I might get into debt is as pathological as fear that I might get fat. I don't feel safe without a big margin between income and expenditure, just in case I wobble and spend more than I'd intended. In the same way, I don't feel safe unless I'm a bit underweight, just in case I eat more than I'd intended.

I've found that reaching into my purse is hard, and if I have to make spot decisions about how much to take out of it, financial anorexia ('stinginess' to the rest of the world) usually wins. For my OA meeting every week, I set up a standing order. I have become treasurer and opened meeting bank accounts at more than one meeting I've attended, so I knew I could set up a standing order! I knew that I would find any excuse otherwise to short-change the meeting if I had to get cash out of my purse every week. Money paid by the standing order requires only one difficult decision each year - by how much to increase it - not a weekly battle with my disease.

The advantage to me and to the group of paying by standing order is that I need that group to be there, even on the odd week when I'm not. My contribution goes in whether or not I'm there, the rent gets paid and the group goes on functioning until the next time I'm there.

I can't write a standing order for my groceries, unfortunately, so every shopping trip requires me to face the fear tied round my purse. The hungrier I am at the time, the worse it is. My criterion is that what's best for me is abstinent, and that means a change from my pre- and early-OA thinking that cheapest was best (and reduced-price bargains with today's sell-by date were better still). Now I buy good-quality food (though I am still pleased if it happens to be going cheap!). My moral stance on foods, driven by my religious background, is also finding it easier to assert itself and let me buy more food - usually more expensive food - that I can eat with a clear conscience about its origin.

There is still a way to go because I have only patchily applied the 'prudent reserve' concept to my habit of accumulating money, to give the surplus to those who need it more - including my future self in a pension fund!

Sheila, Basingstoke

'Tis the season ...to be abstinent

I'm a grateful recovering compulsive overeater and thought I would share my experience of holidays past... and how my last three Christmases in Programme have been.

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First things first – I might as well come out and tell you, I'm of a faith that doesn't celebrate Christmas. So as a child, it was hardly on my radar, except for some good TV.

But I didn't let that exclude me from joining in the festivities of Christmas once I became an adult. I interpreted the meaning of Christmas to be thus: diet insanely for the 8-12 week period (September onwards), then once the holiday season commenced (it got earlier every year), eat insanely till every morsel of 'the good stuff' was gone.

A number of years I would go out and buy all the Christmas goodies – then eat and replace the food bought several times before Santa had even thought of getting the reindeers up and ready for their big day. Other features of my Christmas past:

- Starting Christmas off being 'good', then eating one bite of 'bad' food and using that as an excuse to binge for the following two weeks;
- Thinking, "Well, it's not been a good year diet-wise, so I might as well really let myself go mad and then start again in January"; and
- Getting to January so depressed and disheartened that there was no way I was going to deny myself one of the only pleasures I had.

And so on...

Since coming into Programme, how does Christmas look? Well, I have had three abstinent Christmases (one in Japan) and with my HP's help, many more, I hope. The key characteristic is: 'my Programme, like my disease, does not take holidays.' So I work the same food plan and actions that I do any other day.

I celebrate Christmas with friends and with my partner's (of a different faith to me) family and now I can really enjoy it, as the mental obsession is quiet. I am able to be flexible about times of eating by planning ahead, but I do not forget that for me no trigger food is worth the pain of compulsive overeating. So my present to myself, priceless to me, is my abstinence.

Real honesty with myself and my sponsor about the foods that I am not able to eat takes away the internal discussions about what I can or cannot eat. I know what is available to me on Christmas Day and it's all yummy stuff, in moderate sized, planned portions.

Christmas now is also underpinned by fellowship in Programme. My home meeting has a special pre-Christmas focus in mid-December, and we all commit to making contact by text or phone on Christmas Day and the days following it, to help support our recovery.

So that's Christmas present. Christmas future?...Who knows, but I believe that if I continue to do my best to work the Programme, maintaining my connection with my HP and with an honest food plan, I will be looked after and receive the gift of an abstinent and recovered Christmas (oh... and Channukah too).

AS, Manchester

'Tis the season to be jolly

As a compulsive eater, Christmas, birthdays and any kind of special event always filled me with fear, food obsession and a desire to control everything and everyone around me. Christmases in the past have always been a three-step process:

Step One: Thought I needed to use my power to control my food and everyone's behaviour.

Step Two: Believed that I should and would be able to control my eating and other people's behaviour if I tried hard enough.

Step Three: Made a decision to do better, try harder, be tougher and rely on my self-will to get me through without overeating.

The next step in this process was failure, bitter disappointment and self-hatred. Like every other day as a compulsive eater, my willpower eventually failed me and I was back in the food. I blamed my family, the excess amounts of temptation and most of all myself. The desperate cycle of promises, solemn vows and determination followed by despair, tears and self-hatred continued and it felt all the worse because, as the title suggests, I was 'supposed' to be feeling joyful, happy and excited and instead I felt useless, scared and alone.

Since coming into OA, I have found a new way of living that has set me free from this terrible cycle of self-hatred and loneliness one day at a time. I now know that it's not up to me to fix things, to try harder or to do better. It's up to me to do the footwork by working the Steps and using the Tools and turning my life and my will over to my Higher Power.

One of the wonderful lessons I've learnt since coming into OA is about expectations. The very nature of the phrase "'Tis the season to be jolly" gives me an instruction and therefore an expectation: I should be jolly, I should be having fun, it should be perfect. This Christmas, I know that all it should be is whatever it is; it is not up to me to run the show this year. I am willing to show up exactly as I am this season, faults, worries and all, and to turn all of my compulsive thoughts and behaviours over to my Higher Power. I'm willing to let go of my expectations this year, both of myself and those around me and let the Christmas period unfold exactly the way my Higher Power wants it to. This Christmas, I know that I am not alone, that if I am scared, angry or in fear of losing my abstinence I have a multitude of actions I can take: I can call my sponsor, get on my knees and pray, do some writing, phone a Fellow or pick up some OA literature.

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It's not that all of the fear and compulsive thoughts have disappeared: it's that this year, because of OA, I have a new way to deal with those uncomfortable feelings, a way that breaks the cycle of despair and leads me into a life beyond my wildest dreams. Thank God I have found a new way of life; thank God for OA; thank God that we are no longer alone this Christmas.

Alice, London

Personal Share

I'm a compulsive overeater, and this is my story.

Thanksgiving 1980 – I eat my third heaped plateful, look at the person beside me, and realise I will be her weight in three months. For the past six months I have put on 25 pounds the first two weeks and taken off 20 the last two weeks EACH MONTH. I realise I can no longer stop for the two weeks, so will put on 50 pounds per month until...I explode, I figure. At home that evening, I look at meeting information a friend gave me. I decide to try OA that Sunday afternoon. I go and hate it, grab brochures and a meeting list, pig out all week, then go to a different meeting. There a woman approaches me, tells me to call her the next morning, and starts me off on the 'road of happy destiny' (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, AA World Services, Inc. (2001), Fourth edition, p.164. I have never binged again. What a miracle.

On 8 December 2012, I will gratefully celebrate 32 years of abstinent recovery offered by the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous. What happened in between?

For three years, I call my sponsor daily, attend two-six meetings weekly, attend retreats, and basically do whatever my sponsor suggests. At a Big Book study weekend, led by a member of another Twelve-Step fellowship sober 34 years, I know that is what I want: to never overeat again. So I follow the directions in *Alcoholics Anonymous*, step by step, under the guidance of my abstinent and sane sponsor. I complete the first nine Steps in 18 months, and have never looked back. My sponsor's assurance that a Step thoroughly taken would be done once and for all has proven true for me. The first nine Steps provide a solid foundation upon which I live today, working Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve on an ongoing basis.

I get married, spending the morning of my wedding day with my sponsor, clearing away some resentments and fears that have built up. No wedding cake (I don't eat sugar). No champagne (I do not drink alcohol). And it is the best wedding ever! I eat my weighed and measured meal and food is not an issue.

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"I traded a lot of pain, fear and despair for my seat in OA"

At three years abstinent, my husband and I moved to a rural setting on a different continent for six years. As there were no OA meetings near me, I had no phone (for the first year) and I did not speak the local language, I went to open meetings in English of another Twelve-Step fellowship when I could get to them (we did not have a phone or car) and exchanged letters with my USA sponsor and other OA members. Annual visits (a plane ride) to the nearest OA meetings helped; local members welcomed me into their homes. I depended upon *Lifeline* and OA cassettes, and of course continued to use *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the Big Book, for a reminder of how to live this Programme each day. My service to OA was in the form of my daily continued abstinence, letters to *Lifeline*, and sharing the message with people I met. I got a lifetime subscription to *Lifeline*, so it just kept coming (still does!) and I always had a new copy to pass on to anyone who expressed interest in OA.

I learned to use another Twelve-Step fellowship when no OA was available, so I subscribed to a Loners' Newsletter published out of Johannesburg. After a few years, I realised that OA could be self-supporting in this area, so, willing to go to any lengths to stay abstinent, I started *OAsis*, an OA Loners' meeting in print. Initially, I invited other Loners I'd met through OA to join the meeting in print. It was a privilege to watch this meeting grow to include more than 100 people around the world and become a registered OA meeting. It continued for more than a decade, into the late 1990s, until electronic options came on to the scene.

I learned lots of helpful lessons from my first sponsor (for six years). One: never let distance or timing be an excuse for not getting to a meeting. When I've lived in English-speaking countries, I visit the nearest OA meetings initially, while I check out affordable venues near my home, within 10 minutes by car. I never want the excuse that my home meeting is too far away, or that I cannot get there in bad weather. Also, I want my home meeting to always be 'the best meeting in the world', focused on recovery and following the Steps as presented in the *Big Book*. So I find a venue I can afford if no one else shows up, accessible in a snow storm, and at a time that works for me. I register with WSO and the Intergroup, advertise in local newspapers, post signs, and show up. If no one comes, I still follow the entire format, 'listen' to a speaker from *Lifeline*, then write a share and post it to *Lifeline*. I'm just grateful to have a meeting and to be available for a newcomer who might arrive at any time.

Another lesson I learned was not to eat (overeate), no matter what. That means I may have to make 15 phone calls if a resentment is burning me up, or drive two hours to a meeting, take my packed dinner to a fancy event, or not go. For me, the most important thing in my life, without exception, is abstinence: freedom from compulsive overeating. And I will do anything to keep it. It has meant that my children (now 27 and 24 years old) grew up knowing I did not share my food. I do not toast in the New Year. I do not bake birthday cakes. But they also know I love them and try to be the best Mum I can be, thanks to Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve in my life today. They know when I make a mistake or treat them badly, I always make an apology before the day is over. *(continued on page 12)*

Pregnancy in OA was amazing! Abstinence means that I provide my body with the fuel it needs, so as doctors informed me of new needs, I worked with my sponsor to make the necessary changes to my food plan. During the worst of labour, I focused on a cross-stitch of The Serenity Prayer, improving my conscious contact with a Higher Power with each breath. Taking this Programme one day at a time, one minute at a time, means I can face any situation with sanity, knowing that I am in the care of a Higher Power. What an amazing way to live!

Another lesson I learned from my sponsor is to always have a sponsor. When my first sponsor went back to the food, I had a new temporary sponsor before the day was out. When I travel for business or pleasure, I get a temporary sponsor where I am staying, often just for a few days. When I move, as I have several times, I get a local sponsor right away, someone who is abstinent, working Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve, and available 24/7. I had my second sponsor for about 16 years. During those years when I lived in other countries, I had a local sponsor too, sometimes from another Twelve-Step fellowship because there was no one available in OA abstinent and working the Steps. While that person wasn't a compulsive overeater, so our problems were with different substances, we shared a common solution, working the Twelve Steps. While I needed someone to identify with when I was in the problem of overeating when I first came into OA, I now identify with people in the solution and seek out those living in a life of recovery, free from their compulsion, whatever it was.

I look forward to being in OA, working Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve and living free of the compulsion for the rest of my life, one day at a time!

Ana, London

Poems

The relapse poems only begin to present the seemingly hopeless pain that exists, confusing and raging until we feel almost physically thrown. Then out of those depths comes the hope, the word or smile or note that begins the climb to abstinence, to happiness.

The agony of relapse (1)

Struggle, pain, torture, fight, anger, hatred, hate.
Constant, incessant, unending, relentless. Never stops.
Overwhelming,
I can't stop the rapid thoughts
Tearing into my existence,
Ripping my head to fall shattered and pieceless and peaceless
On the expensive flooring.
Calm, rest, quiet: I yearn for cease.
The terror and horror forces me face down into food.
I pull it in to cover the whole, the deep dark hole that is me, the pain, the movement.
I relish the destruction as success,
I achieve as I grow.

The agony of relapse (2)

Like a tiny stream of life-giving dew
It trickles through my existence.
Stooping to permit, it clouds my breath.
Paralysing my fear, inertia rages.
I stand, I sit, I fall.
I cry. I turn. I run. I hate.
Expanding my being, it enlarges my space.
Suffocating and comforting and crucifying and soothing.
I stop.
Movement is gone. Pain is too loose.
I turn on the TV or the PC and lose my ID.
And I sleep, and I drink and I eat and I die.

Abstinence

This poem reveals how I see abstinence fighting through the pain to give me life, supported by the light and water that OA and its members represent.

Breaking through, a poem about how abstinence can be born.

It rips, it tears gently, the light pushes through with all its existence.
The struggle begins.
Like a root pushing and forcing and living its way through a harsh, barren and unforgiving soil, it yearns for life.
The light is there. A forgiving and loving and wise moisture awaits.
The existence in its fullness and its beauty is there, waiting. Gently waiting.
Heat touches as the life emerges. A warm heat, a comforting heat, an energy.
All the while, an undercurrent pulls, gripping the root, killing its breath.
A warmth envelopes and a thirst is quenched.
...
Life emerges
From the depths of darkness.
Strength builds on the unceasing warmth and the exquisite care.
Abstinence is mine. I can live for one other day.

Annie, Northeast

Tool: Telephone

The telephone was something I thought I was very familiar with when I came into OA. I spent most of my working day on the phone talking to people and often spent more time in the evenings chatting to friends and family catching up. I thought this Tool would therefore be an easy one for me to use on my recovery journey. As with most things throughout my time in OA, I soon learned I knew very little about myself!

My wake-up call was when I had been working with my sponsor for a couple of weeks, and had been committing my food by email. Something came up and she asked me to call her to talk about it. I was literally shaking with fear, terrified about having a conversation. My heart was pounding and I kept picking up the phone, then bursting into tears and putting it down again. I couldn't understand why I felt so scared: my sponsor was loving and kind and I felt a real connection with her. I eventually made the call, spoke to my sponsor for a little while and felt much better. I realised that my fear wasn't coming from my sponsor, or what she wanted to talk to me about, but because I was going to be asked a question and be expected to answer honestly. My life was so full of dishonesty, I didn't know what way was up or down or how I truly felt about anything. I was terrified of giving a 'wrong' answer, or what my sponsor would think of me.

I realised this was another symptom of the spiritual sickness of addiction. As I continued to work with my sponsor, I had to call her again and again, at first on food questions, then on issues that came up throughout my life as I continued to work the Steps. The bizarre thing was that I always felt so much better after having called, and said to myself I wouldn't be so worried next time. But it continued to be difficult to pick up the phone and sometimes took me hours of torture to actually hit the call button. However, my sponsor told me, "Please pick up the phone, because it will be easier to put that down than if you pick up the food."

I knew I had to keep phoning, because the alternative was to eat over how I felt, and I could not risk my abstinence and my life. Through time, the feelings of fear lifted and I was able to get that phone in my hand much more quickly and save myself a lot of pain from having things rolling around in my head. I cleared resentments much more quickly and was able to get on with my day and be of use to others. My relationship with my sponsor developed and deepened as I continued to practice honesty and speak to her regularly, and I learned that taking action is necessary for things to change, even if it feels scary.

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"If you want what the winners have, do what the winners do"

When I reached Step Ten, my sponsor suggested that I start to use the phone to reach out to fellow compulsive overeaters in OA to stay connected to my Programme and widen my network of people I could call on for support. Again, the old feelings of fear returned when I tried to call friends in Fellowship just to say hello and see how they were. I presumed people would be too busy; wouldn't want to talk to me; would wonder why I was calling just to say hello; or think I had some motive for phoning them and would not like me because of it. OA Fellows had called me in my time in recovery and I had never thought or felt any of those things!

I know now that this was yet another symptom of the disease. Having learned from the experience with my sponsor, I did what was suggested and starting making outreach calls most days, even though I didn't want to. If I couldn't reach someone, I would leave them a voicemail asking how they were and sharing anything I needed to. My experience in OA has taught me that willingness to put in the action required in this Programme doesn't necessarily mean I will like doing it!

But again, I felt the benefits of my actions. I developed strong connections with other Fellows, building up a network of people I could call on for help. These Fellows shared their experience and helped me grow in my Programme, and I was in turn able to share my experience and be of use. It helped me break down the fear of being honest and what people would think of me, as I discovered many of us are struggling with similar feelings and issues in our lives. And I felt a real part of OA as a Fellowship, rather than an outsider or someone who turned up to a meeting and stayed on the sidelines.

Since coming into OA in February 2011, I have been blessed with a spiritual experience which has given me 18 months' continuous abstinence and a ten-stone weight loss to bring me to a healthy body weight. Part of this journey has been learning a lot about myself through using the telephone and the other Tools, which can benefit us in ways we don't expect or even realise. I now encourage all my sponsees to adopt similar actions to grow and develop in their recovery and I still continue to make outreach calls most days. Especially over the festive period where people may be unable to attend their usual meetings, being able to connect with the Fellowship and have a mini meeting over the phone is an amazing gift. I am also entering a new period in my recovery and am expecting my first baby in the middle of November, so the phone will continue to be a lifeline that I'm very grateful for.

Laura McC, Glasgow

It's good to talk!

It seems appropriate to start with how I used to be with the phone, explain what happened and finish with telephone positives.

When I was eating compulsively, if the phone rang, I froze with fear. Who was it; what would they want; what would I say? All these thoughts and then I would leave it to stop ringing.

As a child, our phone was by the front door in the hall, which was very chilly, and when I did use it, my parents would shout loudly that it was time to say goodbye and what was I talking about! This made me feel guilty but the defiance kicked in and I would chat longer with a friend, even if I had seen them that day! The bill-payer made it very clear that time was money.

Talking on the phone made me worry about what to say next; so much so that I was not listening to the actual conversation. I wanted to behave in a certain way and would put on airs and graces! If friends of my parents rang, I was awkward and didn't know what to say. I felt uninteresting.

If I phoned a friend, I would want to chat and chat, not having any boundaries and deliberately finding something else to talk about, my disease being one of 'not enough'. I had no respect if they needed to go. Things were a bit one-sided. I would procrastinate over ringing certain people in case I was asked to do something or got told off.

If the phone rang too early or too late, I would instantly think someone was dead or the news was bad!! The call was always going to be about me and I was jealous, when I answered it, if the person wanted to speak to one of my brothers.

When I found OA, all my relationships were struggling. I accepted the gift of abstinence each day and worked the Steps to the best of my ability. After Step Five, I joined the human race. This now includes healthy use of the telephone.

I answer the phone without thinking, "What shall I say?" I do not need to plan responses or behave in a certain way. Mobiles and house phones have caller identity and even this doesn't put me off answering the call! I think, "How can I help?" and also that the person ringing may help me enormously.

Social events are accepted without hesitation. There is less paranoia that something is wrong if a call is late or early in the day. Rather than being rude to call centres, I thank them for the call and end it. The phone is one of the nine Tools that help us work the Steps and it keeps me in the NOW. If I do not want to ring my sponsor, then I know all effort should be made to dial their number.

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"You don't have a problem; you have a solution you don't like"

Voicing any issues I have randomly popping into my head means that the thought has less power. Someone else has a different slant on a problem and sharing it helps me know it is not just me making any decisions. God talks through the people in my life and I must connect to feel the 'Power greater than myself'.

I like texts and e-mails; however, they are in the past, and using the phone keeps me in the present, dealing with what is going on now. I no longer say I am fine if I am not (frantic, insecure, neurotic and emotional!); equally, I save the drama. Tradesmen get the real me, not the flirty, manipulative, bored housewife who says whatever to get her own way.

Having a sponsor and working with sponsees has enabled honesty with conversations, which proves to be a humbling experience. I listen more and try not to offer opinions unless asked for them. I uphold the code of confidentiality with any OA calls, thus maintaining trust.

I have no fear now as God is with me, especially if a conversation is turning awkward. I intuitively know how to end a call without hurting others or myself. Thanks to the Twelve Step Programme, I have boundaries around times and length of chats. I no longer enable disease, instead asking for a positive pitch around what actions are being taken to change situations.

My non-OA friends receive much less gossip than previously and I am genuinely interested in their lives. If I have said I shall return a call, I make sure the call is made within an acceptable timeframe. I behave with integrity and am happy to help.

Sharing my experience over the phone, I have learnt to be me and to listen and pause before giving honest responses. If the call is not convenient, I reschedule without guilt. Having a mobile for a compulsive person can be a nightmare but I have my own limits and if I cannot answer it, then I make no apology but say when I am next free.

The telephone is a lifeline and the OA numbers I have reinforce that I am not alone: together WE get well. When I dial an OA number during a wobble, the identification, love and understanding I receive are priceless. I would not miss it for the world.

Pick up the phone, not the food. Talking always helps. Call five to stay alive!

For those who know my number: please ring; together we recover.

Suzi

Notes from the OAGB Literature Service

One great advantage of being a packer for our Literature Service is that it gives me the splendid benefit of getting familiar with all of OA's literature. I shall start this article by telling you about some useful things I have come to value.

Useful, sometimes neglected/forgotten literature

There is a small booklet called **Anonymity**. Its reference number is 390. It costs £1.30 and is listed under Traditions & Service on our order form. It consists of four articles on anonymity written by Rozanne and originally published in *Lifeline*. The articles' titles are:

- The Promise of Privacy
- The Initial Confusion
- In the Public Media
- Our Spiritual Foundation

There is a very important pamphlet that we often ignore: this is **The Twelve Concepts of OA Service**. Its reference number is 330. It costs £1.30 and is also listed under Traditions & Service on our order form. It has a brief description of each Concept. One reason why this pamphlet is so important to us (even to those not giving service beyond group level) is that when we register a group with WSO, we are agreeing (amongst other things) to be guided by the Concepts. The registration form that we sign includes the definition of an OA group, and that definition opens with:

"As a group, they meet to practise the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, guided by the Twelve Concepts of OA Service."

Article V section 1 Definition a (1) OA Bylaws sub-part B.

Literature to guide us in our sponsoring

A Guide for Sponsors. As well as helpful information about sponsoring, there is an appendix of thirty questions which can be very useful to get a newcomer working on Steps One, Two and Three. Its reference number is 200. It costs £1.00 and is listed under Traditions & Service on our order form.

Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps. In 2010 this replaced the very old *Guide to the Twelve Steps for You and Your Sponsor*. Recently Conference agreed to amend *Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps* to cover the use of the *Big Book* as well as OA literature. As World Service Office (WSO) reprint this pamphlet, it will be amended; until then, every copy that is sold comes with a twelve-page addendum. We do not print this pamphlet in the UK, so we are dependent on WSO for the amended version. In the meantime, you can download the addendum from www.oa.org or ask us for a copy with your next literature order. The reference number is 220. It costs £1.00 and is listed under Programme & Recovery on our order form.

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"I get lots of messages from God but most are in my own handwriting"

There is also a **Sponsorship Kit**. This contains a number of useful articles on sponsorship, plus copies of *A Guide for Sponsors*; *Sponsoring Through the Twelve Steps*; and *The Tools of Recovery*. The reference number is 230 and it costs £3.00.

Printing OA literature in this country

As many of you will have noticed, some of the pamphlets are printed in this country. These are easy to recognise because underneath the OA logo are the words 'Great Britain'. When OA grants permission for an OA service body to use the OA logo, that service body agrees to state its name directly underneath the logo. (Information about use of the OA logo can be found at www.oa.org)

All OA literature is the copyright of Overeaters Anonymous Inc., so before printing any item in this country, we sign a Licensing Agreement between OAGB Literature and Overeaters Anonymous Inc.

We pay royalties to OA on our sales of items we print. It is OA World Service who has paid the costs of drafting, checking the accuracy of the text with the OA group conscience and designing the final version.

We only print the pamphlets with high sales; where our sales are low, it is more economical for us to sell WSO printing. When we print pamphlets, we add all OAGB's contact information; also we ensure they are written in UK English rather than US English (see PI below.)

Buying literature for PI service of any kind

When OA literature is used for any PI service, it is particularly important that this literature includes all the contact information for OAGB, not only for WSO. All of the items we print do contain this information. If you let us know that the literature you are ordering is for PI, we will ensure that every item you order has contact information for OAGB (using a small printed label where necessary).

We also think it is important for PI that the pamphlets are in UK English – this will help show that OAGB is a strong healthy fellowship in this country.

Thank you

I want to end with a thank you to you all for allowing us this opportunity to learn the necessary skills, and to have the reward of working together and the chance to practise growth in recovery. Also, from time to time, we receive kind messages thanking us for the service we give. Deborah, our (part-time) paid employee, and all of us giving service do enjoy the service we give; but sometimes it is hard work, and your kind messages inspire us to keep serving you, with pleasure and to the best of our ability. Thank you.

Kathleen, part of OAGB Literature Service

Interview with John, OAGB Board member

- How and when did you find OA?

I came to the Fellowship in May 1997, after having been in another Twelve Step fellowship for five years. I initially went along to my first OA meeting to support a friend from my other fellowship, but immediately I got there, I knew it was the right place for me, and we have both been in OA ever since. I had some experience of recovery in my other fellowship but the amount of recovery I have been given in OA is almost beyond value. Right from the beginning I have remained totally committed to the Fellowship, always doing service of some kind and supporting other members.

- How long have you been on the Board?

I have just started my fourth year, so this is my last year of two consecutive terms. I spent the first three serving as Treasurer and am now Vice-Chair. During my time on the Board I have also supported the Literature Service and acted as Company Secretary.

- What made you decide to stand for election to the Board?

I knew someone else on the Board and at the time had no thought of standing myself, but I had some skills and experience which I knew would be useful. In August/September of 2009 I had no intention of being on the Board but by October I did stand and was elected!

- What other service have you undertaken in the Fellowship?

There isn't really much service I haven't done at group, Intergroup or Board level. I chaired the North of England Intergroup for three years and had been my group's Intergroup rep before that. I always maintain that the service I give at group level by attending and supporting other members is still the most important service I do.

- What has been the highlight of all your service to date?

It's always whenever I attend any OA group meeting, particularly my home group. A current highlight is having started up a new group in my home town of Scarborough, which meets on Mondays. Please contact me via OAGB or see the meetings list on the OAGB website for further details – everyone is most welcome to come along!

- What would you say to anyone thinking of standing for the Board?

My own personal view is that the most important thing is willingness and open-mindedness that you can do anything in recovery, but also that the timing has to be right. Your Higher Power will let you know when it is the right time to stand, so rely on God's will rather than self-will. I believe that letting things happen in their own time means that the Board evolves as it is meant to, which is why numbers may fluctuate from year to year. It's also useful to be able to offer a particular skill.

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"God doesn't close one door without opening a better one"

- Why is Tradition Seven so important?

It's absolutely vital that individual groups, Intergroups and everyone else is self supporting through their own contributions. I believe we should all try and pay our way, however small that contribution may be, depending upon our individual means at any given time.

- Any final thoughts?

I'm still astonished at the Tardis-like effects of recovery: the more time and effort I put into recovery and service, the more time I am given back to spend on other aspects of life, such as my family and other interests. For me, the benefits of giving service mean that I receive at least 100-fold back what I put in.

John, OAGB National Service Board Vice-Chair

My experience of Region 9 in Poland

I attended the Region 9 Assembly and Convention on behalf of the National Service Board and travelled a day early (funding myself) in order to stay overnight in the centre of Warsaw to have time to explore the Old Town before travelling on to the venue. The Old Town was beautiful and well worth the visit.

I managed to travel by train, tram and bus to the venue on the outskirts of Warsaw, which was quite scary on my own. However, the Polish people are so friendly and everyone I needed to ask advice from was more than willing to help.

This was my fourth Region 9 Assembly and there were many faces I knew, so my nerves quickly disappeared and I felt at home immediately. I was mentoring a first-timer from Switzerland who had never been to an OA business meeting before and it felt such an honour to be guiding her through the procedures.

On the Wednesday evening, we had our first meeting, when we met the Region 9 Board and other delegates, with 17 countries represented and 27 voting members. This was an increase of one country and two voting members from last year, which is a record. There were introductions and brief shares from each delegate. The Chair, Susan from Israel, gave a general overview of the processes of the Assembly and general preparation for the business to come. There was plenty of time for questions if anyone could not fully understand, sometimes through language difficulties, and the Chair patiently explained until the person understood. There was also a Seventh Tradition workshop, a skit, trivia quizzes and time for everyone to get to know each other.

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The actual business took place on the Thursday and Friday, interspersed with really enjoyable and informative workshops with the emphasis on abstinence. We all joined committees such as Finance, PI, Communications, Twelfth Step Within etc. I had joined the Bylaws committee last year but was the only one from that committee who was able to attend this year. Thankfully, two volunteers from Ireland and one from Holland joined me, together with Kate, our Parliamentarian from the UK, so I was not on my own. We went through the proposals and bylaw changes to be voted on during the National Assembly, making some last minute amendments. I had been asked to present all the motions to the Assembly. This really was a huge handing over to my HP moment, as I was completely out of my comfort zone, but although it was not perfect, it was OK and I was pleased to have given this service. We appointed a new Bylaws Chair from Ireland to the committee and it will be our responsibility to bring the Region 9 Bylaws and Policy and Procedures manual up to date, following the decisions made at the Assembly and looking at bylaw amendments for next year. Joining the committees feels quite daunting, but as is the OA way, members patiently help each other to understand.

We also looked at the finances of Region 9 and produced a budget for 2013. Like most service bodies, funding was slightly down this year. We were all asked to pass on to our countries the request that if any group/Intergroup pays money online to Region 9, they send an email to the Treasurer (details on the Region 9 website at www.oaregion9.org), letting her know that the payment has been made and exactly who it is from. Sometimes the references do not give sufficient information and the Treasurer is unable to identify and record the contribution correctly.

Once again, it felt such an honour to be at Region 9 representing my Service Board and voting on their behalf. There were many opinions and votes didn't always go the way we wanted but everyone accepted the group conscience with the usual OA grace.

Each session started and finished with the Serenity Prayer in a different language before being said in English, which was very moving. Somehow over the days, the strangers from different countries became friends, with warm hugs, and you could almost feel the warmth in the room when we stood to hold hands. A group of people all with the same aim: to serve our Intergroup/Service Board to the best of our ability. It was powerful and at times very emotional.

I stayed for the Polish National Service Board Convention which followed the business section and really enjoyed the shares. Again, the subject was abstinence. Each share was translated by volunteers into either English or Polish. There were tears and laughter and it didn't matter that we could not always communicate verbally: sign language and hugs worked!!

Next year the Assembly will be on 23rd October in Israel. There is a Delegate Assistance Fund available to enable delegates from Intergroups to attend and details can be found on the Region 9 website.

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"If you don't take a chance, you don't have one"

This is just a general overview of my experience at Region 9 and my actual Region 9 Report will probably have been circulated before you read this.

It was the most wonderful experience. I travelled home tired but buzzing and full of inspiration, feeling humble that I had been given this opportunity not only to give service but also to gain so much for my own recovery. If you have the chance of being a delegate for Region 9, I would advise you to grab the opportunity with both hands! You won't regret it.

Many thanks for allowing me to give this service on your behalf.

Pam

Region 9 Delegate, OAGB National Service Board

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Friday 15 th to Sunday 17 th March 2013	Pleshey OA Retreat – Focus on Courage and Integrity	House of Retreat Pleshey Chelmsford Essex, CM3 1HA	Julie 07515 050 466/ 0208 555 4776 Sam 01296 681 747/ 07773 165 327 Vanessa 07725 461 805/ 01273 778 814 Sponsored by South and East England Intergroup
Friday 10 th to Sunday 12 th May 2013	Leeds (Rawdon) OA Group Weekend Retreat – <i>"Together we can do what we could never do alone"</i>	The Briery Retreat Centre Ilkley West Yorkshire LS29 9BW	Emma 01943 464 567 (before 9pm) emmaehayes@yahoo.co.uk Sponsored by Leeds (Rawdon) OA group

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.*