

Hello my fellow OA friends!

I'd especially like to welcome any new readers to SBS - your very own newsletter from and for OA members in the UK. We're conscious of the fact that given the time of year, the Fellowship may well have benefited from the addition of some new members whose diets have recently failed for the umpteenth time and who are now seeking long-term respite from what is ultimately a killer disease.

I, for one, am so incredibly grateful that the first few months of the year no longer have to symbolise a period of utter 'doom and gloom' for me when I would always embark upon yet another crazy weight-loss scheme, only to fail miserably, thus chipping further away at my already almost non-existent sense of self-worth. Spring is a time of great hope and new growth to name just two of the many wonderful gifts this Fellowship has so freely given to me over the years, so I hope you're all enjoying the signs and symbols of new life, both inside and outside of our amazing Fellowship.

For those of you who enjoyed reading SBS throughout 2011, you probably can't help but notice the dramatic change in style, format etc. Sadly, our Designer/Illustrator has decided to resign from the SBS Committee, thus forcing us to adopt the slogan 'Keep It Simple'! The new look may no longer be as appealing to the eye, but hopefully the content won't have deteriorated in quality.

Last but not least, a big thank you to everybody who has taken the trouble to submit a survey about SBS. By the time this edition reaches you, we will have collated and evaluated all of your feedback and passed this information on to the Board for further discussion, so watch this space for potential future developments.

Wishing you all a very happy, abstinent Easter.

*Love in Fellowship  
Lucy, SBS editor  
Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

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For more information on the Steps and Traditions, visit

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

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

Share with fellow OA-ers around Great Britain.

Do some fun service and keep our Fellowship thriving.

Email all submissions to  
**stepbystep@oagb.org.uk**

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

**Submissions deadline for SBS Summer 2012  
edition is 11 May 2012. Topics:**

**Steps Six and Seven**

**Tradition Five**

**Tool: Sponsorship**

**Any topic of your choice or review a favourite piece of  
OA approved literature**

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.

*"FEAR = False Evidence Appearing Real"*

**Steps Four and Five**

*"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."*

*"Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."*

I have just done my Steps Four and Five. I spent many hours over a period of days with my sponsor and ploughed through my sheets of resentments...said my prayer for each, looked at my amends and then looked at my part in each situation. The process has been enlightening on many levels.

When I first came into recovery 10 months ago and heard about these Steps, I was filled with horror and never imagined I could honestly tell anyone else all about me and the awful things I had done - mainly against myself, now I see.

I was in the habit of telling a little bit to one person, another bit to another person to keep it 'safe' but no one person knew everything; no one person knew all the bits at all!

Having actually spoken out loud to my sponsor and my HP, I feel relieved and free. There were moments when I felt ashamed and scared, yet instinctively knew that I had to say it all or not be thorough in my Programme.

I was so grateful to have a sponsor who at no time showed any negative emotion...I felt supported and loved.

Strangest for me, though, was the fact that during this period, people who I felt had wronged me badly and episodes I felt before were too terrible to disclose, suddenly seemed less so.

As I looked at my part and really looked deep, I realised that perhaps, neither the person nor the situation was as bad as felt to date as I did in fact have a part...even if it were fear itself.

Some memories evaporated as I looked at my defects and now do not register at all. I have truly put them behind me and the resentment does not exist anymore. What a great feeling.

As I write this, I feel serenity and calmness, feelings that were alien to me before. No one can ever come to me now and make me feel bad saying, "I know what you did." "Yep, and my HP still loves me as does my sponsor and most of all, I love me still!"

Of course, there are some resentments that will take a bit longer to get rid of and I pray and work on them regularly, asking for my HP 'to show tolerance, pity and patience I would cheerfully grant a sick friend'<sup>1</sup> to the person.

It IS working and I see that only so can I actually move on...the other person doesn't even have a clue what I have been thinking or going through emotionally, so why waste more of my energy?

I am still looking in my cupboard to make sure I've not left anything in a dark corner. I am willing to lay everything bare and understand the concept of a strong foundation to move forward to the next Steps.

As hard as it has been to do, as with all the Steps and this wonderful Programme, it works if you work it.

*Denise*

<sup>1</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (2001) Alcoholics Anonymous ('Big Book'). 4th edn. New York City: AAWS, p.67*

*"If you want to change who you are, change what you do"*

### **You Wait for a Bus, and Three Come Along at Once**

Hello. My name is Katie and I am a very gratefully recovering compulsive overeater, anorexic, and bulimic.

When it was announced that the Steps for this issue of SBS were to be Four and Five, I knew I had to put pen to paper and write about my recent experiences with sponsees. I have just taken on three sponsees - you wait for a bus and then three come along at once - and two of the three are involved in Step Four at the moment. What a coincidence! I've been told many, many times that 'coincidence' is just an eleven letter word for God, or that coincidences are for when God would prefer to remain anonymous. Looks like my Higher Power was urging me to write something!

A couple of days ago, I was honoured to be hearing my very first Step Five. I remember how terrified and nervous I was, reading out my own Step Five to my sponsor, and this was no different. I was nervous on her behalf! When I was in the food I didn't trust myself with anything, so to be sitting here letting someone read out their deepest resentments and fears and knowing that they trusted me not to take any of that information out of the room was extremely moving. We sat at the kitchen table, winter sunshine pouring in through the window, sheets of paper spread out everywhere and with steaming cups of tea. I was surprised at how quickly we got through it all. I am constantly amazed at how the patterns of our behaviours are so easily revealed in writing an inventory. The sheets become repetitive, character defects were glaring... In working the Steps the Big Book way, we then went through Steps Six and Seven, and arranged a date to meet up and go through steps Eight and Nine within a month.

I am so grateful for being sponsored in the Big Book way of working the OA Twelve Step Programme. It has literally saved my life. I have the attention span of a flea, so the quick, ruthless, rigorously honest way of blasting through the Steps was exactly what I needed to lift me out of the darkness of compulsive overeating. Different methods work for different people, and it just so happens that the AA Big Book was the way for me. I have been in OA since I was 19 years old, and I am absolutely chuffed to have just celebrated one year's abstinence. Clean house, trust God, help others. Keep it simple!

*Katie, Newcastle upon Tyne*

### **You're only as sick as your secrets**

I'm Alan, a compulsive overeater. For me, going through Steps Four and Five were the real start of real change in my life. I had lots of resentments, fears and harms I needed to deal with, as keeping all that bottled up most of my life had led me down this very dark path to my compulsive eating and very unhappy life. I knew I was not going to get abstinent until I got rid of them. Before I actually started Step Four, I had a load of denial at first. "What have I got to deal with? I don't need to do that. I'm fine," then fear: "Oh, actually I do have loads to deal with, or I am not going to get this recovery that everyone else I see at the meetings has.

So after a very long time of procrastination, I started. I wrote everything down as much as I could. For me, I needed to get rid of the really old stuff and work forward to more recent stuff, in chronological order. Some of them seemed really silly and petty on paper, but wow! I was already beginning to see the benefits of doing this. I didn't realise how much stuff I had managed to hoard in my head. No wonder I was so unhappy and confused.

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## *"Happy, Joyous and Free"*

But no time to wait, I needed to share it with my sponsor (or sponsors in my case, as I've redone the Steps with my next sponsor). This initially took a few hours to go through, which was scary and hard. I won't lie and say it's all lovely. This is life-changing stuff. I needed to go through this vital process to get well and abstinent. As a good friend in recovery says, "You're only as sick as your secrets." How very true; all the debris I had kept in my head was keeping me in the disease. I came out after sharing for what seemed like forever and felt so uplifted and loved by my Higher Power. My sponsor was great. She wasn't shocked or kicked me out; she even continued to be my sponsor and talk to me weekly at the meetings. I no longer needed to be ruled by my past. I was dealing with it for the first time in my life, finally growing up and dealing with life like an adult.

A few years later, with my second sponsor, I had a light bulb moment. Again I was sharing an issue about my father that I did not fully deal with the first time. I can't remember exactly what she said but it just hit me and a decade of built-up resentment suddenly disappeared. I really saw my part and from then everything changed. Today I have a much closer relationship with him and no longer feel the need to lie to him about my sexuality. I actually enjoy spending time with him. A miracle of recovery I never believed would happen. What an amazing Programme. Why didn't I do this sooner? Thanks to you all and to my loving HP.

*Alan, Chatham*

### **I am recovered one day at a time**

Hi, I am a compulsive overeater. I am recovered one day at a time, contingent on working the Steps and using the Tools available to me through this Programme. Today I don't touch my trigger foods or indulge in my trigger behaviours and, for today, I have the sanity restored not to want to do either of these things.

Step Four first time round for me was baffling. It was about 15 years ago now with a sponsor who promised me the desire not to want to compulsively overeat but frightened me to death. I tried to share my Step Four but felt confused by this process. I left her home feeling ghastly and went straight to the nearest fast food outlet. I overate. Feeling even more ghastly, I ended her sponsorship. I couldn't begin to understand my self-pity, self-centredness and dishonesty; I just couldn't see it. Thank God I stayed in the Programme. I hoped I would hear the solution somewhere and I would hear it in a way I understood.

I wasn't wrong and she wasn't right; it just didn't work right for me then like that. About six months later I had developed a much more trusting, healthy relationship with a new sponsor. She helped me through Steps Four and Five week by week. I now have a truly thorough understanding of these Steps and how they are meant to help release me from the bondage of overeating. It was slower than is suggested by the Big Book, but it really worked for me. I needed to really understand my defects, shortcomings, limiting behaviours and my part in the problem. I had spent 35 years not thinking I was at fault in anything, so it was going to take time for me to have the truth gradually revealed to me. I am so grateful to that member of OA. She has sadly since left the Fellowship but I still carry the torch of this liberating Step. With compassion and patience, I try to pass this gift on to newcomers. I can see that contrary to what worked for me, there are many newcomers who benefit from going through the Steps very

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*"Keep your recovery first to make it last"*

much quicker, within a few days sometimes. Neither is wrong. It is whatever works for the person. Since that time, I have worked through the Steps again a few times using sheets; the Big Book; the Step Four inventory booklet; the OA 'Twelve and Twelve'; and the Canadian speaker's CD's, which have all helped in their different ways. But to begin with, I needed the calmness and patience of my second sponsor to help me see how I could change my part in my rapidly self destructive life. Thank God.

Keep coming back until you hear it in a way you understand. I have freedom today from the compulsion to want to overeat.

*Anonymous*

### **Tradition Three**

*"The only requirement for OA membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively"*

I was a real mess when I came to OA four years ago. Since then, I have worked all twelve Steps with a sponsor and now I sponsor others. The reason I feel strongly about this Tradition is because I believe our Fellowship loses members who have slipped and returned to compulsive overeating. There may be a small percentage who wanted to leave anyway but the majority, in my opinion, are embarrassed by their failure and are too ashamed to return to meetings. Prior to OA, I felt like that about slimming clubs and diets.

I want to take the opportunity to say to anyone in this position, "Please remember the wise words of Tradition Three and keep coming back." All any of us needs is a desire to stop eating compulsively. We don't always succeed the first time, or even the second time.

*Pam, Sheffield*

### **Tradition Four**

*"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole."*

I have always found the Traditions boring and annoying. Even after many years in the Programme, whilst understanding how important they are and how they keep the meeting on track and that they exist to prevent problems, I still had to be asked to share on Tradition Four. I hate writing and my first thought was, "How boring, I wish I had something more interesting to write about!"

So I reread Tradition Four and several things came to mind.

When I travelled to another country, where the accent and culture were so different to mine, I was anxious and then so relieved to find out that they followed the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. The format was one that I was used to hearing: it was so comforting.

I still had a lifeline!

I understand the need for protecting the Fellowship. I am thankful that others provide the meeting places but we do not let them influence or interject their practices into an OA meeting. An example in Tradition Four is the meeting at the church where they began to use laying-on of hands instead of working the Steps. I could easily see that this can/does/could happen. Just wondering - is this part of the need for a 'quick fix'?

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## *"KISS – Keep It Simple Sweetie"*

Over the years that I have been in OA, we have had the Group Conscience moved to before the meeting, after the meeting and during the meeting. All of the above has been a huge learning experience for me, especially when I so wanted to control. I now realize the importance of unity.

When a Tradition is being broken, OA members who know the Traditions have a responsibility to speak up. Even though it's usually because members aren't well informed about them. I so want/wish/hope someone else will speak up, as people pleasing is one of my character defects and I would rather let things pass! I now know that if I have to speak up, it should be done with love.

Tradition Four helps us to strike a healthy balance between our responsibility for ourselves and our responsibility to each other. I feel that this is a huge but necessary challenge and I need to ask Higher Power to help me work towards that 'healthy balance'.

*Anonymous*

### **My Story**

I have always been uncertain about food, eating and the way I looked. From a young child at my nana's house, I knew my visits to the candy cupboard were something that needed to be kept secret. I remember vividly the candy bar we got at kindergarten just as we were going home.

I was an anxious kid. I hated being away from home, and got horribly homesick, even for an afternoon at a friend's house. I remember a friend coming to my house when I was five, and my hiding under the lemon tree because I was fearful of having her there.

I thought I was fat all through school. I felt on the outside, and disliked. I had friends that I let walk all over me because I was thankful just to have friends. When I look back, I wasn't actually overweight until high school.

At about 11, I became acutely aware of how I looked and ashamed of it. I tried a commercial diet club while my mother was doing it. I soon fell back to what were beginning to be very secretive overeating behaviours. Candy bought at the dairy on the sly. Hidden under the bed covers and in the backs of drawers. Eating under the bed covers at night. Taking food out of noisy wrappers earlier in the evening so no one would hear me munching at night. Going to the toilet with food stashed in my pockets so I could scoff something in secret. And all this at 11 and 12 years old.

By high school my eating had increased and grown more secretive. As my weight and eating increased 'publically' so did the scrutiny from my parents. They just wanted me to be happy and healthy, but it felt gut wrenchingly shameful to have people take notice of my body size and what I ate. My brother began to tease. I became more secretive.

I ate as much as I could when no one was around. I revelled in the weekend days when mum and dad went out on errands, and my brother was elsewhere - I had the house to myself so I could eat. I loved getting home from school to find the house empty. I could eat.

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*"The mind is like a parachute, it works better when it's open"*

My weight increased through high school. I was definitely overweight, and I think I was maybe 80kg (12½ stone) at about 17 years. Not enormous, but big enough to draw attention. In Sixth Form biology, we had to do a statistics exercise that involved us each putting up on the board our height and weight. A kind friend put my weight and height up for me. Someone commented that it had to be a mistake. "Who would weigh that much?" they asked.

I went through these years with my head down, just hoping to be invisible for the most part. I had nice friends, but I still felt on another planet. I tried dieting once in a while. I even went to the gym for a spell with a friend and did quite well...but something came along eventually to dissuade me from going and I reverted to my secret eating.

At around 17 I tried making myself sick. I don't know what pushed me to do it, or remember the first time vividly, except that I suddenly thought I had found the answer to my weight and eating - I just needed to become bulimic. But for me, being bulimic didn't mean I equalised the food in with food out. It just gave me a way to eat even more. When my stomach was absolutely full, I threw up. Then I started over again.

I did this time and again. Binge meals, normal meals - whatever. My life became eating, bingeing and throwing up. I threw up in the toilet when I was home alone. When others were home, I had to 'save it up' and throw up in the shower at the end of the night. The water hid the sound. The soaps etc hid the smell.

So this became a new pattern that persisted for the rest of my eating, before OA and during my relapse. But I always ate far more than I could ever purge, and so I continued to gain weight up to my maximum of 120kg (18st 12lb).

Along with this descent into more secrecy and bulimia came a depression. I was suicidal in the last year of high school. I scarcely made it to half of my classes. I had always been a solid student and certainly never ever skipped class before that myself from friends periodically. I was tormented by what I thought was the judgement by and hatred from others. I also began to drink in earnest, trying just to be okay with myself.

On a couple of nights I tried taking a packet of painkillers with the drink. I thought I wanted to die, but didn't really have the means around me to make it happen easily. The pills and drink made me very sick, but not dead.

By now, high school was coming to a close. I pulled myself up for a short while, got through exams, and did pretty well in the end. Well enough to get into the university degree I wanted to be in. Nowhere near as well as I could have done.

I thought university would give me a change of life - I thought, "Now that I'm an adult and in this grown up environment, I will be able to stop eating." It was the first time amongst many of my saying to myself, "This time it will be different."

But university carried on where high school left off. My schedule was more flexible so I could eat and purge as I liked. It went by in a blur of eating, purging and drinking heavily.

Getting food ruled everything I did: the way I drove home, the timing of my movements so I could avoid those at home and eat in peace. Eating consumed all my money. I went to different stores so no one shopkeeper would see the true extent of my eating. I made excuses to leave functions and gatherings early so I could binge. I spent whole weekends bingeing and throwing up. Literally whole weekends. And at the point of vomiting - every single time - I would think, "I'll stop now. I can't take it. I won't eat anything else now. I'll just have a normal dinner."

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*"Pain is part of the Programme while suffering is optional"*

I would vomit, I would clean up. I would get a glass of diet soda. And then I would think, "I'll just have a handful, a spoonful, a small bowl of ...I'll just have this one more small thing like a normal person." And the next phase would begin. It astounds me still to think that, in that instant of having the first bite, my mind really truly believed I could stop.

And that's the insanity of the disease.

Towards the end of university, the food and the drinking stopped working for me. It didn't quiet the mind. It didn't numb the pain of all my self-loathing. My head filled with negative chatter. "You are crap, you are revolting, you are disgusting, you should die." I still ate though, because what else is an addict to do?

I was in Melbourne, Australia, working at an internship type arrangement for six months at the end of university. I was lonely and the food ceased to work its magic. I bought a women's magazine as I often did with food - the next solution was sure to be in a women's mag! - and just this once, it was. Someone had anonymously written their story of recovery in OA as part of a public information outreach. I identified immediately. And I felt hope. I said to myself that when I get back to New Zealand (my home), I will find OA.

I had some rocky months left of more of the same depression and eating. I also discovered that if I cut myself, I could numb the fear and self-loathing that the food was no longer effective against. I started self harming every night. The worse I managed to self-harm, the better I felt.

When I got home to New Zealand, I stayed with my parents while I job hunted. I was coming undone and they noticed. They noticed the vomiting, the self-harming, the depression and suicidalness. They sought help for me, but I wasn't willing to be honest with anyone just yet. I let out bits and pieces of information, and wasn't really able to cover my tracks as I used to, but no one was getting the full truth of the situation. I felt like I needed to be institutionalized and that we had begun down this inevitable track. I was 22.

But not too long after this unravelling had begun, I found myself with a new job and resettled in Auckland, New Zealand. And I went to my first OA meeting. How I remembered, how I still had the drive to attend, I really don't know - I just had hope and a fair amount of desperation. At that first meeting, I heard my story over and over.

The embarrassing parts, the horrific parts, the shameful parts. From compulsive overeaters, from anorexics, from bulimics.

I went to another meeting. I asked for help to get started and I was directed to a girl about my age. We went out after the meeting and she Twelve-Stepped me. At my next meeting, I asked her sponsor to sponsor me. She said, "Okay," and, "Ring me in the morning." She suggested a food plan, which I began to follow.

The food stayed put down in OA. I followed the Steps as my sponsor suggested. I went to a meeting every day. Frankly this wasn't a chore, as I couldn't stand to be in my own company and my life of eating and drinking had whittled away much of anything good in my life, save for a few wonderful friends. I lost weight of course, though it was a secondary thing. 'Sort out the mind and the body will follow.' I did my Steps Four and Five after about four weeks. I was eager to get rid of the wreckage of my past. I moved swiftly through Steps Eight and Nine with my sponsor's and others' guidance. I put Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve into daily practice as it describes in the Big Book. I stayed

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*"Sort out the mind and the body will follow"*

abstinent for five years and grew to have a happy, healthy and free life, full of service in Programme and loving relationships in and out of the Fellowship.

And then I grew complacent. I began to think the 'grey around the edges' didn't matter. I stopped being rigorously honest with myself or my sponsor. I got messy with my food plan.

I relapsed and grew increasingly distant from the Programme. I went to meetings and pretended that everything was okay, even though I was throwing up again. Even though I was eating out of control. I distinctly know the point of no return for me. I was out with a male friend who I was a little interested in. He had had a bit too much to drink so I was driving. He had a stash of chocolate in his bag and began eating it. We were having a lot of fun and laughing about and he said, "Here, have a piece." He pleaded with me to have a piece to ease his chocolate guilt. And I thought, "Oh, one piece, it's not going to matter." Chocolate was not on my food plan. And I didn't tell a soul what had happened. My first act of blatant dishonesty about something to do with food that was a black and white issue. And there began a five year relapse in eating. More of the same eating behaviours as I have described above.

I went from a very healthy 63kg (9st 13lb), back to 120kg (18st 12lb) again over those five years. Bingeing and throwing up became my life again. I found myself over the toilet thinking, "Is this how I'm going to die?" I was terrified that my heart would give out while throwing up. I could feel the physical stress I was putting it under every time. And so once again, I reached a point of the food not working, of losing the life I had worked so hard to achieve, and fearful for my life, all because of food. I could see my life descending into that small little life of eating, vomiting, self harming and drinking. I was still sober and I was petrified that I would pick up a drink again. Thoughts of drinking had begun to appear in my head once in a while. It was the fear of picking up a drink and the fear of dying while in the midst of a purge that got me back in through the doors of OA.

But I didn't put the food down again instantly. I wasn't really ready to concede defeat for another maybe 18 months. I flitted around the edges of OA in Washington DC (where I am now living), trying different groups, feeling lost and not finding a sponsor. I asked quite a few but no-one was available. I felt despondent about ever finding recovery again here. But then I was reminded of a friend in the Fellowship back in New Zealand. I rang her in January 2010 and asked her to sponsor me. She said, "Yes," and we've been working together since then. I still struggled with putting the food down that year, particularly with finding a food plan that is black and white but works in my life today. The food plan is not the answer, but it is essential to my recovery. I feel like I have found that now and have been abstinent and free of the obsession to eat since December 2010.

I re-did the Steps on coming back into OA and try to continually practice Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve on a daily basis. I stick close to friends in the Fellowship and my sponsor. I try to be rigorously honest with myself and my sponsor, and find I am willing to go to any lengths to get well. It is a continual process of uncovering new information about myself and my disease, being willing to tackle those things, and of learning how to live life on life's terms with peace. Whatever happens, I just don't pick up the first bite. It's a continual process of accepting myself, and trusting that everything works out for the best in recovery, given time.

I do trust that God will never give us more than we can handle on a daily basis.

*Anonymous*

### **'Nothing tastes as good as abstinence feels'**

When I began attending OA in Leeds, I was sure anything to 'control' my eating and keep my weight stable was a good thing. However, when I realised the full extent of my mental health problems and decided – unwillingly – to make a permanent move back in with my parents, I could no longer hide my horrendous starve/binge cycles! My mental health was in a very bad place and, with this on the line, I was motivated to start taking the Programme seriously!

I started attending meetings at Newcastle upon Tyne, and it was there that I truly realised I WAS a compulsive overeater and I WAS powerless over food. I was in awe as I sat in a meeting where a friend in OA spoke on her 30th day of abstinence. She was glowing with radiance and pride as she described the amazing transformation abstinence had given her, how she had felt depression lift and no longer felt constantly suicidal. Sitting hearing this, the thoughts going through my mind were, "I want to feel like you!" and as I write this, I am fortunate enough to be praying to God for my 35th day of abstinence. I received my 30-day recovery coin earlier this week and the feelings of joy, pride and support I felt in the room were better than any chocolate/ice cream binge after a stressful day or any painfully rumbling belly after a break-up I have ever experienced! When I dropped out of University due to ill-health and moved back home, I felt like such a failure; but finally here is PROOF that I CAN achieve something in the form of a small 30-day recovery coin! Friends and family report how glowing I am, confidence is gradually being restored and life feels calmer all in all. I thank God for allowing me to experience the feelings I am beginning to feel today.

Of course, my mental health problems have in no way disappeared in the three or four months I've been attending OA, and every day God still reminds me of my addiction to food. Tonight I have had to take myself upstairs to write this in order to be away from the kitchen and mounds of lasagne that were surrounding me...but by prioritising my abstinence, reaching out to my OA family, sponsor and even using helplines when needed, I know I CAN get through tonight and together we can recover!

I have now attended a variety of meetings, both in Leeds and in Newcastle. I recommend getting to as many as you can to get different perspectives and tips! At all meetings, members have welcomed me with open arms, no questions asked and no judgements made. Whatever I say here, stays here.

You have a friend in OA!

*Emma, Newcastle upon Tyne & Leeds*

### **How I got Willingness**

I myself define compulsive eating as eating for any reason other than actual hunger.

I know I can reliably distinguish 'actual hunger' from 'craving hunger' because I feel it in my tummy and it growls, and it slowly gets bigger, and, up to a point, the longer I have that feeling, the more I enjoy a moderate amount of healthy food. Beyond a certain point, I start to be irritable, or start to crave, so I would not delay eating for a long time after the first sign of actual hunger...usually the time it takes to prepare a meal!

On the other hand, craving 'hunger' is felt in my mouth and is much more urgent, demanding something now, and usually I think of eating something 'unhealthy'. I am powerless over this. When I feel this sensation, *Cont'd on page 12*

*"What you resist persists"*

if I am willing, I ask myself, "What do you really, really need right now?" This is me asking for my Higher Power's will. The answer is invariably relief from some physical or emotional discomfort, usually a physical one, usually needing a pee or a drink of water, feeling cold, feeling tired or wanting to take off my shoes or my underwired bra! I don't eat compulsively on emotions nearly as often as I used to do, so I can call myself 'recovered' nearly every day. I weigh myself about once a month, and was 13st 2lb on 23rd Jan, 2012. This is 32lb less than I weighed when I came in 13 yrs ago and at that time, I was gaining 4lb per year, so I estimate I would be 19 stone without OA, and, at 5'1", that's a lot!

If I am willing, I satisfy my need and the 'hunger' disappears within 3 to 5 minutes. The problem is that, after several months of abstinence (and about 10lbs weight loss) early in 2010, I lost the willingness. I think this was due to slowly creeping complacency, thinking, "I have it licked", even though I have done this before with the same result, and even though I know intellectually that no-one keeps recovery when they get complacent. My HP was my own true awareness of my own true needs in the present moment. One of my sponsees pointed out that this HP had a hole in it, because I couldn't ask 'it' for the willingness, so I added to my HP the people whose quality of recovery seemed authentic to me (i.e. not the OA equivalent of 'dry drunks'). Now I am asking for the willingness from the collective consciousness of the currently authentically recovering people I know.

**Experience:** I was at Birmingham for the 2010 Convention and heard someone say that if you are abstinent despite the compulsion, or if the compulsion is gone, then you are recovered on that day. I have been abstinent most days, despite the compulsion, since May 16th, 2011. The compulsion disappeared at the end of June 2011 at a stroke (fortunately not by a stroke) when I was told my blood pressure was high and was damaging my brain circulation (I saw the damage on my brain MRI scan). For a brainy person like me, that was the rock bottom, and that MRI image instantly gave me the willingness to eat about half of what I have been eating for the past 13 years in order to lose my excess six stones of weight.

**Strength:** It is very nice to have the freedom from the continuous struggle with food...very calm and relaxing for me in my thought processes today. I am very relieved to say that, although it did not give me the willingness to abstain on anything like a permanent basis, the help I have had from the OA Programme over the past 13 years was all there, like a soft mattress to fall on when I "let go of the food," as Fellowship people say, (or "started eating half of what I usually ate," as I say). Most days since then, I have not had even a moment of struggle (not to overeat), deprivation (seeing others have something highly calorific) or of unhappiness from 'stuff coming up' because all the 'stuff' has been dealt with over the years by working the Programme. The willingness to abstain was the last missing piece of the jigsaw of recovery for me. Today, I don't want to eat compulsively any more than I want to swallow a capsule of cyanide.

**Hope:** I hope that you get the willingness long before your body is permanently damaged. I hope that you don't give up, like I sometimes felt like doing, but keep going back to meetings and using ALL the Tools to continue working the Twelve Steps to the best of your ability, as I did for 12 years with almost no physical recovery. I hope I feel like this every day of the rest of my life. I am deeply grateful to you all, especially my sponsors and sponsees, and all those others who have Twelve-Stepped before us.

*Love from Miriam, a recovered compulsive overeater*

## **Patience**

It is Christmas time and I am abstinent. As a compulsive overeater, one day at a time, I still struggle with patience and have to pray for the willingness for it every day.

Recovery has blessed me with over four years of back-to-back abstinence and for this I am eternally grateful.

I have a life today. I never had a life before. My life has real friendships and a real faith that I work on each day.

I thank God every day for OA and feel blessed to have found it, as it has saved my life.

The Steps are amazing. I have worked all twelve and continue to each day, along with Step Twelve which has strengthened my recovery and kept me abstinent by God's grace for the last three and a half years.

The Tools are still present in my life, including an action plan, and I know I would not be here if it had not been for my first sponsor and the message she carried to me. Thank God for the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and the Fellowship of Overeaters Anonymous.

## **Patience**

Patience is time, slowness, waiting and calm.

Patience is respect in itself because it observes, pauses, questions and thinks before moving.

Patience is hard. Patience hurts.

Patience has a life of its own.

It is a superior quality, it is unfamiliar, it is silent and dignified.

Patience is not loud, forceful or compulsive.

Patience is not aggressive or competitive or over there. Patience is slow.

Patience waits. Patience feels.

Patience is in the moment. Patience gives hindsight, insight, foresight, time, values and no regrets.

Patience is not remorseful because it does not hurt in the first place in a negative way.

Patience is growth. Patience is maturity.

Patience is time.

Patience heals, patience loves, patience waits compassionately. Patience listens.

Patience is hope for a better day and lives in reliance upon God.

Patience is hard for me.

I live in my head.

My head has no time for patience.

My head is NOT my friend, never was, never will be.

*Anonymous, Harlington*

## **My journey to abstinence**

I went into the hospitality industry into surroundings of opulent elegance and the best food money could and did buy. Fillet of Angus beef; the best Scottish smoked salmon; cream sauces; pastries; sugar and sugar carvings and decorated sugar: in fact sugar was worshiped and glorified and if I did not jump on board I would have to leave the industry. As a result, food of an á la carte standard of excellence was an everyday occurrence. With all this beatification of food, I did not want to be left behind.

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It was on a daily basis. The term 'one day at a time' had not been invented or heard of in my world: it was twenty four hours around the clock food, five stars and a very exciting world to live in, after coming from a food-loving home with the best that the money available could afford. I was nourished and wrapped in the envelope of food love. If ever there was a crisis, family love was demonstrated by more food. Emotions were never exposed to identify where the need for this feeling was coming from. On reflection, the food was an abuse of comfort eating: a drug with no mercies.

As the decade continued, the acceptance and comfort of this became easy for me but as I was progressing into adolescence, it metamorphosed into an understanding that in all of this there was also body shape and image to cope with. Lots of my friends were not as we say 'in the food'; neither did they have or start to appear to have weight gain issues.

As I started going out on Saturday nights and to events I could see myself and others referring to my over size and I did not feel comfortable at all. My clothes felt uncomfortable and I looked different from my peers. I did not feel equal to my friends.

This went on for some time until I discovered appetite suppressants - what a discovery. I soon began to realize that I did not need to eat: this was the answer to suppressing my hunger. At this stage, I had no conception or vision of what it was doing to my mind or how this path or root to being thin could and did ruin my life.

My mood was in a different place from those around me and the roots of anorexic tendencies had grasped my spirit and were running my life. I allowed this to happen as I wanted more than anything else to be thin, to be like my mates, friends, the world, I thought. It was a big compliment to say to me that I was looking great, I had lost all that weight. Secretly drinking spirits was starting to enter my life. Having a drink was acceptable behaviour and I was able to take it by storm and be the very life and soul of the party. Humiliation and deception were my partners in crime. All my money and energy went into funding this alien that had taken over the person that lived in me. It was not until many years later that I came to believe that a Power greater than myself could and would restore me to sanity if He was asked, and that's exactly what did happen.

Thank you (God, OA and another Fellowship) and all who are recovering today in our fantastic Twelve Step Fellowship. The secret world of deception that I had been living in had been falsely projecting an image of wellness.

I had not discovered full wellness at that time, as I did not experience a true state of wellbeing until I also came through alcoholism. Tackling both addictions gave me a true path to recovery: a life beyond my wildest dreams.

I am learning to have a new relationship with my food and the food that I eat. I have turned things around now, enjoying nourishing myself and planning my meals, as for many years I used to find that food was an inconvenience to be fitted into the day. Even when I was working in the food industry, we were not encouraged to eat. Stop to eat? There was no time! Life and work rushed by at a pace that I thought was impossible to keep up with. If you stopped for a meal break, it was not acceptable, and the staff were not there to eat. The law said we had to be fed, but the people that I worked and sometimes lived with twelve hours a day thought differently. As I progressed through the ranks, I believed and said the same thing. The primary purpose was to provide a service to the customer and a high standard of excellence along the way. Many of us fell by the wayside, as it was too much pressure to take. As a young man, I used to say

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when we were on annual leave, it was a merciful relief, like a pressure valve being opened and the steam released.

The industry that I work in now has similar food resistance, thinking it has to fit around the convenience of the production during rehearsal times, and around the convenience of the director. All in all, if you can fit your meal break in or not stop for lunch at all, it helps. Then again, at the other end of the scale, with topliners and the exultation of production success, extravagance rears its head. Food in these instances is given priority: a must-have requisite for the job. It appears that food in these circumstances is used as an aid or archaic hospitality to reward. Moderation is not encouraged, gluttony is applauded and it is appreciated if the person eating has their fill.

My goal is to put into place for myself a deep-rooted structure in my daily life: to have a three meals a day at a moderate level - an eating plan that I can use as a tool for my wellbeing for the rest of my life.

I am comfortable that a Power greater than me can and will help me achieve this. I cannot do this alone. I have tried 'alone' in the past.

Life is about me today and my part in it. I still have to love myself a little bit more but I am giving it a go. Today is a new day in recovery; I strive to be substance-free. One day at a time within the twenty four hours. I think that the gift that I can pass on today is my abstinence from compulsive overeating, as without having abstinence in my life, I do not feel that it is possible to progress. I do have a desire not to compulsively overeat and I am embracing the task of engaging with the suggested Programme of recovery.

The reason I am reaching out and finding the Twelve Steps again is that I did not and do not want to use appetite suppressants. I am so glad that God has guided me into his arms and is showing me the joy of life through the Fellowship. The best of times are now. I had never been in a better place of harmony and wellness until I discovered abstinence through the plan of eating that I am using today. Today, I regulate my food plan meal by meal. I contact my OA fellows and friends and reach out to my Step sponsor. I use the nine Tools as a natural default; I am practising the suggestions.

At this time, I have been given the gift of willingness: to be willing to ask for support and guidance from the God of my understanding. God is doing for me what I could not do for myself. I rigorously avoid the isolation. I am able to pass on the message. I am never alone in this Fellowship with my loving God, my Fellowship friends, those I sponsor and my sponsor. I willingly engage with my Programme. As the days go on, I am finding a harmony of niceness in positive thinking and doing activities with people in the Fellowship here on the South Coast.

I am also encouraged by the strong recovery I hear in the rooms and witness at the Heart of England convention. I feel healing words and identify with what is on offer. I am encouraged by the whole of this thing we call 'recovery'. I find the whole weekend gives me an inner peace and soothes my soul; you cannot go out and buy that message. Thank you for that.

As time has passed, I have been following and being involved with the Twelve Step Programme. I feel that for me, it is a selfish, selfless Programme. I feel that it is for **me** to get to a better way of living, to live life to its full, without misusing mind-altering substances.

I also believe and have witnessed for myself the wonderful mysteries of our Promises. I find that the Promises have become part of my everyday living. I did not realise that the miracle had happened, as it is mentioned in Step Twelve: I am having a life beyond my wildest dreams. The wording

*Cont'd on page 16*

from the Big Book jumps off the page and into my day.

Thank you all for being out there in the ether of OA. I hope and pray that your dreams of recovery come true, one day at a time. Thank you, God, for being with me on this journey.

*Love, Bill from OA Hove, Sussex*

### **Tool: A Plan of Eating**

To me, a plan of eating is not only a Tool, but a gift of recovery for which I am extremely grateful. As I reflect on my years in OA and my years of back-to-back abstinence, I am still amazed that the gift of abstinence has been given to me.

I know that, for me, the only reason that I am able to abstain from compulsive overeating and follow a food plan is because of working the Twelve Steps.

Before OA, I followed several diets, food plans or food behaviour modification programmes in an attempt to try and control my compulsive overeating. These all worked for a time, but I would eventually take that first compulsive bite and end up bingeing again, which as the Big Book says, leads to "pitiful and incomprehensible demoralization."<sup>2</sup>

The difference in recovery is that because I have a Higher Power (whom I choose to call God) in my life today, I am able to commit to a plan of eating.

As stated in 'Our Invitation to You', OA is not 'a diet and calories club and does not endorse any particular plan of eating.'<sup>3</sup>

During my 20 plus years in OA, I have followed various food plans which have evolved as I have grown in recovery.

As someone who fantasised about finding and following the 'perfect food plan', I need to frequently remind myself that my plan of eating is something that I should be doing anyway, as part of a healthy person trying to live a healthy lifestyle. It does not hold any magic powers.

As stated in the OA preamble, my primary purpose of being a member of OA is to abstain from compulsive overeating and to help other compulsive overeaters to achieve recovery. A plan of eating assists me in this process.

As a result of following a plan of eating, I am and have been able to maintain a normal body weight.

As long as I work the Steps, I find that a plan of eating gives me a structured discipline around food, which provides me with clarity and boundaries. This in turn provides the space I need to work the Steps as outlined in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous and to connect with God.

If I try to follow a food plan without working the Steps, I am relying on my willpower, which will eventually fail me. Even if I am able to follow it, I would remain as the Big Book describes, 'restless, irritable and discontent'<sup>4</sup>, because I have not dealt with my real problem, which is that I have a spiritual malady. For me, this spiritual illness can only be addressed by me working this Programme.

I have confidence in being able to follow a plan of eating today and I can trust myself around food. This is because I trust the God of my understanding, who is doing for me what I could not do for myself. Thank you, God, and thank you, OA.

*Anonymous, London*

<sup>2</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous, p.30*

<sup>3</sup> *Overeaters Anonymous Inc (2001) Overeaters Anonymous. 2nd edn. Rio Rancho, NM: OA Inc, p.2*

<sup>4</sup> *Alcoholics Anonymous, p.xxiv*

### **A food plan journey**

Year one, I tried to let go of a major trigger food. It took many attempts but I got there. That was my food plan then.

A few years later, I tried to gather my food into three meals a day. That was my plan then.

Then I tried to eat nothing at all in between. That took a while, but in my journey of self-acceptance I did it.

Then I had to challenge more picky trigger foods, in and out of my meals. They plagued me for years: I didn't want to put them down.

I did eventually, they beat me!

Then I tried moderate amounts. That helped, but in time became too vague.

Then I tried ruling out more major food groups. I just got weight-obsessed and too resentful.

Then laxative abuse crept in. Thank God, with a loving sponsor, I got honest. This took more years!

After 15 years of using the Tools of OA and trying to work the Programme, however imperfectly, I now use a mental daily food plan. I used to write and share it with my sponsor online every day with my review but now I eat pretty much the same food over a week and just don't need to share it so scrupulously.

A food plan in the past has enabled me to go shopping with calm sanity, buying my week's food and finding reasonable ways of eating the same food as the rest of my family. I need to watch my amounts so I have to plan not to eat my trigger foods that might make me want more. That can mean planning with my sponsor or any OA, especially for a special occasion. I need to know clearly when I drift out of God's will into self will. So I do have to weigh and measure certain foods sometimes. I also have to have a rough idea of calorific value and have a limit agreed with my sponsor.

This has come about with time and many years of drifting around in the Programme not quite knowing why I didn't feel that clear-headed but also, more obviously, not being at a healthy body weight. After tweaking my food plan in these ways, I have a new freedom and a new happiness. I can see how my experience can benefit others, fear of people and economic security has left me and God is doing for me what I could not do for myself. These are just some of the many gifts I have received and now, at last, a healthy body weight!

My food plan is not the same as anyone else's, just like my Higher Power isn't. It took me years to really get that. The gift of anonymity is that we are all different and so are our food plans and that is OK. I am neither above nor below; I am on this journey of learning, one day at a time.

Thank God.

T

*"Look for the similarities rather than the differences"*

### **The plan to help you eat well and be well**

Hello and welcome to my share around the one Tool that I am so happy to use. There are nine Tools but a plan of eating is my pivotal one to surrender and acceptance. I consider the plan that works for me to be watertight and my safety net.

The structure and discipline around my plan has been hammered out from my history with compulsive eating. My physical needs have been identified and are attended to. The toddler has been tamed with regard to food. There is no defiance and total willingness to continue each new day to live within the boundaries of the eating plan which keeps me sane and well.

Each morning as my eyes open and before my mouth opens for anything I say I am powerless over ALL food which focuses my day to be mindful of the fact I am a compulsive overeater. This strengthens my desire to have food behaviours removed. I know the 'dis'ease I have and my eating plan is the prescription to maintaining my healthy body weight.

For myself there are no half measures - I refrain from all foods that would feed a craving, accepting that I do have a physical allergy and mental obsession around food. Humility and brutal honesty prove extremely useful, aiding my ability to help the still suffering compulsive eater. The plan that works for me may not suit another but I offer no apology for its simplicity.

Eating three balanced meals per day with a supper has kept me well since September 2007 and there is no chore about the disciplines I engage with. Each meal and drink gets written down, a line drawn, and that's it till the next meal. This enables me to eat to live, not live to eat.

Flexibility is vital and covers any situation. Planning food is important and in order to do that there are actions that need to be taken. Shopping is done to avoid not having in what keeps me well. This is done without drama and non-abstinent foods can be in the house, as my God takes care of me willingly as I commit to my relationship with the Power greater than me that makes my freedom from food a reality.

When eating out in a restaurant, taking time to look at the menu online means I choose before I go, taking away any risk of procrastination or comparing. Believing I am worth doing these things has increased my faith that my bubble shall not burst and one day at a time I am privileged to accept my gift of abstinence.

The plan of eating includes boundaries around things I could just have a handful of - I count out a portion as my eyes can be bigger than my belly. This is God-led and I laugh as I do, thanking the Power greater than me. Buffets are not an issue as a moderate plateful is enough - accepting I will not fade away and my food needs will always be met is so uplifting.

How, where, what, why and with whom I eat is important and covers situations that could be emotional. If I am feeling vulnerable, I may decline the offer of eating out - going to any lengths to keep myself well, especially if I would be surrounded by an excess of everything. I compassionately turn down the invitation without the need to justify my decision.

Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired (HALT) - these triggers are uppermost in my mind and to the best of my ability I live to avoid them!! Overeaters Anonymous is not a diet and calories club; however, we are a Fellowship of attraction. The benefits

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*"Surrender is victory. We win by giving up the fight"*

of working towards a healthy body weight are known. Choosing a plan that I can realistically follow each new day is not a chore when I hand over to the Power that wants what is good for me.

Having a plan, no matter how basic, is important, taking away the possibility of my self-will running riot. We have the luxury of formulating our own plan and it can be tweaked as life changes, accepting what we are and that using this Tool will help us with a daily reprieve. Working with the God of our understanding separates us from other clubs. Honesty is vital when looking at types and amounts of food. If necessary, weighing food or spot-checking calories can be a saving grace and helps with denial.

I am blessed and full of gratitude that the plan I have is realistic for me. Living within it means I have no fear that I can live without excess food or certain food types. I have finished my over-needy relationship with food and have matured around food and my choices. The other eight Tools and the Twelve Steps enable me to deal with life's challenges abstinently and be willing to be useful.

I have shared my plan with my sponsor and, if wobbly, will hear the question in my head, "Is it on your plan?" I then say, "NO," and that's that - decision made. I believe we all know intuitively which foods are triggers and when the time is right, we will willingly live without them.

Having boundaries around eating is crucial to live sanely around food and enable the Twelve Steps to be worked through, which maintains my three-fold recovery. Honesty, openness and willingness to do God's will are so helpful. The luxury of formulating my plan means I take total responsibility for what I eat. By the grace of God, my desire to stick within my plan is as strong as the desire to overeat used to be. Humility rises the longer I eat well and live well, as, thank God, my disease can be arrested each day. If I deviate off the plan that works for me, I will slowly die, as my disease is progressive and deadly.

Working within an understanding and accepting Fellowship gives me great hope that we will all work towards the plan of eating that keeps us as well as we can be, each day that we practice it.

Thank you for reading and helping me share. We are all worth a plan and together we can!

*Anonymous*

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

**[stepbystep@oagb.org.uk](mailto:stepbystep@oagb.org.uk)**

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

# Calendar of Events

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

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Friday 23 <sup>rd</sup> to Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> March 2012	Pleshey OA Retreat – Focus on Trust	House of Retreat, Pleshey, Chelmsford, Essex	Julie 07515 050 466/ 0208 555 4776, Sam 01296 681 747/ 07773 165 327, Vanessa 01273 494 968  <b>Sponsored by South and East England Intergroup</b>
Saturday 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2012 10am – 3.30pm	Step into the Solution - Progressive Recovery	Union Chapel Baptist Church, Wellington Rd (Waller Avenue entrance), Fallowfield, Manchester, M14 6EQ.	Texts/e-mails confirming attendance welcome – Suzi 07876 152 630 <a href="mailto:suzibrown99@fsmail.net">suzibrown99@fsmail.net</a>  <b>Sponsored by North West Intergroup</b>
Saturday 14 <sup>th</sup> April 2012 10am-4pm	Spring into action! New beginnings with a new Tool	Unitarian Church, 5 Emmanuel Rd, Cambridge, CB1 1JW	Olivia 07769 934 346 <a href="mailto:livbetts@hotmail.com">livbetts@hotmail.com</a> Helen- 07826 736 308 <a href="mailto:helen239@hotmail.com">helen239@hotmail.com</a> Tony- 01480 432 282 <a href="mailto:katieonyburns@tiscali.co.uk">katieonyburns@tiscali.co.uk</a>  <b>Sponsored by OA St Neots</b>
Friday 11 <sup>th</sup> May (4pm onwards) - Sunday the 13 <sup>th</sup> May 2012	Love, Recovery & Relationships Retreat  <i>Limited places left – book by 14 April</i>	The Briery Retreat Centre, Ilkley, West Yorkshire, LS29 9BW	Emma 01943 464 567 (before 9pm) <a href="mailto:emmahayes@yahoo.co.uk">emmahayes@yahoo.co.uk</a>  <b>Sponsored by Leeds (Rawdon) OA Group</b>
Friday 13 <sup>th</sup> - Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Humility, Shortcomings, Amends & Promises 12th Annual Recovery Convention	Hilton Metropole Hotel, NEC, Birmingham, B40 1PP	Rachel 01384 891 678 Pam 07971 968 430 Victoria (email) <a href="mailto:victoria.derrick@gmail.com">victoria.derrick@gmail.com</a>  <b>Sponsored by Heart of England Intergroup</b>

*Publicise your OA event for free!*

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

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