

Don't Leave Before the Miracle Happens!

Hi Fellow OAers!

My name's Lucy and I'm a very grateful, recovering compulsive overeater who, by the grace of God, fully intends to celebrate 17 years' back-to-back abstinence on 29th August.

I used to be an avid reader (and writer) of Step By Step (SBS) until sadly the decision was taken to cease publishing it following the May 2004 edition. This was down to the age-old problem of there simply not being enough people willing to give service. I feel sure that I was by no means the only person to be deeply disappointed by this news.

Last year I asked John to be a guest speaker at our bi-monthly workshop in November to share his experience, strength and hope as an OAGB Board Member on the topic of 'Service'. I listened with great interest, but couldn't help feeling a pang of guilt as I don't feel that I'm currently in a position to do service above group level which would involve travel due to the demands of a young family. So when he asked me to consider getting together with a few friends to revive SBS I jumped at the chance!

Very soon we had formed a publication committee consisting of six very enthusiastic, highly skilled, abstinent OA members from the Newcastle-upon-Tyne groups. We've met on a monthly basis since January and each of us has worked very hard to put together this all singing, all dancing new-look edition of SBS. We sincerely hope you enjoy reading your very own OAGB newsletter and would appeal to you – the reader – to please take the time to put pen to paper so as to ensure that SBS 'keeps coming back' this time! Remember

the words of the OA Promise: '...together we can do what we could never do alone.'

Love in Fellowship

Lucy
SBS editor,
Newcastle upon Tyne

Contents

- Page 3 - Step 1
- Page 6 - Don't Leave Before the Miracle Happens
- Page 8 - Tradition 1
- Page 11 - 'Step Into The Good Life'
- Page 13 - 'A Day In The Life' Interview
- Page 15 - Two Years Back in OA
- Page 16 - Lit' Review: anorexia & bulimia pack
- Page 17 - Writing: Tool of Recovery
- Page 18 - OA Calendar of Events

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

“I put my hand in yours...and together we can do what we could never do alone.”

**SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE FOR SBS AUTUMN
ISSUE – 26TH AUGUST 2011. TOPICS:**

‘Easy Does It, But Do It!’

Step 2

Tradition 2

Action Plan

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.

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

Step 1

"We admitted we were powerless over food - that our lives had become unmanageable."

When I came to Overeaters Anonymous I was at my rock bottom, but I know now I had the gift of desperation. I weighed 16 stone and was desperate because I knew there was nothing I could do to stop myself overeating. I was miserable because any time I had a compulsion to eat, that was all I could think about, and there was nothing I could do to stop myself following it through. When the thought came into my mind to binge, I would head to a shop at the next available opportunity, stock up on my supplies and then when I could, hide away to eat my haul. Sometimes I was on autopilot, feeling completely defeated, knowing I had no control over my actions. Other times, I would be arguing the entire way in my head, almost talking myself out of it at points, but still generally ending up hidden away in a room stuffing my face and then being left with the task of hiding the evidence. At other times, the argument against bingeing would win out briefly and I would throw out the chocolate or whatever. However, the next morning would find me rescuing it from the bin to eat before breakfast.

My overeating was out of control and I knew there was no power in me to stop it. Before I came to OA, I had my daughter and got married. These were the two best reasons I'd ever had for stopping overeating and I couldn't

do it. We had a big wedding and of course I wanted to be a beautiful bride. I knew that wasn't going to happen but I thought I could maybe lose a couple of stone, so I was at least not a repulsive bride. I tried a diet club which had worked for me once before, a long time ago, but I only lasted three weeks. I also tried some mad diet that's supposed to remove your appetite, absolutely barmy and again I managed for about three weeks. I then realised I had to give up trying because organising a wedding is hugely stressful and there was no way I could cope with that without overeating and there was no way I could keep fighting the compulsions in my head because I'd wind up exhausted.

Before the wedding I thought when I was pregnant I'd stop overeating because I knew that was best for the baby, but I couldn't. When she was born and I was overwhelmed with feelings of love and responsibility, I swore I'd stop, but I couldn't. I still find that hard to say but I now know I have a disease and until I found OA I was powerless to stop, even through my love for her.

I came to OA shortly after my wedding because I saw an alcoholic on the street after I'd spent an afternoon bingeing and recognised we were the same. I was already at Step 1; I had no hope that there was anything I could do that could stop me overeating for any period longer than three weeks. I had read enough books and tried various stratagems, including paying £200

continued on page 4...

for a day where I was taught how to resist each compulsion, to know I was an addict. I knew I needed to flip a switch in my brain where eating was concerned because I was not normal, but I didn't know how to do it and I could not see any solution.

What OA gave me immediately was hope. I heard some amazing recovery stories on that first night and I felt at home. I remember being shocked when I heard people say out loud things I had kept secret all my life. But the most amazing thing was to suddenly have hope again, even though I couldn't understand how it would work. To know that there was a solution that wasn't dependent on me (because I knew I was powerless) was such a relief.

I've been in OA for one and a half years now and been abstinent for a year and

four months, with one slip. I found a sponsor, wrote a food plan and started working the Steps; I have recently handed over part of my Step Four. Through meetings, OA literature and writing, I have learnt so much about myself and this disease and, most importantly for me, had an amazing spiritual revival in my existing faith. I have lost five stone and, even better, gained so much joy and peace that my internal life is unrecognisable. I am no longer miserably controlled by my disease but am building a life based on reality through the love of my Higher Power who has lifted my compulsions. I am so grateful that when I was in despair I found OA. And I'm grateful I found OA when I was desperate, because I grabbed the Programme with both hands, as I knew it was my only hope.

Anonymous, Manchester

Admitting powerlessness over anything doesn't come naturally to me.

I have always believed that if I try hard enough, work long enough, worry enough, tie myself in knots enough, I will succeed. I believed this to be true in my life, even though countless examples had shown that it wasn't the case. The only thing which I believed eluded me was the control of my weight (not my food!). However, when I reached the rooms after at least twenty years of compulsive eating and fourteen of dieting, I was ready to

believe that I was powerless over food and that my life was unmanageable.

I had spent the previous six months desperately trying to diet for my forthcoming wedding, starting with great intentions on the Monday morning and bingeing, if not on the Monday evening, then certainly by the Tuesday. I had so much weight to lose that I considered the only thing to do would be to eat nothing. I now know that sort of thinking doesn't work, no matter what weight we have to lose; eating three healthy meals a day is a necessity and we can only take our

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food and our lives one day at a time.

I felt guilty that I was so miserable in my life when on the outside I had the things which I believed should make me happy: a partner, a flat, a good job and friends – but I hated myself and I wanted to punish my body for letting me down by being fat so I could enjoy nothing in life. My life was totally unmanageable, though I was loath to admit this; I never had enough money despite a good wage; I rarely put in a full day at work; I avoided friends who hadn't seen me in a while and associated with many people who I had little in common with. Members of my family called me a 'sofa slug' as I rarely left the sofa! Mainly, I thought only of food or of starving, so I failed to notice any of the above aspects of my life which were unmanageable. I only started to recover when I learned to accept things exactly as they were and to

take Steps to enjoy my life the way my Higher Power (HP) wants.

Admitting that I was powerless over food meant that I had to ask for help with my eating. For many years I wrote down my food and handed it weekly to my sponsor. In OA, I have found that recovery is as much about what you do eat as what you choose to abstain from, and her advice and guidance meant that I lost weight in a manageable way. I also did exactly as suggested and made no major changes for the first two years. This is probably the most challenging thing I have ever done, but it removed my ability to run from my problems and forced me to face them. I also worked the other eleven Steps – but those are for future editions!

Today, nine years later, I have a great life. I have a husband; two small children; a fulfilling part-time job; and many friends, both inside and outside the Fellowship, who I can be honest with. There have been many ups and downs but they haven't caused me to disappear back into the food. I have recently had a weight gain due to pregnancy which, with the help of this Programme, is being removed one day at a time, so all I can really say is, 'Thank you OA!'

Joanna, Newcastle upon Tyne

Resting in Peace

Here I am in India, abstinent and free on the day of my father's funeral. What a journey this has been. Five months ago, I arrived here in Bangalore. With a yoga meditation ashram to visit, I was set for spiritual evolution. Then two months later, I found myself on my knees (once again) with this ferocious food addiction. There had been problems of sorts with previous attempts to connect with the Fellowship here. Now I find myself with my feet rooted in this incredible Fellowship. I am also doing service by connecting to OA World Service, obtaining a pdf of the OA 12 & 12 and starting a Step meeting tonight. The grace is accumulating in my life in direct proportion to the OA recovery dance.

Having been around OA for six years, it seems I still require reminders that I cannot do this alone. I was substituting OA Fellowship with another Twelve Step group, under the illusion that the food addiction could also be healed. I found out after various slips, slides and a binge that it cannot.

Today, I have a spiritual home with other compulsive over/undereaters and those with other forms of our malady. I'm not alone, and we're not alone.

My father recently died at 64 after a stroke. He did join our Fellowship and appreciated what we do. May he rest in loving peace.

Michael S

“Don't leave
before the
miracle
happens!”

“The symptom is physical, the cause is emotional, the solution is spiritual.”

The miracle for me is that today, I have spent the day on my own in a house stocked with food and I am abstinent. Today, there are no questions in my head about what I should eat, when I should eat, have I eaten too much?, in which case I will obviously put on weight and so I may as well binge. Or, have I eaten too little? Excitement - I may lose weight! This will be it! I will be thin and moreover, if I am thin, I will be happy.

My head was always full of questions, like a constant buzzing sound you only realise was there when it's gone. I survived by 'white knuckling' diets, desperately trying to ignore the craving, counting down the minutes until I could eat again, doing everything I could to distract. The alternative to this was giving in to the craving, either way I managed: I was completely absorbed in me, myself and my head.

I was never successful at any lasting weight loss, whichever weight loss theory I truly believed was the answer to happiness. Despite knowing everything there was to know about every diet and compulsively exercising, there was always a time when I 'deserved' to overeat because I'd worked so hard.

What happened to me was that I met a member who used to be like me, yet now had freedom from food. I also saw physical recovery, which at that time was very important to me. So I gave up trying to manage my food, my weight, my life. I surrendered to something outside of me and in time, that became

God. I gave up trying to run my life; I'd had enough experience to know that that way of living did not work for me. By giving up the food, I was able to see how selfish, self-seeking and fear-driven my life was. Fear that ultimately took me to the food. For me, it took what it took. I went to a lot of meetings, did a lot of writing, read a lot of literature and spoke to a lot of members, over several years, until I was ready to admit that I was absolutely powerless over food. I could say it, but for a long time there was still part of me that thought I could manage this disease myself.

I struggle to put into words how at peace and calm my life is today, in comparison to how it was. The way I live now is simply one day at a time. All I have is abstinence today; it doesn't matter how many back-to-back days of this I have. It's just for today and I'm exactly the same as you.

Gemma

An anorexic stays in OA

I wrote an article for Step by Step in the early '90s called something like 'An anorexic joins OA' about my experience before and since 1990 when I joined. This anorexic has stayed in OA ever since; but my version of our common disease is no less stubbornly with me than I am with OA. 'Don't leave before the miracle happens,' for me also includes, 'Don't give up on the miracles that can still happen.'

My first - and still greatest - miracle was the lifting of my need to cry at every setback; in reality, my tool for manipulating the world not to hurt me. When I suffer yet another painful blow from one of my other character defects, I wonder why they haven't disappeared so miraculously. Even at their worst, though, they seldom shredded my self-esteem the way crying did daily. Shredded self-esteem is my excuse for abuse, not only of myself, but also of people around me.

Now in my evening Step Ten, I count the day's blessings. I crossly ask my Higher Power to remove the rump of defects. Compulsive overtalking, big-shot-ism and procrastination form its bulk, and their removal is the miracle for which I'm impatient. I remind myself and say thanks that I'm alive, solvent and mostly useful to OA and to the world, and for the occasional absence of the other defects. I thank my Higher Power for those absences, knowing that the defects will be back tomorrow, unless there is another miracle.

Recently, the miracles seemed not to be enough. I looked back and thought

I saw, not continuing recovery from my anorexia, but seventeen years of continuing hanging-on, never even aspiring to, let alone achieving, a 'healthy' weight, and bruising my and others' lives with my bursts of hypoglycaemic emotion and indiscretion. But wait - my disease is progressive, so holding myself at one weight is not regression, it's miraculous too. What's more, when four years ago the disease got the upper hand and I began to lose weight, the Programme of OA gave me the solid foundation to say, "No, this is not good for me," and to do something better. I changed my food plan and stuck to it even when an injury trashed my exercise plan and my every urge was to "cut down".

I welcome the return of 'Step by Step' - now that's a miracle for every OA in Britain. It's also a miracle that doing something as simple as writing for it helped my recovery, back then and now. Don't leave without taking part in that miracle!

SP, Hampshire

Tradition 1

"Our common welfare should come first: personal recovery depends upon OA unity."

The overriding feeling I had when I was in the thick of my disease

of compulsive overeating was loneliness. I thought I was the only one who felt like I did - outwardly 'successful', holding down a series of professional jobs, happily married, with a family and friends who cared about me - but I was still fat and couldn't control my eating, so in my eyes

continued on page 9...

that made me a failure (that and the forty miserable years on the relentless merry-go-round of bingeing and dieting).

I joined OA in January 2009 at the age of 46 and could not believe my luck: the room was full of people just like me. That first feeling of kinship, understanding, support and unconditional acceptance was (and still is) overwhelming. However, one thing puzzled me at those first meetings. I found it really strange that when members shared, I wasn't supposed to say anything: no empathy or sympathy, challenge, advice giving or comments of any kind, just let each individual speak uninterrupted, even if they were saying things I really didn't agree with.

The longer I stayed, the more I realised that this was to give me time to voice my own thoughts freely and to discourage me from thinking that I was responsible for taking on other people's problems and trying to fix them, rather than facing up to my own issues around my food and my life. I also found it comforting that other OA meetings ran along similar lines; that there was a common underpinning framework and guidelines that worked; and that maintaining those 'rules' (the Traditions) was what kept the Fellowship healthy and gave people the

time and space to recover and follow their Higher Power's path for them, which may be very different from mine. My sponsor always reminds me to look for the similarities rather than the differences, and I am slowly learning more tolerance and compassion. I can also accept that other people's opinions may differ from mine, and even have the courage to change my mind without feeling small! I can set aside personal differences now, because ultimately the integrity and unity of the group and the Fellowship come first, not me.

Before I joined OA, I thought only I could sort out my eating problems through sheer willpower, which had always failed me in the past. I also thought I knew best for other people! How wrong I was. This Programme works because it is a Fellowship and we are encouraged to learn from others in a tolerant and loving environment and become well so that we can help those who still suffer.

From years of numbing out and isolating from life by overeating, I am finally learning to live life less fearfully and become the person my HP wants me to be, following the example of those in recovery around me who share their experience, strength and hope so freely. The last twelve months have been stressful,

including bereavement, emotional collapse, redundancy and illness, but by the grace of my HP and the amazing support of my OA friends, I've remained abstinent for two and a half years, which is a miracle. I feel truly blessed to be part of this Fellowship and am so grateful to be reminded each week that 'You are not alone any more', because for years I really believed I was and that overeating would blight my life for ever. This Fellowship, the people in it and my HP have changed all that and I am slowly becoming happy, joyous and free from the deadly disease of compulsive overeating with their love and support, one day at a time. It's not 'me, me, me' any more, it's 'we, we, we!'

*Karen, SBS Copy Editor
Newcastle upon Tyne*

“Before I joined
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'Step' Into The Good Life!

When I returned to OA in September 2007, I was broken and knew I could not do another diet. I had a desire to be well in my body, mind and soul. Between August 2006 and January 2007, my eldest son had successful treatment for leukaemia and is currently in good health. Six months of being in hospital with him meant that when he was allowed home, I went into overdrive on the post traumatic troughing. I am five foot two inches and so to weigh 15 stone 10 lbs was less than healthy.

Since the age of nine, I have had an over-needy, self-destructive relationship with food. I endured a vast number of diets, always looking for the easiest, quickest one. When I did reduce my weight though, my head never caught up and so it was not sustained. I ate what I wanted and behaved however I wanted and was the prime example of self-will run riot. My

life was unmanageable. I needed and wanted help.

Food dominated my every fibre. Food was my first love and therefore no other relationship stood a chance. 'Two is company, three is a crowd!' Food didn't answer me back or challenge me; it was safe and reliable and readily available. It was always hard for me to speak up because I felt like the odd one out and had low self-esteem.

When I left school, I chose a caring profession, which enables me to pre-empt people's needs and always give the best care. It is a vocation. I had not been cared for emotionally and so I wanted to do for others what hadn't been done for me. As I had to deal with tough emotional situations, it was hard. The food took some of the pain away. I couldn't eat just one of anything. Social situations would faze me and I isolated.

When dieting, I felt very righteous and would get annoyed if people

couldn't stick to it. Once I was in the zone, there was nothing stopping me. I was bloody-minded and extremely self-centred.

September 13 2007 is when my abstinence started, and continues to this day. I went to my home meeting every Wednesday for two years. I had a watertight food plan and did lose seven stone in weight. This happened by sheer good fortune. However, it was when I attended the Birmingham convention in July 2009 that the light bulb went on! Just to write about old ideas of God and then about what I wanted from God shifted my thinking.

The Monday after attending, I felt the fear but branched out and attended other meetings. I got a sponsor and immediately started completing the Steps. This journey I have started is a spiritual one and I am so willing to keep on moving forward. Once I had completed Step One, I figured so long as I was one Step ahead, I was ready to

sponsor. (The purple folder, purple pen and purple pencil case also helped!) The decision not to sit on the sidelines and to jump into our Fellowship and truly accept that I am a compulsive overeater, but that my deadly disease can be arrested one day at a time, so long as I keep in fit spiritual condition, helped me join the human race.

For the seven stone I lost, I gained seven health benefits: reducing my risks of diabetes; high blood pressure; strokes; heart conditions; joint problems; digestive disorders; and, most relevant, reducing my risk of cancer. Depression has also reduced, as 'we are what we eat'. I shall be 50 later this year and I am more alive than previously. I say, 'Yes,' and take risks. I do what I can and God does what I cannot do.

I use all nine Tools, which are the railings to help me with the Steps. I completed the Steps with the same appetite I used to have for food, allowing my soul to be nourished.

Service keeps me in the presence of other compulsive overeaters and I am happy to help. My ego has been reduced, my self-esteem has increased and I have a warm feeling of belonging. I have peace of mind.

My amazing illustrations of my recovery include major life events but without the drama. Last September I married my partner of eighteen years, due to the fact I now emotionally relate with the people in my life. The day was arranged intuitively and was simple. I did not taste any of my wedding cupcakes because the respect I have for my abstinence is 100%. Recently we have had home improvements, where previously I couldn't have faced it, but with the Programme and taking each day by itself, I managed. I have an acceptance that I am powerless. I have let God into my life. I am willing and know that I need help and am happy to surrender to a power greater than me.

I am maintaining my seven stone weight loss. I have a balance and

apply the Traditions to all my affairs. I feel the love of my God and often ask to be carried. I am living the spiritual life. I no longer need to analyse and intellectualise. My gloves are off and it feels great. I have freedom from food obsession and the Promises are materialising. I have boundaries and know I cannot eat, say or behave as I wish. I am working for my HP and what a great employer - complete unconditional understanding! My eyes sparkle, my hair shines - it shows in my face I am living the good life.

My cup runneth over and I am happy to share the message by attraction, honesty and a willingness to change myself. Thank you for reading my share of hope and strength. You *can* recover from compulsive eating.

Suzi, Manchester

A Day in the Life

An interview with Sam, chair of the National Service Board, OA Great Britain.

How long have you been serving on the board of OAGB as Chair?
As Chair, since October 2010. I joined the National Service Board (NSB) in October 2008 and had done two years as Literature Liaison Officer prior to October 2010.

Being Chair of OAGB seems like a huge responsibility. How much time does this service take?

On average it probably takes an hour or two a week, plus four times a year we meet for a day on a Saturday, and once a year we're at the National Assembly for a weekend. There are some other occasions when I take whole days to do bigger pieces of work or something that needs doing during the week: for example, if I go to see our Literature Administrator; or when I have been a rep at the Region 9 Assembly or the World Service Business Conference. I am lucky in that although I work full-time in quite a full-on job, I can work flexibly sometimes, so this helps to fit things in. It is a responsibility but there is always someone to help if I get overwhelmed.

Did you do any service prior to this?
I did much of the usual group service, starting off as Literature person at Southgate group, which I always loved, especially as I had very little money and it meant when I ordered literature, I got to see things I couldn't afford to buy! I was an Intergroup rep and then Intergroup Telephone Officer and Region 9 rep for a year. Next I was Accounts Advisor to the Literature

Service, which is a sub-committee of the NSB.

How long have you been part of our Fellowship?
I went to my first meeting on Bank Holiday Monday in May, 1997 and have been abstinent by my own definition since 1998 sometime - I don't have an exact date.

How did you find OA?
I was in another Twelve Step Fellowship, getting more and more desperate. Despite abstaining from that substance I was still unable to work the Steps and was depressed and suicidal. Eventually I managed to talk to someone about the food, and how I felt about myself and my body. Thank God that person knew about OA and took me to a meeting. It was the last place I wanted to be but I knew absolutely it was the place I needed to be.

How did you end up becoming Chair?
Kind of by being willing to do it and by a process of elimination! We knew we only had four people able to do NSB service in October 2010, and our then Chair Joanna was rotating off. We had a new officer who was willing to do Secretary; we all really wanted Maureen to be able to continue with Public Information (PI), because we were really making progress there; John was willing to keep Company Secretary and Treasurer; we still needed a Chair and that kind of left me!

Do you think you will go on to do service at an even higher level in future?
We try to think about the inverted pyramid as the OA service structure, so strictly speaking it should be service

at a lower level! I would love to do service at Region 9 in the future, and maybe even as a World Service Trustee in the more distant future. I will finish four years on the Board in October 2012 and will probably want and need a break then. Region 9 service might come after a break and I suspect Trustee service is only do-able when I've retired - and I'm only 40 now, so I have a few years to go!

As we know, service aids our recovery. What other benefits have you found from any service you have given? In the early days it taught me to do stuff I had no clue how to do. Simple example: I had never used a computer and was terrified of doing so. My sponsor introduced me to his and once I had passed the totally terrified stage (which took a while..!), I was able to use Excel to do meeting accounts and service rotas. Today I am a qualified accountant who uses Excel all day for work as well as service. It has also taught me to be able to talk to people - not a natural skill for me - and given me more confidence than I had. Most of all, lest anyone should think I am some paragon of virtue, I really enjoy service! I get a healthy natural buzz from achieving stuff for OA and from working with people who are serious about their recovery. Service doesn't just aid my recovery: it is an integral part of my recovery and of my life.

Do you need to have any qualifications or requirements to serve on the Board? NSB officers need to have a year's abstinence by their own definition and two years' service above group level. The non-OA requirement is to have not been made bankrupt or convicted of fraud - this is because we are officially company directors. It's also necessary to have basic computer skills, such as being able to email, as we conduct a

lot of business that way. It's useful, though not essential, to have some basic business skills, though they don't necessarily have to be gained through employment. The best thing if anyone is interested is for them to email me at chair@oagb.org.uk and we can arrange an initial chat about it.

Were you 'Twelve-Stepped' into your service?

Yes, absolutely, in that someone at Southgate meeting said to me, 'Why don't you do literature?' and that gave me the courage to put my hand up in the group conscience. I'm not a natural volunteer, as my first instinct is to think I'll be rubbish! This is part of the Programme I still have to work on, which is around Step Seven and believing that I am okay as I am, the way my HP wants me to be and, most of all, am good enough. I would definitely encourage people not just to think, 'Can I do this service?' but, 'Can my sponsee/friend/someone I know at my meeting?' do this service?

What is the highlight of your service to date?

I'm going to be cheeky and say two things: one, getting literature sales online last year; and two, attending the World Service Business Conference for the first time in April this year. It was awe-inspiring to be in a room with over 180 OAers, all abstinent and serious about service - wow!

*Sam
Chair of National Service Board
OA Great Britain*

*Angela
SBS journalist
Newcastle upon Tyne*

*"Keep coming back, it works if you work it.
(and it doesn't if you don't!)"*

Two Years Back in OA

It's a year since I came back into OA and started trying to get help. My life was in a complete state at the end of 2008, after just five months away from OA. I had left the groups, as I wasn't making progress fast enough, and was feeling depressed.

My food problem was OK while I was away to begin with, but by the end of that period, I had got back to binges. But it was the insanity of my life which got me back to recovery. I couldn't cope with people - I got to the point where I did not want to see friends. I found family get-togethers extremely distressing and full of resentments. I couldn't cope with work - I couldn't stand the people there. I was racked with worries and anger. I vented this all to my mother- poor her. It's horrible having life traumas without help. I wanted to change everything - where I lived, who I knew, where I worked. Everything seemed wrong. I was in a financial mess, unable and unwilling to ask for help. I resented my family and friends for not helping me or sorting me out. All within five months of not being in recovery. Gone was any gratitude, serenity, hope, peace, acceptance. This culminated in Christmas, which involved bingeing and hiding away. I knew I needed to get back to recovery.

So in January 2009 I went back to my first meeting, after the most horrendous food binges. (I discovered I can no longer eat enough food to fill myself up, without being so stuffed that I have to lie down for several hours afterwards.) I knew it was the right place to be. Members who knew me seemed glad to see me.

I got back into calling people, meetings, service and other groups involvement very quickly, and within a year, absolutely EVERY single area of my life has improved.

Gone are the binges followed by total despair for days. I'm happier with my job and have kept it - before I was sure I'd have to give it up. I'm happy where I'm living and I've filled the financial hole I was creating. I've regained peace, serenity, hope and acceptance. I've got that treasured gratitude back. I've started to make healthy friendships. I've started tackling serious legal problems I had been ignoring for years. I've got help with my flat and daily living, which has made a massive difference. I've made changes to my diet, gradually. I now eat off plates, not out of huge bowls. I've given up certain unhealthy food behaviours, a complete miracle for me. I've started leaning less on my mother for emotional help. I have built up a wonderful network of people I can call, who I am getting closer and closer to. I feel I'm able to share and help others, as well as letting them help me.

I've got a long, long way to go, but I'm on the way, and I've stopped going down the path of self-destruction that I was on a year ago. Who knows where I'd be by now? So I'm extremely grateful to have got back to OA, the Steps, my sponsor and plan, never to leave again. When away from recovery, I knew how to live in theory, but simply had no reasons why I should live that way - a terrible place to be!

Julian

Literature Review

'Focus on Anorexia and Bulimia'

The OA starter pack on 'Focus on Anorexia and Bulimia' includes the following: 'Many Symptoms, One Solution' – a card listing the varied food behaviours of OA members; 'OA Members Come in All Sizes' – a booklet of personal stories, plus the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions; and 'Anorexia and Bulimia' – a pamphlet with many personal shares of experience, strength and hope. When I first heard the name 'Overeaters', I did not think this Fellowship was for me. Anorexia and bulimia are my primary addictions and my food behaviours have ranged from starvation to bingeing and purging.

Although I had been hugely encouraged and supported by all members in my first meeting, seeing in black and white the words on the front of this starter pack confirmed to me I was where I needed to be.

The booklet 'OA Members Come in All Sizes' explains that OA members come in all different sizes but we all suffer from the same disease. On the outside, our bodies may all look so different, yet in OA we all share the same problem. We also share the same solution.

When I first joined OA fourteen months ago, I did not believe that I would be able to identify with someone who introduces themselves as an 'overeater'. Yet today, my life has been turned around by the sharing, identification and wonderful sponsorship of these members. Although I may not have believed this to be true at the beginning of the journey, reading this booklet certainly gave me encouragement.

The personal shares enclosed within the pack describe so well the love and support in the rooms and real emphasis is on the fact that we are no longer alone. Until I found OA, I was lonely and trapped with my obsession, fear and controlling of food. To me, it all felt like my dirty, awful secret. Identifying with these shares brought huge relief that I no longer needed to be alone and ashamed. The shares gently introduce the various Tools of Recovery. The 'Just for Today' slogan hugely helped me in the very early days and I still remind myself of this today. When my racing brain wants to start obsessing about food and weight, I remind myself that my Higher Power has me exactly where I am meant to be today.

I have so much identification with the share entitled 'I am a vomiter'. I still describe myself as an overeater, as the two (overeating and vomiting) are inseparable. I cannot overeat without making myself throw up. I can feel the writer's fear and loneliness because it is everything I felt. I found it quite overwhelming to actually read my own secret behaviours written by someone else. Reading shares is certainly a huge vital part of my recovery.

This introductory pack gave me the hope, encouragement and identification I needed when I was physically, mentally and emotionally broken. Today, life is good and I am a grateful recovering anorexic, bulimic and compulsive overeater.

Anonymous

Tool of Recovery: Writing

"In the past, compulsive eating was our most common reaction to life. When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action."

My name is Paula and I joined OA on 2 March 2011. Since that time, I have remained abstinent and worked through many issues. I try and use all of the OA tools: I have a sponsor, a food plan, attend meetings and do a little bit of service at those meetings; I also speak to other OA members on the telephone.

My favourite tool, though, is writing. I carry a little notebook around with me, the contents of which are my food plan for each day; any shopping that I may need in relation to that; a quote from the OA 'Just for Today' book; and any issues that are difficult. I spill everything out on to the paper, usually writing 'I AM ANGRY' (in capitals!) about whatever I am upset about. My sponsor has shown me how to use the Serenity Prayer to identify the things I cannot change and accept, and I am learning to change the things I can, which are normally about my reaction. I also talk to her about my issues.

Today I have a freedom that I have never experienced in my whole life. I used to be crippled by a sudden loss of self-worth and self-esteem that meant I couldn't get out of the house at times. Now I have freedom and know that emotions do not have to be overwhelming and cripple me; that I do not have to eat on them; and that by using the OA Tools, I can maintain abstinence and have a life that is happy, joyous and free.

Paula

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions? Send SBS an email at:

stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions, and other OA happenings...

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
8th -10th July (Friday 17.30 to Sunday 12.45)	Heart of England annual convention – Steps 4, 5 and 6	Hilton Metropole Hotel, NEC, Birmingham	victoria.derrick@ googlemail.com Sponsored by Heart of England intergroup.
10th September (Saturday) 09.30 - 15.30	Workshop: Relapse? Don't Do It!	Sale Moor Methodist Church Northenden Road Sale, Cheshire M33 2DG	suzibrown99@fsmail. net Sponsored by Northwest intergroup.
24th September (Saturday) 1.30 - 3.30	Workshop "WE are the message"	Brunswick Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7BJ	Angela: 07837205976 Sponsored by Newcastle upon Tyne Thursday Group.
1st October (Saturday) 10.00 - 16.00	Workshop on Step 3/11.	Friends Meeting House 126 Hampton Road Bristol, BS6 6JE	sarahonthesevern@ hotmail.com Sponsored by Bristol group.
21st to 23rd October (Friday 17.30 to Sunday lunchtime)	26th Annual National Assembly/ Recovery Convention	Hilton Metropole Hotel, NEC, Birmingham	Barbara: 07740 645401 Valerie: 01273 890445 Email Alan: xxamukxx@hotmail. com Sponsored by Heart of England, South Coast and Kent & Essex Intergroups.

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.)