

STEP

OVEREATERS
ANONYMOUS

Great Britain

by STEP

Winter 2011

A Family Recovery

Season's Greetings to you all!

I simply can't believe that 2011 is now drawing to an end. Time used to really drag when I was in the thick of my disease – back then, I was totally incapable of living 'in the now' because it was just too unbearable for words and I wasted ridiculous amounts of time either ruminating over the past or quivering in my shoes at the mere thought of what the future may or may not hold for me. However, in recovery, it's just like the saying goes: 'Time flies when you're having fun!' A sponsor once recounted being told at the beginning of her recovery journey to, "Hold on to your hat – life's about to take off like you'd never believe it," and I have to admit that that has definitely been, and continues to be, my experience. But that's not to say nothing 'bad' ever happens to me – far from it (more of that later)! In fact, the more entrenched my recovery becomes, the more my Higher Power seems to give me to deal with, or is it vice-versa, maybe? 2011 certainly hasn't been without its share of challenges; the bottom line is that I have remained abstinent throughout.

The Tool for this edition is Service and, as far as that's concerned, 2011 has certainly been an extremely busy year for me and the rest of the Step By Step Publishing Committee. We spent the first six months preparing for the re-launch of SBS and have since managed to produce three editions, which as far as we are aware have all been very well received. Of course, none of this would have been possible without all of you - the members of Overeaters Anonymous in Great Britain – who kindly took the time and trouble to do some service yourselves and submit articles. Just a week before the submission deadline for this edition, we still only had very little to go on, but a brief reminder was all it took to prompt you into action and you certainly didn't disappoint, for which we'd like to offer a heartfelt thank-you!

So, on this note, I would like to wish you all an abstinent Christmas and all the best for 2012, one day at a time.

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 issue –
10th February 2012. Topics:**

**Tool: A Plan of Eating
Steps 4 & 5
Tradition 4
A topic of your choice!**

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Please note your contribution may be held and published in a future edition of Step By Step.

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Step 3

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

Step Three was important for me from the first day I came into an OA meeting. I knew I was powerless over food and that my life had become unmanageable, and as a very religious person I thought I prayed about my relationship with food, but in reality, I prayed about everything else! I felt too ashamed to bother God with my bad behaviour around food: I thought He had better things to do. I realised after my first meeting that although I turned many aspects of my life over to God, I didn't really want to trust God about food. I felt I should be able to handle it myself. I had suffered anorexia as a teenager, and had recovered through the help of my Church community, but deep down there was still a lot of fear and shame around food. I thought I kept it under control, but when I got diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in January 2008, my eating went thoroughly off the rails. I binged and then over-exercised, but nothing numbed the pain of MS, and nothing stopped the bingeing, not even God!

When I walked through the doors of the OA meeting I was welcomed unconditionally by people I had never met before, and the Twelve Steps were read out. I realised that I believed in an unconditionally loving God, but had always tried to hide my overeating from God. I made a decision at my first meeting that I had to trust this Programme because

I could see evidence of it working all around me in the lovely women who shared with me in that meeting.

Once I got home, I faced the fact that I had to make a decision: to turn my will and my life over to God. I came to see that I had trusted God for recovery from the anorexia, but I still wanted to eat my way, and not listen to any inspiration from this wonderful God that might have helped me to eat normally. I have often felt that turning my life over to God was no problem, but turning my will over is a decision that I need to make every day. I hear people in Programme talking about 'self-will run riot' and can identify with that: my self-will tries every way possible to have its own way. Some days I need to submit to God minute by minute if I am facing particular challenges over food, like a meal out.

I also think it is so important that Programme talks about 'God as we understood him' and I love it because it doesn't matter how the person sitting next to me in an OA meeting sees God; it is the God of his/her understanding. As someone who spends a lot of time in religious groups, I learn so much from how others in Programme understand God. For some people, God is a challenging word, and it is great that people can say Higher Power if that helps. Nowhere in Programme does it say you have to explain how you see God; it is different for everyone, whether we share a faith outside of OA or not: it is a spiritual programme, not a religious one. At many points in the Big Book¹, Bill W encourages readers to avail themselves of the help religious traditions can offer, but it is

“ If I don't feel close to God, who moved?”

never heavy handed. I have loved OA retreats that may take place in religious buildings, but where 'OA is spoken', so that no-one is excluded. I have been in Programme nearly three years and love the ways people share on the Steps, as I always learn something new that strengthens my recovery.

Katharine (Rawdon and Sheffield)

¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (2001) Alcoholics Anonymous. 4th edn. New York City: AAWS*

me the 'Dignity of Choice' pamphlet, instructed me to choose one of the meal plans (she didn't care which one), and told me to start eating that way for dinner.

I have been abstinent since that day, December 8, 1980. I knew if I called her each morning, I did not overeat that day, so that was Higher Power enough for my Step Two. She showed me the directions outlined in the Big Book. She did not encourage me to take any shortcuts, no 'easier, softer ways'. She led me through the first nine Steps in my first 18 months in OA. She expected me to do Step work each day, including my wedding day! She taught me that if I want recovery, I need to work the Step I am on TODAY, not tomorrow or next week. She highlighted the promises for each Step, again as printed in the Big Book. She emphasized that I never had to overeat again. She assured me that Steps One through Nine, if taken thoroughly and honestly, need never be taken again. This has been my experience; I have never re-taken these Steps. She also assured me that I MUST work Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve every day if I want to stay in recovery (abstinence) – no vacations, no holidays, no days off. Good advice. I am grateful! While she was my first Higher Power, I did not, and would not, make a decision to turn my will and life over to her care.

While I knew my contact with my sponsor and OA was keeping me abstinent, I also knew neither she nor OA would be able to be my Higher Power long term. Reading

Step 3 Reflections

I'm grateful for the abstinence I have had each day for almost 31 years. Without abstinence, I have nothing but insanity and misery. I am grateful knowing I never have to compulsively overeat again. My decision to be abstinent, one day at a time, preceded my decision to turn my life and will over to the care of God. I could not have made the solid decision Step Three required of me, had I still been in the food. It would have been a wish, not a decision.

My first sponsor (for six years) was my first Higher Power. She came up to me at my second meeting and asked me if I had a sponsor. When I said, "No," she promptly said she would be my sponsor, gave me a calling time for the next morning (6.10-6.20 am!), and loaned me her Big Book so I could get started on reading the first 164 pages and start writing. She also handed

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“...God as we understood Him.”

‘We Agnostics’ in the Big Book² and another Twelve Step Fellowship book ‘Came to Believe’³ and the chapters on Steps Two and Three in another Twelve Step Fellowship publication under the direction of my sponsor, I learned to have an open mind. I learned to not know too much. I learned that God could be trusted ultimately to do for me what I could not do for myself. At an OA conference, I let go and let God. I got out of the driver’s seat I’d occupied all my life. I gave up the controls, and I cried and cried. I surrendered absolutely, and my relief was palpable. The decision I made that day 30 years ago changed my life forever.

I was immediately catapulted into a new dimension of existence. I

changed. And I ‘launched out’ into my Fourth Step inventory, eager to live out the life my Higher Power wanted for me: a life of ‘sane and happy usefulness to God and my fellows.’ A life where I would never again have to pig out, starve, diet, steal, cheat, lie, wallow (not for long anyway!), hate myself, and hate everyone else. A life being abstinent and clean, one day at a time, for the rest of my life.

Each day I continue to live based upon my Step Three decision of 30 years ago. So my plan for today is always the same: say please and thank you to God throughout the day, work Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve, and don’t overeat, no matter what.

Ana, London

² pp. 44-57. *Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (2001) Alcoholics Anonymous. 4th edn. New York City: AAWS*

³ *Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (1973) Came to Believe... New York City: AAWS*

Made a decision...

I didn’t understand or like this Step – in fact I didn’t really like any that had the ‘G’ word in them. The ‘Higher Power’ words weren’t much better for me; I knew that ‘they’ really meant ‘G’ and were just trying to convince me to believe in God through the back door. The real problem of course was Step Two, and although this Step is ‘Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity’, in order to come to believe, I had to have some concept of a Power greater than myself – and I didn’t.

The thing that made a difference to me was being told to write down what I wanted such a Power, if indeed there was one, to be and to do in my life. I am

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quite a logical, pragmatic person so this worked. I wrote that I wanted something that would help me to know that I was going to be okay from one day to the next. That was as much as I needed to move on to Step Three, which was, for me, acting as if that Power was working in my life. Deciding to 'act as if' is, for me, effectively deciding to turn my will and my life over. Once I did that, gradually better things started happening – though I didn't notice them at first, being so used to catastrophising everything. I was then introduced to the saying 'I can't, God can, I think I'll let God', with the latter part being Step Three.

Again, 'I think I'll let God' was nice and simple, plus it gave me some illusion of choice in the 'I think I'll let...' part! Next, when I was still dithering around analysing Step Three, my sponsor told me that Step Three was just a decision to get on and write a Step Four inventory. Again, this made sense. The lesson for me, which I try to remember on a daily basis, is that I can sit around debating what words mean and how EXACTLY I can turn my will and my life over, or I can take some simple action, 'Let God', and get on with the next right thing.

Sam

I am Melissa, and I am an emotional compulsive overeater.

I naively thought Step Three would be a breeze for me, because I came from a semi-religious background, believed in God, and defined my very own Higher Power. So it was time for me to 'make a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood Him'.

But how am I supposed to hand my will over and continue to live? I am a mother with a full time job; I have responsibilities; I am educated too...to me, these are all massive accomplishments. From being a little girl I learnt to juggle everything and anything that was thrown at me, and it occurred to me that 'blind faith' was required and I became scared because I would have to hand over

my control. I fought so hard for my control: suffragettes died for me to gain control over my life as a woman; and pioneers such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King helped give black people a sense of entitlement and have control over their own lives too. I've fought depression, bullies at work and so on and so on and so on. Why would I 'willingly' hand over my life to anyone or anything?

P.60-61 of the Big Book⁴ explain my conundrum very eloquently:

'Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would

"Cultivate an attitude of gratitude"

be pleased. Life would be wonderful... What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well. He begins to think life doesn't treat him right. He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him. Admitting he may be somewhat at fault, he is sure that other people are more to blame. He becomes angry, indignant, self-pitying. What is his basic trouble? Is he not really a self-seeker even when trying to be kind? Is he not a victim of the delusion that he can wrest satisfaction and happiness out of this world if he only manages well? Is it not evident to all the rest of the players that these are the things he wants? And do not his actions make each of them wish to retaliate, snatching all they can get out of the show? Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?'

I had to 'quit playing God'. I could no longer be the conductor in the orchestra as well the music sheets, the notes and the instruments. I had to place the baton on the stand and humbly walk away from it, because I was failing miserably at it all. The Big Book (p.62) says, 'So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making.' In the dead of night, when the old Melissa would be gorging on food, clarity came to me, along with these words, "Let it all go, close your eyes and let me drive. Pass me the keys, steering wheel and take your hands off the gear stick. Just sit and I will drive

you, taking you exactly where you need to go. Rip up the directions and disconnect the sat nav, close your eyes and feel the breeze through your hair and against your skin and trust I will take you "there"...Dear God, I pass you the keys," and I had taken my Step Three.

However, to me, Step Three requires constant reiteration and the disease rears its ugly head and tells me, "Take control and manipulate the situations you are in; force others to conform... do these things and everything will be ok." So daily I try to close my eyes and literally imagine myself passing over my gigantic bundle of keys to my Higher Power, placing them at His feet and walking away from them. I did this today and I will do it tomorrow, and if I have to do it indefinitely, then so be it...because when I 'Let Go and Let God', I am a better mother, partner, daughter, employee; I am able to wash the dishes; vacuum my home: basic things that come easily and naturally to others, but were overwhelming for me because I was in control and juggling.

So I sit here today and give thanks to my Higher Power, because I am exactly where he wants me to be. I urge everyone when they are unsure, afraid, depressed, confused, or feel as though they want to take a compulsive bite, to say the Third Step Prayer, which is on p.63 of the Big Book: 'God, I offer myself to Thee - to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take

“Live and Let Live”

away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!’

Melissa, Sheffield

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I have been struggling to ‘let go’ over the last few weeks,

so after a bad morning, I decided to go for a walk in the fields in the next village from where I live. I had a walking book which gave me directions for where I needed to go and off I set. Some way into my walk, a friend texted me and I stopped to read it. It made me stop, take stock and look around. It was beautiful - the sun was shining in the bright blue sky, there were lush green fields and orchards all around

me scattered with old farmhouses. It made me realise that I was so focused on my journey, that I was not taking in the beauty of the countryside.

It is the same with my life: I am so caught up in where I am going that I rarely stop, look around and am grateful for the wonderful things that are in my life today. It then got me thinking about Step Three. I trusted the book to give me the right directions on my journey and I knew I needed to do the same in trusting God. There were a few times I

doubted I had gone the right way and I had a few slips and slides in the mud...but when I stopped and trusted the book, I knew I was on the right track.

The same is true in my life: I might have doubts and have some slips and slides, but if I keep going to meetings, working the Steps, talking to my sponsor and OA friends and truly turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand him, I know I am going to be OK.

Katie

Step Three

To this day I remember clearly the moment I shared the Step Three prayer with a female friend whose spirituality I had always admired. She told me it was a very powerful prayer and it meant so much to me to have her approval.

And so I began to recite the prayer at the start of each day and to spend a few moments considering what the phrases meant to me personally. I have always thought the word 'offer' sounds gentle, almost hesitant and timid. That is certainly how I felt.

What God has done with me and built with me far exceeds

the life I would be living, had my self-will continued to be in charge. Knowing that I was a valued member of OA gave me the confidence, self-respect and the willingness to walk through the door of my local church. Two of my many blessings are that I have continued to be part of the OA Fellowship and a member of that church.

Left to run riot, my self-will could easily have brought my marriage to an end. With the help of OA, I have learned that my opinions can often be wrong. I try hard in all my relationships and friendships to give respect and then I am in with a good chance of receiving respect.

Mary J

Life is changing slowly...

I have been in OA now for six months and life is changing slowly...as I work the Steps and see how when I work them, they do work for me.

I had dipped in and out of meetings before but never really took anything seriously. The slogans sounded good but went in one ear and out of the other. I certainly couldn't find a Higher Power and so I kept doing the same things and the same things kept happening.

*I felt lost.
I was a victim.
I overate and hated myself.
No-one really understood or cared!*

I hit my rock bottom when I found myself all alone again, having followed a boyfriend for the wrong reasons...and ending up in a new city, in a flat alone, knowing no-one. He seemed all sorted and didn't want to have me around.

I wallowed in self pity and 'food, glorious food'.

I looked online and there was only one meeting near me...and I went – eventually. As soon as I entered, I knew I was in the right place and I got a sponsor before I could do any more damage to myself. She was methodical, strict and abstinent.

I started to use the Tools, thanks to her guidance, and found myself writing nearly every night. I had a food plan, the first ever, and I didn't have to think about food for the rest of the day. I actually phoned others and didn't hear what I thought I would, which was resentment at me phoning, my excuse for not calling before.

I looked forward to my home meeting more than anything else in the week and made sure that nothing else got in its way. My momentum slowed down a little with Step Two, as I had to gear up to accepting and handing over to a Higher Power in Step Three.

Funny how I struggled here, and as a confirmed atheist just couldn't get the idea of 'God' out of my head, although I knew it could be anything. I think it was more about my fear of handing over and losing control: losing control of me actually making all my own decisions.

As I wrote and wrote every night, I began to realise that my control

hadn't worked. I'd heard it before, but it was dawning deeper and deeper that I really would not get whole and stay abstinent if I did not work the Programme, the whole Programme, as intended. I prayed and I meditated. I worked the Tools vigorously because I so wanted to be and stay abstinent and I knew, I just knew, that the Programme and the Big Book was what I wanted to follow and believe in.

I guess it took time and once I felt comfortable with my concept of a Higher Power and started praying to my Higher Power and actually seeing that I felt better, and that on occasions handing over actually worked, I was convinced. The more convinced I was that the Programme worked, the more it did. I was in a positive spiral – upwards.

I have just said my Step Three prayer to my sponsor looking out over trees and a thunderous sky but feel uplifted and good.

I feel lucky.

I feel gratitude.

I hear this word 'gratitude' so much, and now understand why, as I feel it with such intensity. I can see the incredible way the Steps work and they increment in order and with form that makes sense. I commit my abstinence each morning to my sponsor and commit to being abstinent that day.

“HALT: Don’t get too Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired.”

I was asked to sponsor someone new to the Programme to the level that I am at and although I was fearful at first, feeling I had nothing to offer, it wasn't until I first heard my sponsee's worries, insecurities and problems with eating that I realised just how important sponsoring is to make me realise what I have achieved and what I can give back. I understood what she was saying. I had been there too. I could pass on what my sponsor had passed on to me. It all made sense.

So now I am an integral part of a wonderful Programme that is structured and giving me so much for free and allowing me to play my part in giving back too.

I still have problems I deal with daily, and find myself laughing at myself when I still say, “Yes,” when I mean, “No” or get all het up about not being able to set boundaries and feel taken for granted. I realise that I cannot change 180° overnight, but I have Tools now and a sponsor and I am saying and doing things differently. I am starting to own how I feel and say how I feel, and no-one can argue with that. I tried to say how I felt to my father and as I was not used to it, it all came out wrong, as I felt guilty as I was speaking. He was surprised; I felt bad but I knew I had to keep going. My sponsor helped me and I tried again. Now I have found it easier

and with a calm and quiet voice am able to express my feelings without resentment. I do not need to caretake others or feel responsible for their actions. Looking after me is more than enough!

The saying ‘One day at a time’ now makes so much more sense, as does everything else I took for granted. I have just moved, yet again, and for once in my life, actually took care to work the Programme, ask for help from friends, and move in an orderly manner, unstressed and with joy. I am in a much smaller flat, dark and without sun and yet I am really filled with gratitude that I have a roof over my head, that I live in a super part of London and that I have a home meeting within walking distance that I can go to. I have legs to get there, eyes to read the Big Book and good health in general.

I am blessed. I have wonderful OA friends, my sponsor, the Big Book and my Higher Power. These first three Steps have been so important for me and now I actually look forward to doing my Step Four, something I dreaded only months ago. I totally understand why Step Four is done now and why I have to, actually want to, do it.

Denise

“Serenity isn’t freedom from the storm; it is peace within the storm.”

Step Three was meant to be an easy, “OK God, I turn my will over to you, do your thing!” Unfortunately it wasn’t that straightforward. It suddenly occurred to me that I had no faith in anything, let alone God. God was an abstract concept that I had at best a vague interest in and at worst a complete lack of belief that any such entity existed!

For weeks I went to meetings and listened avidly to other members, hoping they’d tell me how to understand God. I listened to CDs that told me quite clearly that Step Three should be a Step that you move on from swiftly as nothing happened there! “Oh God,” (!!) I used to think, “If you’re there, what are you? Who are you?”

During my Step Three I worked at a community centre below a church. Born into one faith and being married to someone of another faith, I knew with the utmost certainty that our Gods weren’t the same. However, I liked the people from the church who would pop into the centre. They were kind, community-focused people who were willing to take the time for a chat.

One day I started speaking to a young man who had recently been released from prison, and in order to get his life back on track was volunteering in the community church garden. He had embraced God and had a strong faith that I had overheard him speaking about to the vicar. I knew we didn’t have the same God but wondered if

he could shine a light on what it took to find God.

I quickly acted on the courage I felt to ask about God and found that chatting with him was easy. He had a broad smile and an earnest humility that I had not seen in another person for such a long time. He explained that for him, God was a father figure that guided him and spoke to him through his instincts. He went on to tell me that prayer provided him with an opportunity to know “his father” better and understand His will for him.

My life changed irrevocably in that conversation; imperceptible to others but it meant everything to me. It has been five months since that conversation and I am clear who God is for me.

God is the father I craved for as a child. He speaks to me every day and is the instinct to do what I know is right. I pray to God and ask for the guidance, courage and love to work the Programme to the best of my ability. I pray to God for the freedom from food obsession and to be generous to others.

Once I knew who God was for me, it was easy to turn my will over to Him. I mean, how could I not trust such a God who I know, without question, loves me unconditionally?

Sarah, London

“What is ‘God’ to me?”

God, what is ‘God’ to me? When I joined OA in 2008, I had no concept of a God working in my life. It was never a question that had come up for me. God was something that other people did: I didn’t need it. It was something for older people or people who knew no better.

So when I first got to Step Three, having acknowledged in Step Two that maybe not everything was in my control, and that maybe I couldn’t kick a 30-year bingeing habit using the methods I had already tried, I reluctantly gave it a shot.

At first I felt I wasn’t doing it right, as I just didn’t understand how. How do you turn your will over? Being pretty logical, I just didn’t get it but it was one of those things that came to me the more I tried. It wasn’t a case of a structured action but a case of willingness. Willingness to pause before acting, to think how my actions affect other people, to tune into the gut instinct that I have within me, which is now how I see my Higher Power.

So now I still sometimes bang out that angry email but never send it. I can think that a bit extra at dinner won’t hurt as it’s cold, I’m tired, I’ve had a hard day, but I then get a feeling that tells me, “No”, and I don’t feel deprived having made that decision, as I know it’s part of a bigger picture and that so am I.

I don’t have a line of communication constantly open to my Higher Power. I have days when I choose to plough on in self will, but when I am willing to connect, everything is easier. Step Three to me is a very quiet step of contemplation, love, listening and stillness and I am very grateful to have all that in my life now.

Anonymous, London

Surrender & Acceptance

I love talking about Step One and Step Two. My inability to stop bingeing, starving and exercising compulsively, even though it was ruining my life, made it easy to admit powerlessness, and that I was insane, therefore not able to help myself. Easy!

But Step Three - turning my will and my life over to a Power greater than myself - I don't like talking about that, because I operate my life like a juggernaut: at a very high speed, unable to change course, and running over pretty much everything that gets in my way.

For me, Step Three tends to be something I come to eventually, often after I've fought and fought to control damaging behaviours (just

like I fought the food) for some time. And even after that, this prize-winning fighter will surrender, give up, rest with God... and then fight a little bit more.

Working the Steps has brought me abstinence, and with that a life, but bringing Step Three into my relationships, my work, my life, is tough. My factory setting is to fight the world, driven by fear that my needs won't get met; to lash out at the world, driven by shame.

So Step Three, for me, has been a slow burner and I need help to come to a place of surrender, of acceptance. And things are getting better. I still fight, but now, with help, I get out of the ring pretty quickly. I'll keep working Step Three. I want to cease fighting anyone and anything. How nice would that be?

Julia

Tradition Three – *'The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively.'*

I can generally only remember two Traditions – this one and Tradition Seven, possibly because both tend to be quoted at most meetings I go to. So when I say that Tradition Three is my favourite Tradition, to be fair that's partly because I remember it. But I do think it's a crucial one. When I came to OA, I knew on an instinctive level that it was the right

place for me. However, that didn't mean that I wanted to be there; in fact I thought that a food addiction was the last thing I wanted to have. Although I was in my late twenties, I had never grown up, addiction having stunted my development pretty thoroughly. So I reacted like a child, stamping my foot and screaming or crying at things I didn't like or didn't want to do. And I reacted like that to OA: my heart knew I belonged, but my head said I couldn't possibly, didn't want to, etc. Tradition Three was crucial during this period. I could

"Don't compare your insides to other people's outsides"

just ask myself, "Do I have a desire to stop eating compulsively?" and if the answer was, "Yes," I could just get on with the next thing and quit debating with myself whether I did 'belong'. Now I often find myself quoting this Tradition to newcomers on the phone, when they ask what they 'have' to do and 'how' to become a member. People are often bemused that it's as simple as turning up and seeing what happens. I would find it much harder if I had to quiz newcomers on how over- or underweight they were; whether they binge; and what their other food behaviours are to see if they 'qualify'. And generally, it is pretty obvious when someone gets to a meeting: not from what their body looks like or what they do or do not say about the food, but from the desperation in their eyes and from their relief when they start to 'get it'.

I also think it's really important, when we have changed the definition of an OA meeting and changed the definition of abstinence (both of which I support, but they can serve to complicate things), that we also have this simple Tradition to fall back on. I can worry away about definitions until my head's sore, but I can always come back to Tradition Three and ask myself, "Do I have a desire to continue to not eat compulsively, one day at a time?" and if I can answer, "Yes" then I am in the right place still.

Sam

Tradition 3 helped me to get my abstinence back

Even though the Traditions are read out at every meeting, Tradition Three was really brought to my attention after a long period of relapse. After white-knuckling my first year of abstinence, shortly after coming into Programme in March 2008, I found myself in and out of relapse for the next 18 months. This was the most painful time because I knew there was a solution but I just wasn't 'getting it'. However, I kept coming back and eventually heard what I needed to hear. I was talking to another OA member about how I couldn't get any long-term abstinence back and she drew my attention to this Third Tradition: "The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively". Did I really want to stop eating compulsively? Well, this blew me away. I had never looked at this Tradition from this angle before and I can honestly say that up until then, I still wanted the food. I missed the food. I had overpowering sugar cravings. Sometimes I found myself longingly looking at normal eaters indulging in their favourite foods and felt jealous, like I was missing out. I guess the desire to eat was still more powerful than the desire to get abstinent, but I had hit too many rock bottoms not to take a

“Feelings aren’t facts”

thorough look at this.

I sat quietly, looked at myself honestly, and from the heart, wrote about my desire to stop eating compulsively. This was it, I was finally making the commitment to abstinence and was willing to go any lengths. Abstinence is the most important thing in my life. I never have to hit rock bottom again. For the first time, I really, really wanted it! But that was just the start, as it was also suggested to me to make changes - if something wasn't working, then change it. Everyone's recovery, and how we get there, is different. I got a new sponsor, found my home meeting and I got my food clean (and this meant going back to measuring some foods that caused me problems).

I have been abstinent since 8th December 2010, which was actually the night of my office Christmas party - proving that you can decide to get abstinent at any time! This time, I have been freed from sugar cravings and blessed with sanity around the food (most of the time), for which I'm truly grateful, as it was physically (and spiritually) exhausting constantly putting up a fight. This I put down to no longer wanting those foods that harm me, as I know only too well where that first compulsive bite will take me. The Promises are coming true and this is all down to my Higher Power doing for me what I could not do for myself.

Anonymous, London

A FAMILY RECOVERY



Nicer to live with!

The chance to write for Step by Step helps me reflect and see the progress that working the OA Twelve Step Programme has made to my life.

The first relationship I had was with food, hook, line and sinker. The shutters were down and no-one was able to penetrate my hard exterior. The worst relationship I had was with myself. I was never happy with things and wanted perfection with all I did. I

was very wilful and really didn't care if I was rude and obnoxious.

Throughout my childhood, things needed to go my way, otherwise Mum, Dad and brothers would have to give in for a quiet life. I often didn't feel comfy in social situations and found food would assist me calming down and being able to fit in. I had guilt, shame and an inner need to be self-sufficient. Asking for help seemed weak and frowned upon.

At school, I would put effort into subjects I liked, but could not be bothered if I disliked the lessons. I knew what career I wanted but was unable to vocalise as university

continued on page 17...

was expected at the grammar school I attended. To get around this, I put little effort in and so failed my 'A' Levels! I wanted to be a nurse and did end up doing just that, knowing it was my plan all along. I specialised in midwifery, enjoying caring for well women. My worth came from the career.

I enjoyed caring for people, putting special effort in to pre-empt patients' needs and make them feel loved and special. My disease meant I had not felt like this and often felt so alone. Traumatic work events would not be talked about and I ate over them, getting fatter and fatter. Food asked no questions and had no expectations of me.

Sexuality and femininity were covered over with food. Issues did not get dealt with and I coasted through, never really engaging with anyone.

Thank God I came to OA and found acceptance and identification. I have been able to grasp abstinence and the need to work the Twelve Steps and connect with people.

My first child was born during compulsive eating. Bonding was difficult and post-natal depression followed as I internalised everything. The experience was made worse by my thoughts that I should know how to cope.

My relationships with people, places and things were unbalanced and one-sided. The disease of compulsive eating and behaviours robbed me of

'normal' two-sided discussions and open and genuine interest in the other side. Food was just stuffed in, with no consideration about what it was doing to me and no gratitude for where it came from. Eye contact would be avoided, as it felt like my core was being invaded.

When you are 5 feet 2 inches tall and weigh just under 16 stone, that is an illustration of self-will run riot. The catalyst for change happened after a close family member's illness. I realised that it was important for me to reduce my risk of cancer due to obesity. My soul was empty and all my relationships were struggling.

Engaging in OA Fellowship has been paramount to my healing. The relationship that I have daily with food is one of respect and acceptance that, for me, I cannot eat foods that feed a craving. Things are simple: I plan, I eat, then I draw a line and live my life until eating time again. This is a miracle. I am a healthy body weight and my gift of abstinence is four years. Honesty means portions are sufficient for me to maintain my seven stone weight loss.

The Twelve Steps enabled me to take on board all the spiritual concepts, always willing to grow and develop. Humility is so special. When I close the doors to our family home, that is the real barometer of how my Programme is helping me act on life and cease reacting. My partner of 18 years and I married last year, as I stopped thinking, "The grass is greener," and accepted that he is the one for me.

'Commitment' was a swear word, but not now. "Yes," trips off my tongue quicker than, "No". My boys have spent their formative years treading on eggshells and not knowing how I would be. Friends rarely came because I couldn't cope with people in the house. Now the boys know I'm usually cool with spontaneity!

Step Five opened up the channels for sharing what is on my mind but without any drama. Steps Six and Seven get done as often as possible, sometimes 'acting as if'. Steps go up, down and side to side but they mean I move, which keeps the changes propelling ahead.

My work colleagues have been recalling how I used to have only my writing on the board and certain things had to be done in a certain way. No longer does that happen; serenity means I have in my mind what really matters. Living in the solution that is the Twelve Step Programme

means that whatever is happening in my life gets dealt with. My relationships are two-way and genuine. My acceptance of myself is climbing up and up; I do nice things and I am nice to be with.

Step Nine enabled amends to be made, freeing up space in my head. My family have seen healing in action and are very supportive of the new boundaries I live by. Discipline is not a problem, as all my Programme is tailor-made for me and it is working. Recently, I was privileged to have small meals out to celebrate my 50th, knowing everyone there loves me and I them. I now give my love away. I used to be unable to say, "I love you," very cynical of the whole concept. However, since finding my God who is love, I no longer feel stupid saying "I love you," or sending sloppy cards etc.

I respect others and myself now, which is a big shift. My relationship with my sponsor and sponsees

is open and honest and my willingness to help in any way keeps me connected to my disease and aids living abstinently.

Tradesmen, house callers and random telephone callers now get the real me: nice! Everyone I meet gets the best of me. Naturally I am still human, and some days are less than serene, but the knowledge that 'One day at a time' is the motto that fills me with hope. The guards are off and I feel content. Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve maintain my recovery. When reviewing my day, the only thing I need to take into account is my part and how I can improve. Snuggling up with your eleven year old watching a film, not projecting, is amazing. Texting my husband loving messages feels so right and I'm not bothered whether or not I get a reply.

Whilst writing this, I have been mindful of how many 'I's there are, but it is OA Fellowship and the support of other

“To thine own self be true”

compulsive eaters that has enabled all my relationships to blossom. Time is invested in order to stay well and be able to share the message. Choices that are made now have others' best interests at heart and to be abstinent is the kindest thing for me to do. Living within the Traditions is healthy for my relationships, helping me see all sides of the story.

However, all this is only possible due to my no. 1 helper, which is my God. The more we are connected, the more I am free to serve others. I am still in early days within our Fellowship and balancing all areas of my life means I serve at meeting and Intergroup level and am pacing myself beyond these levels of service. I have committed to the spiritual way of life and am

blessed to willingly share what works for me. Time is needed for all my relationships to flourish and I now use God's time wisely.

My respect, self-esteem and worth have risen enormously since I accepted my disease and continue with daily disciplines which keep me in fit spiritual condition. Anyone can have what I have so graciously been given: the freedom from food obsession does happen.

Thanks to all members of the OA Fellowship who have helped me engage with the human race, one day at a time, for the rest of my life.

Suzi, Manchester

Family Recovery is Possible

Having made my amends to my parents, the thing that came out of it was that they did not feel included in my recovery. So I invited them to come to Birmingham for the mini-convention after the National Assembly. I was sharing from the top table as a piece of service I had agreed to before I asked them if they would like to attend. My sponsor suggested that I do the service and be honest as this was all just part of my living amends.

My Dad read the Autumn 2011 Step by Step magazine and unbeknown to me sent in the following:

We are the parents of an addict in recovery. This was not new to us. We supported her during the early days and went to another Twelve Step Fellowship. We did get something from the meetings but did not attend too many meetings. Perhaps it was not the right group.

We were aware that she was attending OA meetings but she did not include or share with us. Last Christmas, despite meetings, she clearly had a problem with food, but we did not know how to broach the subject with ease.

Her Higher Power guided her to the realisation that she did have a problem and needed help from the Fellowship. February 2011 seems to have been the turning point and she enlisted the help of a new sponsor. We can only say we are amazed at the transformation, not only physical, but mental and spiritual too.

Working the Steps, it was time for her to make amends and for the first time she sat with each of us individually and shared. At last we were included and have become a part of her life again. We attended an open meeting recently and it was such an uplifting and emotional time.

We have lots to learn and understand but are fully behind her. God has granted us the serenity to accept that there are things we cannot change and given us the courage to accept the things we can, and we will then have the wisdom to know the difference.

Ken & Trish

As Step by Step is unable to accept submissions from non-OA members, the letter could not be published as a standalone piece. However, I was so touched that my Dad had taken the time to write that I wanted to share it with you all and let you know that family recovery is possible, but the thing I am learning is that it is all about communication. I have found it hard to change my behaviour but I was getting so sick of saying, "Sorry," that the best thing for me to do was to stop the behaviour. So that's what I am trying to do, one day at a time.

*In Fellowship
Jakki, Tunbridge Wells*

I have been in OA for two and a half years. I had my son when I was young and he bore the brunt of what I now term my immature parenting but which I used to term abuse, for abuse it was. I cannot remember when I started to realise that certain aspects of my parenting were harmful but I do know that I stopped smacking him when he was about five (!) but that the emotional aspects of my abusive parenting

***"At last
we were
included and
have become
a part of her
life again."***

"Expect miracles"

continued and in some ways became more sadistic.

I know now that my own parenting style was compulsively that of my parents, who'd been born in the late 1930s. I know from speaking to other OAers that had I had more children, when more mature, I might have parented them differently. Back then I could not understand why, when I had such high ideals, my parenting was so dysfunctional. Of course I was in the food the entire time I was growing up and actively eating on all of my fears and resentments. Most of my adult life was fuelled by a general background fear: a radioactive hum left over from my nuclear childhood - a 'noise' so ingrained it became my psychological default mode: to be scared. To possess lingering self-doubt even when alone and warm and safe in bed. To worry. To feel 'not right'.

Then about three years ago I collapsed one day in the corridor at work. I had been walking along an empty corridor when I suddenly had a flashback to one particularly nasty episode involving one of my inexplicably cruel acts towards my son when he was little. I staggered around a bit, trying to keep the tidal flood of emotion from overwhelming me - anyone could come along this corridor at any moment! - and in my pain and fear and guilt and shame I cried out to a God I barely believed in, "Please! Show me a way to put this right!"

I am not sure how much later I 'discovered' OA - but because of

some beautiful messengers I was brought to the doors of my first meeting.

Without ever thinking of it in terms of 'making amends' I had started putting things right with my son a long time before, but I had never, of course, actually acknowledged to him my awareness of my own shortcomings, an awareness which increasingly burned my own conscience as surely as acid would the skin.

I completed my first Step Four after about 15 months in OA and was able, through the kindness of my sponsor, to tell her everything. It was the scariest day of my life. Later that week I had a pleasant day out with my son in which he said complimentary things about my parenting for the very first time: I took this as a sign that I was on the right track.

But the nightmares did not go away. Lying in bed week after week, while my mind projected its late-night litany of past harms across the screen of my internal cinema, they slowly began to eat away at me. Abstinence was erratic. I lost a sponsor and finding a new one seemed to take an age. Then this spring I heard myself say, "I am going to make a proper amend to my son this summer." No one was more surprised than I was to hear those words!

In the days running up to my apology I took advice, suggestions and top tips from all my OA friends. My sponsor walked me through the fear.

“EGO = Easing God Out (or Edging God Out)”

I did the Big Book’s fear sheet on all of my fears around making this apology and was surprised to learn that my main fear was that I would cry so much I wouldn’t be able to say the words! I was also made aware that there were really only two things I wanted from the action of saying sorry: a) to apologise properly and b) to ask how I might put things right. Some kind friends suggested the time might not be right (being as I was in a ‘state’ at certain moments), but I could feel that every single fibre of my being wanted me to take this action.

The night before the fateful day I spent with my sponsor, over the phone. Her calm wisdom and spiritual butt-kicking was exactly the workout I needed before what felt like the most important day of my life. She had me put down the phone, go over specific passages in the Big Book, and ring her back an hour later. During that hour I cried harder than I had ever cried before. I cried for me and my son. I cried for the little boy who was lost, I cried for the little girl who was his mother and I cried for the sickness and disease that has blighted our family for generations. I then wrote myself out of my fears, carried out my prayers and looked at what God would have me be, then rang my sponsor back. That she was there for me, so late at night, in my hour of need, is just one of the immense blessings I have received since coming to OA.

The next day I had arranged for my

son (now in his late twenties) and I to spend the day alone together ‘gardening’. I didn’t know how I would initiate the conversation but a kind friend had said, “Take your Higher Power with you, then you’ll know just what to say”, and I clung onto that statement as if it were a life raft. It was!

We had been together only a short while when jokingly my son made a comment about my parenting – I had my hands in the washing up bowl but I walked over to him, looked him in the eye and said, “I am sorry about all of that.” He looked irritated and when I opened my mouth to say more he said, “Not again!” as if I had done this type of thing many times before! His demeanour the entire time was that of a weary husband who doesn’t want to hear what his loquacious wife has to say! But at one point he did say, “What exactly are you apologising for?” And I was able to tell him. I was able, without crying too much, to say the actual words. And he forgave me. Simply and lightly and with infinite patience he unlocked a burden that had been tied to my heart for decades and I got to watch as it turned from bricks to bubbles and floated away. Afterwards, we worked together in the garden, which was utterly neglected, and over the space of an afternoon, all the dead wood was cleared away.

Thank you OA!

“I felt like a square peg
in a round hole where
my family of origin was
concerned.”

A Family Recovery

When we decided to include this topic in SBS, I don't think I really appreciated how difficult it might be to write an article on it, but just like I would do with any share, I'll attempt to tell you what it was like before and what it's like now (I can miss out the bit about what happened as working all Twelve Steps is what happened!).

Prior to finding OA, I felt like a square peg in a round hole where my family of origin was concerned. I was a latecomer and a great deal younger than my two sisters, hence they both moved out of the family home whilst I was still very young and left me alone with two rather elderly parents, compared to those of my peers. It was a lonely existence and yet, at the same time, quite a privileged one. I recently heard it aptly described about somebody else in a very similar situation that 'I had everything and yet I had nothing'.

The only glimmer on the horizon appeared in the form of my cousin who was in an identical position to me, i.e. the third child with two siblings over a decade older than her. I spent a great deal of my childhood with my cousin – she was only eight months older than me and we grew up almost as sisters and yet best friends, too. She was the only family member I felt I could truly trust and confide in. Incidentally, she was also the only family member I have ever chosen to break my anonymity to. Looking back, I now realise that I took her hostage – nobody was allowed to get even vaguely close if I had any say in the matter! She watched me battle with food throughout, but was powerless to help.

As soon as I was old enough to leave home, I moved as far away as I possibly could - not because my parents were in any way abusive, just somewhat emotionally bankrupt. Then again, they were both products of their own 'stiff upper lip' upbringing, born in the 1920s, and they grew up at a time when you didn't talk about emotions, let alone demonstrate

them. I continued to distance myself both geographically and otherwise and later even emigrated for eight years. During that time, contact with my parents was very sparse, only involving one brief phone call once a fortnight, and I'd usually get so worked up about that beforehand that the mere anticipation would cause me to suffer horrendous attacks of Irritable Bowel Syndrome. In hindsight, however, they were really nothing but caring – their only 'crime' was to sometimes ask challenging questions that I really struggled to answer.

Prior to moving away, I was actually quite close to my middle sister, but then again we had been bingeing and dieting buddies throughout my teenage years. In my twenties, following what I can only imagine must have been some kind of a 'family conference' on how to stop Lucy exploding, as I had totally ballooned in size whilst living in Germany, she wrote me a letter, trying to encourage me to go on yet another (long distance!) diet with her. Needless to say, I reacted extremely badly to this and put poisonous pen to paper in retaliation. Unfortunately, this was becoming a bit of a habit by now – I didn't have the courage to say boo to a goose face-to-face, but could be pretty articulate and forthright in the written word, but would then literally hide whenever the recipient picked up the phone to challenge me on my vitriolic

written outbursts! My Dad also became the victim of one of these such letters, as did a fair few of my friends, so slowly but surely I was alienating myself from anybody who cared about me.

When I got into recovery in 1994, I'd been married for four years and probably wouldn't have remained married for very much longer because I was a complete psychopath! We didn't have any children and there certainly weren't any plans to have any because I was absolutely terrified by the mere prospect. After all, I was incapable of taking responsibility for my own actions, let alone anybody else's. So that's what 'it'/I was like. What's it like today? In early recovery I had the courage to move back to England, but still felt like I needed some distance between me and my family of origin. However, I make the effort to do the 700-mile round trip at least three times a year. Long gone are the days when I was terrified to pick up the phone to family members – I can now speak at ease and be there for them on many different levels.

Sadly, my Dad developed Parkinson's disease and passed away four years ago. I was able to be there for my Mum and sisters as his condition progressed – a sharp contrast to when my Mum developed breast cancer requiring a mastectomy when I was 17. She still questions where I was back then, as she can't actually remember me having been around

“Keep your side of the street clean”

at the time, and she’s absolutely right - I wasn’t. At every given opportunity, I would disappear with my friends as I couldn’t cope with it. Whilst Dad was in hospital I also had what I now consider to be the privilege of spoon-feeding him his last ever meal, like a baby, and I supported my elder sister by standing up in church with her at his funeral and doing a reading – I could never have done anything quite so emotionally charged as that whilst in the disease.

Last year we very nearly lost Mum, too. Between June and September she had three hospital admissions and was eventually discharged into a care home. It became increasingly clear that my sisters weren’t going to do anything towards clearing the family home after it had lain empty for six months without a thing out of place, so I extended my Christmas holiday by a week and embarked upon the unenviable task of starting to de-clutter generations of accrued ‘stuff’. To say it was an emotional rollercoaster is a total understatement. My parents were hoarders and never really threw anything away, so I found myself re-living every single significant event (births, deaths, marriages, christenings, anniversaries, illness – you name it, all the cards were still there!) which had occurred since pretty much the turn of the last century, as they’d also taken in their own parents’ belongings after they died! It was tough to say the least, but my Higher Power and the

OA Fellowship got me through, as during that week I got myself to OA meetings in Southampton, Petworth, Guildford and Godalming – thank you to everybody who gave me such a warm welcome.

As the week went on, my resentment towards my family for not having even made a start on clearing the house transformed into compassion for them, as I realised that they simply weren’t in a position to carry out such a gruelling task because they didn’t have the emotional recovery that I have been lucky enough to gain through working the Twelve Steps. So, for me, this was the ultimate in living amends.

I’m a firm believer in everything happening for a reason and I now look back on that week with overwhelming gratitude, as it also enabled me to spend some quality time with my cousin, who decided to stay over a couple of nights in order to offer me some moral support. On the very last night that she spent with me prior to returning home I had the privilege of taking her to an OA meeting in Godalming, where the members kindly declared it an ‘open meeting’ so that she could attend. She was absolutely blown away by people’s honesty and recovery and it felt so right for me to include somebody who I classed as my closest family member in something so very dear to me.

I met up with her again when we were next down South in April and we had an absolutely fantastic day out in London. She was 100% fit and

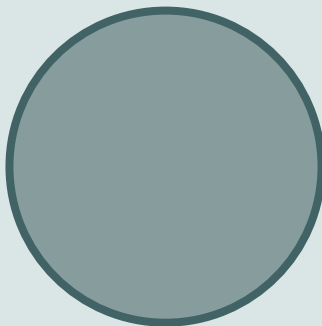
"A resentment is anger without the enthusiasm"

healthy at the time, although she's battled on and off with breast cancer for the past seven years. That was the last time I saw her – sadly, the cancer came back with a vengeance and on 12th September 2011 she lost the battle and passed away at the age of 45, leaving behind two young boys and a husband. To say that I'm devastated doesn't even come close. However, I'm emotionally present and able to be there for her nearest and dearest. And as for my own family unit – well! 21 years later I'm still married to the same man and we have two 'recovery babies' who simply wouldn't have ever been born had I not grasped hold of this Programme and started working the Steps. As my sponsor continues to tell me whenever I'm struggling to juggle numerous 'plates' in the air (family, work, recovery, service etc.), as I work this Programme to the best of my ability, the main beneficiaries are indeed my family, as they then have a much nicer, saner wife, mother, daughter, sister, niece, cousin etc. So, I can now see why the subject of 'A Family Recovery' wasn't the most popular of choices, as it's really very hard to address and I'm not convinced I have done so in this

article. Do I think my family have recovered/changed in any way as a direct result of me being in OA and working the Programme of recovery? Probably not! If anything, their own shortcomings have become more apparent to me. My sponsor assures me that they've always had them – I just didn't see them as I was so wrapped up in myself, comparing other people's outsides to my insides.

However, where I do see the Programme working in people's lives, though, is in the next generation: my children. I was adamant that I wanted to get enough recovery under my belt before having children, in the hope that I could 'break that chain' and I'd like to think that I've done just that. I have two gorgeous, self-confident children who are growing up without all the emotional 'baggage' I carried with me for so many years. They have the courage to do things that would have been way beyond my wildest dreams at their age, or sometimes even today, for that matter! All the time I remain in recovery they stand a fantastic chance of living life to the full, and for that, I am responsible!

Lucy, Newcastle upon Tyne



Tool: SERVICE

People Recovery

It was not knowing how to deal with other people that kept me in the food for so long. And, if I'm honest, it is the thing that has taken me closer to going back into the food once in recovery. Learning how to be around others has been a key part of my recovery, on all levels.

I needed my Higher Power's help with this and when I asked him to show me how I could strengthen this really important part of my recovery, I found myself agreeing to be nominated for service at Intergroup.

Service at Intergroup or National Service Board level is one way of really taking my 'people recovery' seriously. Where else could I safely learn how to work alongside people who don't do things in the way in which I wanted them to do them? Where else do I practise how to manage my defects of character and still get the work done?

For those of us for whom people remain one of the greatest challenges in recovery, service is a God-given opportunity to strengthen this aspect of our lives. Is there a better way of fulfilling my Higher Power's purpose for me in living as useful a life as possible?

Anonymous

The Ace Tool!

I value the chance of sharing how the Twelfth Step keeps me well. By accepting my gift of abstinence each day, I am doing the best service ever. There are nine Tools: each has its role and, for me, service connects me with the human race.

Before I came to OA, I did exactly as I fancied and never thought about anyone's feelings. I did myself a fat disservice by eating to morbid obesity. Self-worth was very low and there seemed no point.

By attending meetings I serve those I share with and listen to. Remembering always to engage with the meeting and having no expectations means I am present and go with the flow. For me it is vital to be mindful: I am but a trusted servant. Positions helped me feel I belonged and started the process of committing and responsibility. I started doing easy tasks and have progressed, loving being around members with strong

“Take an action, then let go of the results”

threefold recovery.

My eating plan links in with abstinence and service as it enables me to eat well and be well. I share what works for me and continue each day with the same zest I had for bingeing. There is no defiance, I surrender and let my God help me.

Having a sponsor is service to my Programme as it assists me in maintaining rigorous honesty. I willingly have sponsees myself, knowing it is the Twelve Step Programme that works and if they do 'it', I rejoice with them. Sponsorship keeps me out of my own way, which is always helpful if I am to be of most use. Genuine interest in my fellow members has resulted from engaging in conversations. Together we recover.

Texting, emails and phone calls prove invaluable on the days when my disease wishes isolation. I pick up the phone, knowing the two-way conversation is a meeting, and I listen. Writing as often as I can, working within work/life/OA balance, helps me tease out issues which are blocking me off from my intuitive Higher Power, never forgetting the Power greater than me is always there.

Anonymity reminds me of my humility and my desire to share the message of OA. To live abstinently

is the greatest way I know of demonstrating my ongoing recovery.

When I read the literature available, I am armed with information to willingly pass on as I share what works for me. OA is 50+ years old and the Twelve Step spiritual Programme works. The promises do happen.

Pre-OA, I weighed seven stone more and served no-one. I am maintaining the weight loss and am always happy to share. My abstinence has been accepted each day since September 2007. The facts speak for themselves. I am honoured to work for/serve my God, as to serve is to work for others.

Having decided to write about service, it is clear to me that all nine Tools interweave and enable me to work the Steps and Traditions to the best of my ability. The action plan saves me from procrastination and assists acceptance that it is progress, not perfection. I am human and am very able to help my fellows.

Service is one tool that makes the Steps easier. For me Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve are the maintenance Steps and I never wish to return to the compulsive eating that emptied my soul.

Service doesn't just apply to within OA. My family, work colleagues and

“Pre-OA, I weighed
seven stone more
and served no-one.”

anyone I meet gets the best of me. I now try and say, “Yes,” to new tasks. Keeping service simple helps me know I can make a difference. There are so many ways we can make others’ lives richer. Jumping into the OA Fellowship made the difference for me between popping to a meeting and being connected, accountable, responsible and content.

To serve is paramount for our disease. Self obsession serves no one. I live the Programme to the best of my ability, attracting members who want what I have, and to give hope lights up my life. The gratitude I have for my Fellowship is top of the agenda and giving thanks by giving back what I have so graciously been given is the message. It is by the grace of God I remain well and motivated to help others, abstinence being my most precious gift.

Together we can. Service is truly the Tool to keep you living in the solution.

Many thanks for reading and connecting with me.

God bless.

Suzi, Manchester

Service Keeps Me Where I Need to Be

I am Alan, a grateful and recovering compulsive overeater.

What can I say about service? It’s a truly amazing tool that keeps me where I need to be, with other OAers and carrying the message. I have always given some form of service from early on in recovery, from helping at the group in different ways that kept me coming back. I then attended Intergroup and soon became Secretary and now Chair, even a representative to attend the National Assembly in my first year in programme. I have even had the privilege of helping to organise the Assembly this year. I never felt I would be good enough to do service. I used to say to myself, “What have I got to offer?” or, “Oh no, I can’t do that, I will do it all wrong!” But it was just the disease trying to maintain its control over me and keep me in the food. Believe me, being the Intergroup Chair sometimes scares me still, as I used to shy away from this sort of role and would prefer a back seat job. But it has tested me, helped me deal with some of my character defects and helped brilliantly with my recovery. I am not perfect nor strive to be: I do what I can and ask for help when needed.

How can giving back to OA

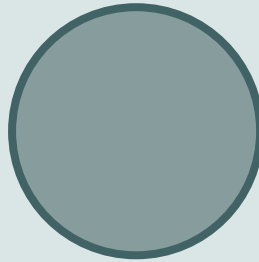
“As a compulsive overeater, if I make food an option, it will always be the only option.”

and being with other compulsive overeaters not help? Today I do service to keep me well; if it helps others too, excellent! I want to keep OA strong and help it continue to thrive. I need OA in my life and it can't continue if I and others don't give service. I've been in OA nearly five years and done more than I ever

thought possible. I can only hope God has more planned for me and for you all. Thanks for reading my story.

With love in Fellowship

Alan, Chatham



Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

Adverts

'Calling All Men'

I have set up a small informal e-mail group for men in OA.

Please e-mail me at julwood@gmail.com to be added to the list.

If you are not a man, could you offer details of the e-mail group to men in your local meetings, whether regular or occasional members?

The more men there are in OA, and the more men feel fully involved and supported, the stronger the whole Fellowship is, I believe.

Thanks
Julian, Bristol

CHILD FRIENDLY OA MEETING (*Sheffield*)

There is a new, child friendly OA meeting.

This takes place on Wednesdays, 11am - 1pm.

Attendees are able to bring their children.
There are toys available for babies/toddlers/younger children.

The address: Upper Gallery Conference Room, Victoria Methodist Church,
Stafford Road, Sheffield, S2 2SE.

*For all enquiries please contact the Group's Secretary
Melissa on 07818 727811*

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions, and other OA happenings...

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Saturday 21st January 2012 1.30 - 3.30	Reasons to be Cheerful!	Brunswick Methodist Church, Brunswick Place, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7BJ	Group Phone: 07837 205976 Sponsored by Newcastle-upon-Tyne Thursday group
Friday 11th May (4pm onwards) - Sunday the 13th May 2012	Love, Recovery & Relationships Retreat	The Briery Retreat Centre, Ilkley, West Yorkshire, LS29 9BW	Emma: 01943 464567 (before 9pm) emmahayes@yahoo.co.uk Sponsored by Leeds (Rawdon) OA Group
Friday 13th - Sunday 15th July 2012	Humility, Shortcomings, Amends & Promises 12th Annual Recovery Convention	Hilton Metropole Hotel, NEC, Birmingham, UK	Rachel: 01384 891 678 Pam: 07971 968 430 Victoria (email): victoria.derrick@gmail.com Sponsored by Heart of England Intergroup

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.*