

Hello my fellow OA friends!

I can't believe this is the summer edition of SBS already! I sincerely hope the good weather continues.

You may notice that this edition contains several poems, most of which were written for the special 'celebration of recovery' session held on the Saturday night of the Ilkley Retreat from 10-12 May 2013. I obviously can't speak for anybody else, but I, for one, am still buzzing from what I can only describe as a totally empowering and life-changing weekend ☺. I just wish I had the freedom and the financial resources to attend more such amazing OA events, but sadly '*just for today*' that's not possible. However, I have every faith that '*this too shall pass*' and I'll be back on that OA circuit in no time at all.

The other day a work colleague, who is much closer to retirement than I am, was despairing about not having any hobbies that could help her while away her time whenever she retires. She turned to me and asked me if I had any special interests outside of work. As a working mother to two very active children and a committed member of two Twelve-Step Fellowships, I often struggle to even find time to breathe, let alone time for any hobbies. However, it then suddenly struck me that the OA world will one day be my oyster and there will be absolutely nobody and nothing stopping me any more. So what my dearly departed sponsor always used to say is indeed absolutely true: "*The best is yet to come*". And that's the self-same message that I took away from the Ilkley Retreat last weekend and I'd like to extend a MASSIVE thank you to all of you who made it possible.

Love in Fellowship

*Lucy, SBS Editor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

Contents

- Page 3 - Board message
- Page 3 - Step Twelve
- Page 5 - What do I have to pass on? How do I pass it on and why?
- Page 5 - "Recovery from relapse"
- Page 12 - Literature review: "Before you take that First Compulsive Bite"
- Page 13 - Poems celebrating recovery
- Page 15 - Happy to help!
- Page 16 - Programme is about the journey not the destination
- Page 17 - Alone... i.e., in bad company?
- Page 19 - A reflection on Step Nine
- Page 20 - Footwork of recovery
- Page 21 - My HP light
- Page 23 - OA Calendar of events

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

Share with fellow OAers 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 the Autumn 2013 edition of SBS is Friday, 16th August 2013. Topics:

Step One

Tradition Ten

Tool of Recovery: Plan of Eating

Topic: "*I put my hand in yours and together we can do what we could never do alone*"

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

Submissions sent to Step By Step are assumed to be intended for publication and may be subject to editing. All submissions become the property of OAGB for publication and copyright purposes. Submission does not guarantee publication. We do not publish stories that contain outside issues or that do not demonstrate recovery through the OA Programme. Please note your contribution may be held and published in a future edition of Step By Step.

Please note that in line with the policy 'Guidelines for OA Newsletters' (see <http://www.oa.org/pdfs/newsletterguidelines.pdf>) any OA service body is welcome to reprint full articles featured in Step By Step without permission as long as credit is given to SBS. Authors of articles published in this and any future editions of SBS need to therefore be aware of the fact that their articles may be reproduced in other OA publications.

For more information on the Steps and Traditions, visit www.oagb.org.uk

Board message

As readers may have noticed from the last edition, there has been a change of editorial policy regarding copyright issues. This was triggered by a request from an Intergroup who wanted to be able to publish excerpts from SBS articles in their own newsletter, with a link to the full version.

The National Service Board talked through this issue, taking into account the OA World Service Office guidelines for OA newsletters. These suggest that reprinting articles from other OA newsletters is acceptable. The Board decided, however, that this change of copyright usage would apply from the last edition onwards and not retrospectively. This was because we were concerned that any articles previously submitted by a member to Step by Step could subsequently have been printed in another service body's newsletter without the author's expressed permission.

If any members have concerns about this change of policy, please feel free to contact Sue (OAGB Chair) at chair@oagb.org.uk

Sue, OAGB Chair

Step Twelve

"Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to compulsive overeaters and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

I'd be quite happy not to get as far as Step Twelve in the Programme. The other Steps are so much easier, because they either don't involve taking risks of being rejected (Step Nine) or I can get the risky part 'over and done with'. Step Twelve includes taking that risk over and over; indeed, choosing to take it when I could get away with less risky actions and still keep my recovery - at least in the short-term.

The big risky actions:

1. Telephoning a newcomer after a meeting;
2. Telephoning someone who hasn't been to a meeting for a bit;
3. Telephoning a doctor's surgery to ask whether they would like some OA leaflets;
4. Telephoning possible places for room hire for a new meeting;
5. Offering to sponsor someone;
6. Offering to receive regular phone calls from a sponsee;
7. Telephoning my sponsor;
8. Offering to do a job for Intergroup;
9. Selling OA souvenirs to my group;
10. Raising difficult Intergroup questions at my group (as Group Service Representative);
11. Enforcing the Traditions, particularly on a newcomer in a small meeting.

(continued on page 4)

It would be nice to say that every day I say my prayers to my Higher Power for courage and then get on and do one or more of the items on this list every day or week. Well, no, I don't, and some of them I haven't done for ages, particularly the ones including or implying the word 'telephone'. Email is easier but I think it's a lot less effective than a live voice at the end of the line.

Step Twelve comes with a stick and a carrot. I started a meeting (no. 4 on the list above), but I wasn't doing the rest of the list, and I had a relapse and the meeting closed because I had nothing to offer the newcomers. That was a big stick but it moved me on a bit from where I'd been stuck. I got a co-sponsor who didn't have email. My previous sponsor, by email, had tried to encourage me to change my food plan, but it's a lot easier to ignore suggestions for recovery in an email than on the phone. I joined the Intergroup Public Information committee because I am an all-or-nothing person and I thought I should tackle my defect head-on. The defect is subtle, though, and while I am quite happy to surf the net looking for contact names of healthcare professionals, I haven't actually rung any of them up (yet).

I did take the World Service Business Conference motions to my group about changing the Preamble and adding and deleting Tools. It was magic: the group members shared from their hearts about what makes OA special and how they use an Action Plan and prayer and meditation, and I had to listen, take down their views, and share these at the Intergroup, even when they didn't fit in with how I thought the world should be. Some of the views brought by other reps to the Intergroup fitted even less well, so I had to change my views on how the world should be!

Using the telephone is like pulling off sticking plaster: it takes courage, it's best got over with, it hurts, what I find beneath might be painful and show up that my efforts at healing it didn't work; but if I don't go through that I will never fully heal.

The carrot? Well, people at Intergroup are fabulous. Having a sponsor who asks how I am and cares about me and leaves messages on my answering machine is fabulous. And not having to act as an anorexic, occasionally bingeing, constantly crying, compulsive eater is pretty good, too.

Anonymous

Step Twelve: The promise of a spiritual awakening

I had heard of the promise of a spiritual awakening in Step Twelve before I came to OA. I had heard of old-timers in another Twelve-Step fellowship with a calmness and a spirituality that I could hardly imagine. I had no concept of God, and, when I found the rooms a short while later, I wondered how exactly this spiritual transformation would take place.

I remember reaching Step Twelve for the first time and being disappointed that I wasn't transformed into some sort of a Buddha-type person radiating spiritual beauty!

(continued on page 5)

"Act yourself into right thinking instead of thinking yourself into right acting"

What I understand now is that Step Twelve is about awakenings and beginnings and not about the end point. I may not have had a huge amount of spiritual recovery in my early days but a door was opened, and, over the years, this awakening has grown into understanding and faith.

Now, more than a decade later, I am shortly to do Step Twelve with my sponsor again. It feels very different this time. I do now have a concept of a Higher Power, and I encourage and nurture that relationship. I have indeed had a spiritual awakening which gives me the tools and the faith to cope with difficulties in my life and continue to work the Programme.

Although the spiritual awakening did not make much sense to me in my early days, what did sink in was the idea of service, which is the other essential part of Step Twelve. This had quite a profound effect on my life. The selfish part of me started to recede. I realised the extent to which service made me feel good about myself, and that I had a duty to do it as a recovering individual. My recovery went up a level. I felt as if I belonged and that OA was my fellowship. I understood the word 'fellowship' and the concept of mutual support and was finally able to give something without expecting something back.

Finally, do I practise the principles of OA in all my affairs? I certainly try to, and this is what's required. As ever, it is 'progress not perfection'.

Madeline

"What do I have to pass on? How do I pass it on and why?"

I am a grateful abstinent compulsive overeater working the maintenance Steps and here is an 'assignment' that I was given recently by my sponsor. After reading "Dr Bob's Nightmare" in the *Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001, pp.171-181)*, I was asked to answer, "What do I have to pass on? How do I pass it on and why?" Here is what I wrote:

All that I have to pass on is my experience - my experience of compulsive overeating and what I did to get well. How simple is that! I'm passing on what I already know and what's worked for me, which was passed on from my sponsor, which was passed on from their sponsor. This is one of the reasons to pick a sponsor who has what you want. If I want to recover, just as my sponsor has recovered, then all I do is follow suggestions. This is how I then help other compulsive overeaters who want to stop and are ready and willing to work the Steps.

The main reason why I'm willing to help others is to give back the amazing gift that I've been given. It is how I show my appreciation and thanks to the person who passed it on to me, and to this wonderful Programme. The Fellowship would not continue to grow and help others if members kept recovery to themselves.

(continued on page 6)

It was also drummed into me early on in Programme that sponsoring and helping others keeps me abstinent. This works for a number of reasons: it gets me out of myself and means I'm focussing less on the food; it helps me to be responsible and practice what I preach; it constantly refreshes me about parts of the Programme that may have become hazy; and it reminds me what it's like to be in the food if I'm working with someone struggling or new. But the rewards for helping others are not only abstinence and sanity for myself, but seeing others recover and grow in the Programme and then, in turn, help others, which keeps the Fellowship strong. All of these reasons combined make it my duty to keep carrying the message. I feel obligated to follow all the directions as set out in the *Big Book* and if it's worked for all those before me, it will work for me!

Anonymous, London

"Recovery from relapse"

Relapse is a word I've never really applied to myself, even though my abstinence has been less than perfect throughout the four years I've been in OA.

So, I never relapsed, because I never really had abstinence in the first place.

But last year, from 1st August, I started really working my abstinence well and finally gave up sugar - alcohol and bread had already disappeared. Prior to that, I believed I didn't have a problem with sugar because it wasn't my primary binge food (bread).

Cutting out sugar was the difference between night and day, I mean in the way I thought about people, places and situations, and challenges in my life. I really was 'released from the compulsion' - although sometimes it was hard to sit and watch everyone else around me (my family and friends not in the Fellowship) eating ice-cream, cakes, sweets and biscuits, especially on holiday, when we seemed to do nothing else but eat, moving from one long, leisurely meal to the next without pausing for breath.

Finally, with my new-found abstinence, I understood what everyone had been talking about in meetings: the serenity, being OK with people around me, feeling 'held' and assured that I would be all right, even if things didn't work out the way I'd planned, or the way I wanted them to.

BUT...

Just before Christmas, I got ill with a chest infection and was dragged really low. I hate being ill - I guess we all do. But my default behaviour is to eat my way out of illness. Sitting with the feeling of being unwell, in pain, uncomfortable, miserable, unable to enjoy the things I'd normally enjoy meant that all bets were off. The only foods I felt like eating were bread and jam. I gave myself permission to eat these items but didn't realise it would lead to several months of relapse.

(continued on page 7)

"The will of God will not lead me where the grace of God will not protect me"

I am still flip-flopping between a few days of abstinence and then getting back into the sugar again. Today is good, so far, thank God, probably because I'm connecting with the Programme and writing this article (*the Tool of Writing!*).

So I have been trying to work out what keeps me on the straight and narrow, abstinent and happy.

And also I've been realising why I do this Programme – it's not even (really) about my weight or what I eat. It's to stop all the negative feelings of fear, inadequacy, worry, stress, beating myself up for not being good enough, resentment at not getting my own way, feeling overwhelmed by everything, isolating and hiding from people, places and situations by compulsively watching TV, surfing the net and generally running from life. These feelings are much worse when I am riding the serotonin wave of sugar rushes and downs.

I've found that when I am back in the sugar, I panic about work: stress-eating to get me through the fear that, "I can't do it, I'm not good enough, I'm going to get found out any minute, I'm not as good as the other employees, my bosses think I'm rubbish," etc.

When I am abstinent, although some work assignments are new and challenging, I calm myself down with some meditation (for me that means lying on the floor and forcing myself to DO NOTHING for ten minutes) and tackle it one step at a time. I recognise that I need to give myself time to learn how to do the task, to research it on the Internet, and it's OK to ask questions and request guidance from a colleague. I must not expect myself to be fully up to speed, perfect and with all the facts on Day One, just by clicking my fingers.

Not giving myself time to learn something new is a major defect of mine. I have high expectations of myself, wanting to be able to do everything pretty much effortlessly, and immediately.

My 'over-responsibility for others' defect is also much worse when I am in the sugar. My daughter has been ill and suddenly decided she's unhappy at school. I have been unable to let this go, worrying all day whether she is OK and whether I should be keeping her off school. I worry I've done the wrong thing sending her in (when my intuition tells me she's basically all right, with the tail-end of a cold). Sitting with this feeling yesterday and abstinely pondering on it, I decided it may be because her best friend has recently moved to Australia and she may be grieving about that. I wrote a note to her teacher asking her to keep an eye on her. I've also discussed this with my daughter and she thinks it may be the cause. In the food, I would never have worked this out. I would have blocked it, pushed the problem away, isolated and ignored it.

(continued on page 8)

So, what keeps me connected to the Programme and what doesn't? I work freelance and often end up sitting at home, isolating. Being around people really helps me stay sane. So, yesterday I rang two OAers (as my sponsor has suggested I do every day!) and although I only actually spoke to one, it helped me get in touch with my feelings. (*Tool of Telephone*)

I realised I haven't been to many meetings recently because I've been abroad working. Meetings really help me. I'm going tonight. (*Tool of Meetings*)

I did an amend to my Dad on Tuesday (I'm on Step Nine for the first time), and that helped me feel I was moving forward with the Programme (I am procrastinating on my amends). (*Working the Steps*)

I haven't done much reading really, not even "*For Today*" which I usually do religiously every night (mornings aren't good with kids, school run etc.). So I am committing to doing more reading. I looked at the literature table in my home meeting on Monday and realised I've only read a fraction of the books: I haven't read "*Lifeline Sampler*", "*Voices of Recovery*", "*Abstinence*" – you get the idea? OK, next meeting I commit to buying a new book. And I'll read it ☺. (*Tool of Literature*)

Service helps me a lot – it gets me out of myself: the 'me, me, me' mentality, obsessing about MY job, MY abilities, MY looks, MY self-discipline, or lack of it. I do service within the Fellowship, holding service positions, plus if I do something in my day that I don't particularly enjoy (like hosting a meal for acquaintances that I find triggering or not spiritually healthy for me to be around) I think of it as doing service for my husband, who enjoys their company, and to them. (*Tool of Service*)

Sponsorship is something I think I could do more of. I have a sponsee but we're not in touch much. We meet once a week for 50 minutes to do Stepwork – but my sponsor says it's up to her to 'go to any lengths' to seek ME out, not up to me to chase her, check up on her or chivvy her along. I am there if she needs me and wanting her to work her Programme more rigorously, diligently or 'better' is just me being judgemental and controlling. I'm there if she needs me. My sponsor has been away but we're trying to keep in touch. I have a phone call scheduled with her this afternoon (hey, maybe that's why today is going so well, because I am WORKING THE PROGRAMME!) (*Tool of Sponsorship*)

I've always loved the *Plan of Eating Tool* – it fits with my list-writing tendencies. I write a food plan every night for the next day, checking what's in the fridge and thinking about where I'll be, what I'll be doing and what'll be available. I check to see what time I'll be able to eat and schedule in snacks so I don't get over-hungry, snappy and compulsive. A newcomer asked this week how it differs from a diet. For me it plans that I eat ENOUGH – I can get into restricting and eating too little (salad and protein and not enough carbs) and it ensures that I eat foods I enjoy and can look forward to. I avoid foods that set my craziness off i.e. bread, sugar and alcohol.

(continued on page 9)

"Relapse is NOT requirement"

The *Action Plan* is also a Tool that has also worked for me ever since it came in relatively recently. It *is* a 'To Do' list for me BUT it's much more. I detail chores and errands - writing them down stops me getting panicky and overwhelmed so that I can prioritise and yes, maybe postpone some of them. I also factor in things I need to keep me sane and free from compulsive behaviour. It may be sitting down and having a PROPER relax - two (or even three!) hours watching a great film on TV and not feeling guilty about it. This is *different* from the mindless isolating I can go into, watching junk on TV. I may need to have some human interaction if I have a day alone, so I'd make myself do some outreach calls, or call a friend or my Mum (although, bless her, that can be a bit counterproductive as she can be triggering, but I'm aware of it).

So - these are the steps I take on a daily basis, imperfectly and not all the time, to keep me abstinent and away from a relapse.

I also think of a Hollywood actor's words when he was asked about preparing his fabulous physique for each film role. He said, "It's much easier to *stay* ready than to *get* ready".

Similarly, once I am abstinent, it's easier to maintain that serenity than to get it back once it's lost. Now I just have to remember that, the next time I am faced with a testing situation and my thoughts turn to foods that will break my equilibrium.

Sarah

"Recovery from relapse": 'easy does it'

Thank you Step by Step for giving me the opportunity to reflect on my very recent and very new recovery from relapse. Or my return from the brink. Because I think I was actually on the verge of full relapse, but not quite there - YET.

This is my story and it reflects my beliefs and my opinions about what has helped me step away from the cliff edge and back towards saner living.

I have been 'in the rooms' of OA now for over three years and experienced an extended 'honeymoon period' very soon after coming in. I found a food plan that worked for me, I worked the Steps, took on some service positions, had a sponsor and was starting to sponsor. And guess what? The food obsession was removed from me most days - I abstained from eating compulsively (which for me is binge-eating) for a very long period. I lost the extra weight I had been carrying around for over 20 years - this weight was both physical and psychological. I felt like a totally different person!

(continued on page 10)

Then, after two and a half years, something gradually changed. On reflection, I feel that certain themes were identifiable in this change:

- Physical: I became more interested in the physical aspects of my recovery and found myself on the weighing scales more that is healthy for me. Emotionally and spiritually I was not engaging. I was struggling with a new job and feelings of low self-esteem, and was 'medicating' with food when things got really bad.
- Arrogance: I thought that I had 'cracked it' and was cured of compulsive eating. In addition, (I am ashamed to admit it but...) I was sorely lacking in empathy and understanding for those who were not managing to abstain. "It's simple," I thought to myself, "Why don't these people get it?"
- Denial: I started thinking that maybe I wasn't a compulsive eater after all. I started thinking how I used to think: "I just need to be in control of what I eat,"; "I can have my cake/chocolate etc. etc. in moderate portions." It was like I had forgotten the previous 20+ years and the hellish places my disease had taken me.
- Dishonesty: I was not sharing with my OA sponsor or OA friends how I was feeling or behaving.

The behaviour and thought patterns soon manifested in my recovery: I had 'little slips' here and there, and the 'odd binge'. I wasn't putting on all, or any, of the weight I had lost, so I thought I was 'getting away with it'. In reality, my head was getting crazier and crazier and I was relapsing – in the sense that I was not far off where I was when I came into the rooms. I wasn't bingeing all the time, but hanging in there, using willpower as long as I could, then when feelings got too much, taking refuge in the food. Just for long enough to calm me down – and then I was back into abstinent eating. But with a 'diet head' on.

This went on for a matter of months. And I was bloody miserable, and also losing faith in OA. Maybe OA wasn't for me...

Then, thankfully, things started to change slowly. It started with finding the courage to be honest about my abstinence – in public - and letting go of service positions that had abstinence requirements. And I was amazed and bolstered by the non-judgemental, unconditional acceptance and love I received from my friends and sponsor.

Thereafter, I had a period of starting lots of action plans and committing daily to my Programme and abstinence. I was working the Steps like crazy – through gritted teeth! "I am ****ing gonna get this," I thought. And still my abstinence was not returning. I was still taking my will back here and there around the food. I was still finding it especially difficult to deal with emotions and tiredness without my old crutch. However, at least something was different now in that I was being honest and I stayed 'in the rooms'. I kept coming back to meetings.

(continued on page 11)

"Your bottom is wherever you stop digging"

Then something shifted again. I think I reconnected to my Higher Power, which had been reworked. And HP actually told me to ease off – *"take it easy and keep it simple"*. I realised that I had been trying to control my eating using the Programme the way that I used to try, and fail, to control my eating by dieting or counting calories etc. OA had become my new diet.

But that wasn't working for me. I believe that until I was able to let go of my will to control my eating, to really connect with Programme in a meaningful way and not just physical recovery-focussed, then I would stay in relapse. Thankfully, for today, I feel as though I am back in a true, real recovery. I'm feeling feelings again without switching them off with food.

And I know that it isn't me who has 'achieved' this through working the Programme. I finally understand that there are plenty of people, like me, working the Programme who are not yet recovered, or who are struggling. I thought this meant they just weren't doing it right.

I believe that recovery is a gift. A precious gift that may come and go in my life. What I do know, though, is that I have a Programme that will work for me - if I am patient. It might not be on my timetable. And that my job is not to 'be' recovered but to let go, work my Programme to the best of my ability, connect with my HP - and then I may or may not 'get abstinence'. If I take it easy and stay connected to my soul, my HP, I know what I need to do, and how I need to live my life.

Thanks to OA. Thanks to all my lovely OA friends.

Anonymous

"Recovery from relapse": 'it works if you work it'

I have been in recovery in OA for about seven years, and, like many other newbies, I had a 'honeymoon' period in my first few months where it all seemed amazingly easy. It was only a few months later that I discovered that I was not really 'fixed' and learned that I had to actually work the Programme if it was going to work for me.

As an atheist, my first challenge was to identify a Higher Power that worked for me. Initially using the meetings and the Fellowship provided a partial solution, but for me the very nature of the tradition of not giving feedback meant that when I was seeking guidance and a Power that could replace my self-will, this did not seem sufficient. Eventually I settled on an Inner Higher Power that I might describe as my subconscious self or my conscience.

Appealing to my HP became something of a blend of meditation and affirmations. Hearing my HP's will came from listening to the inner voices that had actually always been there, just badly out of balance. The voices that said, "Go raid the fridge," or "Ignore the pain, take another helping," became quieter, while those that had always just been an ignored whisper that said, "You'll regret this," or "Let's skip the dessert," became louder and more focussed.

(continued on page 12)

An experienced OA often shared that when he had a relapse with a trigger food on one day, his head would insistently demand it the next day, and the next. He said that this would continue until the emotional pain was too great and then he would feel the desire to stop. When this happened, he often found it was a few more days before he actually managed to not eat it. Then on the next day the craving would be less but still intense. He related how the next day would be easier and, after another one or two days, the compulsion would disappear.

I listened to this and thought that it was interesting but it wasn't how it worked for me. Then I had my own trigger food relapse. It was the insidious rack of temptingly packaged treats on the way to the petrol station tills that caught me. And once I had fallen off my little island of abstinence, it seemed impossible to climb back onto it. I did not start eating several of the offending items as I would have done in my pre-OA days, but I was unable to resist one every day.

Suddenly I was in a place of self-doubt and self-criticism. My fear and expectation was that I would return to the old days of the yo-yo dieting when, once I slipped, I gave up all hope and watched all my weight loss and health gains vanish over a few months to take me back to my pre-diet weight and then a bit more.

But I did keep going to meetings, and I did realise that while my behaviour was a huge disappointment, it was not the same as before – I was not escalating, and I had not picked up all my other vices. I held onto the slogans that helped – '*This Too Shall Pass*', '*One Day at a Time*' - and tried to accept my powerlessness, appreciate what I had changed, and waited. After a few days, from somewhere I shall call my HP, the intention just appeared in my head to break the pattern. It actually took another three days before I succeeded. Then the following few days followed the exact pattern my friend had described – initially a titanic battle between my good voice and my bad voice. Day by day, the bad voice receded and finally stopped, and I was abstinent by my definition again.

The greatest gift from this was knowing that I had a path back from a fall. While I would like to be one of those people who can write, "and I was abstinent from that day", I must accept that I am not there yet. I know absolutely, however, that I do not have to accept that "once I slip I am lost". I can accept my weakness and powerlessness and just keep asking to be released from the compulsion, and I know that it will come and abstinence will return.

Ray J

Literature review: "*Before you take that First Compulsive Bite*"

When I first joined OA I got a copy of "*Before you take...*" and I realised that it contained the key. The thinking precedes the eating, starving, or, in my case at the time, obsessive thoughts about men. Stress and self-condemnation over relationships with men were components of my anorexia, and one in particular had just brought me to rock bottom.

(continued on page 13)

"If you can take it or leave it, you can have it!"

I originally used the booklet to help me with another obsession, focussing instead on the pamphlet's promises of peace of mind and a loving Higher Power. It worked. I was freed from the obsession that had first driven me to OA, and when other obsessions loomed, I was able to focus past them on my serenity.

Many years later, I remember this pamphlet when food temptations arise. When I moved to my present job, I found that cakes and sweets were abundant whenever one of my colleagues had their birthday or returned from a trip. I am still somewhat underweight and I don't have problems with the ingredients, so at first I ate my share of these offerings. I found, though, that they drove me into a 'diet' obsession of, "How much of my food plan do I have to sacrifice to make up for my indulgence?" It interfered with my work and my peace of mind, so I made a new food plan rule not to touch these extra items. My serenity returned. I now use the words of the pamphlet to remind me to stick to my rule even when the food is exotic, home-made, tempting or - a particular trigger - will be wasted if I don't eat it.

I try to make sure that newcomers don't leave our meeting without a copy of this pamphlet, or its reduced version, '*Think First*', which is a handy purse-sized foldout card.

SP, Hampshire

Celebrating recovery

This was me two years ago,
I couldn't go with any flow.
These clothes were snug, a little tight,
But mention it and you I'd fight.
Believe it or believe it not,
Beyond the food I cared no jot.

My heart was shut, no fellowship there.
My soul was small from lack of care,
Emotionally stunted, I never bloomed.
To be fat and unhappy I was doomed,
But then I found the OA rooms.

I listened, cried and gradually,
The Programme seeped deep into me.
I grasped the Steps and worked them thro'
The Tools I use to help me too.
I found a sponsor to me that fit
My outside shrank bit by bit by bit.

Today I look like this inside,
Gone has my empty pride.
My heart has swelled it's certainly true,
It's full of fellowship and love for you.

(continued on page 14)

My soul has grown and now it glows,
I feel a joy which flows and flows.
My little girl now jumps for joy,
No longer stamps and wants her toy.

Emotions have blossomed clear and true,
I no longer behave as if I'm two.
Well not so very often.
Everything has begun to soften.
The outside's changed a lot as you can see,
And I'm the person my Higher Power meant me to be.

Caroline

Celebration of recovery

The gift of recovery, how do I put it in words?
Wait, I think I hear it, yes it's sung by the birds.

Who am I? I did not know.
I didn't have what I needed to grow.
Bigger and bigger I cried with the pain.
As I vowed never ever to do it again.

It did not last, oh how it hurt me so.
I did not have what I needed to grow.

A shaking hand, the fears escaped.
My hand was held and the warmth came through.
Could it be?
Could I learn from you?

The gift of recovery, how do I put it in words?
It's in the wind I can feel with each blow.
I feel it giving me all I need to grow.

The trees as they rustle,
The energy, the force
It's guiding me now...
I am on my course.

The sun that warms this skin of mine.
I can feel the energy I can feel the shine.
I don't know how and I don't know why.
But I know I can feel it coming from the sky.

The stars that sparkle.
The moon that glows.
I do feel it now...
It may come and go.

(continued on page 15)

"Expect miracles"

So bless me please as I take each leap.
Bless me please when I hear you speak.
Is it just in the birds and trees?
Is it just when I feel at ease?
It's all the time through good and bad.
I feel it now as you hold my hand.

The gift of recovery, how do I put it in words?
It's everywhere now.
Haven't you heard?

I pray God
I need it, for this is so.
From You is the only way I learn to grow.

Emily, Liverpool

Gratitudes

I am sitting here because I can.
I am sitting with legs crossed because I can.
I am sitting here in my size 14 jeans because I can.
I am feeling joyous, happy and free because I can.
I am living my abstinence one day at a time because I can.
I am looking forward to the rest of my life - because I can.
I am feeling immense gratitude to my HP, the Fellowship and you all.
Because I can.

Sue

Happy to help!

I do not wait for my ability; I clock in with my availability.

I do what I can, when I can: a smile, a hug, an understanding nod.

I go to meetings with open ears and mind, sharing my hope and strength, knowing people understand.

I am generous with my Seventh Tradition, giving my money and my time, supporting myself in all areas of my life.

Abstinence and working the Steps is the best service I can do, as I see the work that needs to be done, sharing how my life has changed since I joined the Fellowship and faced the disease.

I have a choice in all I do; I do not need to suffer alone.

As I join the human race by putting down the compulsion to eat, transformation of my life is complete.

(continued on page 16)

Together we can overcome all difficulties as we look at ourselves and take responsibility.

No more blame or shame... food in its place, all healthy and balanced to help maintain.

My God loves me in totality: this Programme helps me live in reality.

To give without expectation is a blessing from Higher Power: to share the solution is priceless.

The gift of freedom can be mine, by keeping to my daily Programme chores.

Honesty, open-mindedness and willingness is **how** to live abstinely in the now.

I hold my head up high and shout loud and clear, "I am in recovery, you can be too: let me offer suggestions for what to do!"

God be with you as you put on the badge 'Happy to help, here is my hand.'
To serve is a privilege and humbles me.

The solution allows me to **be** me, sharing myself with you to keep me well.
Please join me - life is **good!**

Love and peace

Anonymous

Programme is about the journey not the destination

One suggestion I heard several years ago about OA service is "to write the report or notes for the report as soon as the event starts. Don't wait until the OA event is over when you will be overwhelmed with all the information." I can say the same thing about what is happening on my road of recovery.

Weeks ago I noticed and acknowledged to myself that I pick up resentments - slowly and gradually negative thinking was taking over my head and my life. I was praying and using all the Tools and hoping it would pass. Then one day I realised that I actually needed to do something about what was going on in my head. And I thought, "I need to change my meeting and 'have a break' from my current home group." I didn't recognise my old way of thinking because it wasn't about food/drugs/shopping/relationships (you name it), it was about my meeting. Obviously the 'right' answer was to change the meeting, find my serenity and get back on the right track again.

Luckily I was talking to my sponsor and some old-timers and I heard the message, "Go to more meetings as well as to your home meeting". I was desperately looking for ways to get to the different meetings with limited funds and limited access to the car. Eventually I realised that in my initial search for more meetings, I was still looking for something to fix me - the 'perfect' meeting. "If I go and find the best meeting and see all these fantastic people, I will be all sorted." It's no surprise that I managed to get

(continued on page 17)

"Expectations are premeditated resentments"

to five Twelve-Step meetings in one week as well as meeting my sponsor for coffee. I still don't know how it works or what happened but after these meetings I realised the people at the meetings are fantastic but not perfect. By listening and sharing and being there I can see that no meeting and no-one can fix me. The answer is within myself and this last spiritual 'blip' is my Higher Power's way of showing that we are all on our journey 'one day at time'. Life doesn't get any easier but our perspective on life changes. And if I keep asking the question I will find the answer. Even if sometimes I forget the answer, the people at the meeting will remind me what it is :)

Like someone shared, "We need to hear newcomers to hear how it was; we need to hear old-timers to know that there is a solution."

Lots of love to everyone on our journey.

Grateful compulsive overeater 'e'



Alone... i.e., in bad company?

When I am alone, I am in the best company in the world.

Miriam can meet all my needs.

If I am cold, she will put clothes on me or set me a lovely fire. If I am hot, she can turn on a fan or give me a cool shower (summer only: I live in the UK!).

(continued on page 18)

If I am tired, she will put me to bed or allow me to have a nap or a chill-out on top of my bed for 20 minutes. If I am uncomfortable physically, she will notice it and remind me to change my clothes, shoes, seating or whatever it takes to make me deliciously relaxed.

If I am hungry, she knows perfectly well when it is a craving, when it is thirst or when it is true hunger, and, when it is true hunger, she feeds me nourishing food which she has thoughtfully planned for me the day before.

When I am bored, she recognises that it is a form of anger that I need to deal with to heal, and she deals with her feelings in the way her sponsor taught her, working through them systematically, and I soon feel better. Sometimes, strange to say, she suggests I could usefully help someone else when I am bored, and she has all their numbers in her book!

If I want sex, she knows how to provide satisfaction and does so in a loving way.

If I am lonely, she suggests I call someone, go and meet a friend or ask a neighbour in for a cuppa: she even knows whom I would most enjoy seeing out of the available people. She knows who is nourishing and who is likely to be draining!

Yes, I am so lucky to have her: she makes sure I am comfortable physically and emotionally, so that I don't have to look outside myself (towards food, work, gambling, getting laid, romance, drugs, alcohol or any other external source of temporary comfort) to distract me from meeting my own true needs in the present moment and feeling serene and comfortable.

I see solitude as a basic need in a busy life. She helps me to relish solitude as an emotional, physical and spiritual refuelling time.

If I still feel like overeating when all my physical and emotional needs are met, she even has the number of my sponsor and lets me call her, even when I think I should be able to cope unaided! Wow...what a good friend that Miriam is: I love her company. Thanks to her years in OA, she really understands me!

Do you see solitude as a basic need in a busy life?

Miriam

A reflection on Step Nine

"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

I took Step Nine 31 years ago, completely and thoroughly. I had been a compulsive thief and cheat, and had often been a manipulator and bully. So I had a lot of cleaning up to do. My sponsor kept me at it, doing one thing each day. It might be searching for a phone number for someone I had not seen in 15 years, or locating the owner of a now-closed business, or cleaning out one more drawer in my home to find more stolen goods. I contacted a cemetery I had stolen grave items from; a museum I'd stolen items from; people I'd baby-sat for and stolen items from. I contacted a university at which I'd cheated on my Masters exams, ready and willing to turn in my falsely-obtained degree (which meant I would have had to leave my job – but I was willing). I contacted the government to repay benefits I had claimed dishonestly.

Some amends were ongoing, like leaving appropriate tips for waiters to make up for all the tips I had never left because of my selfishness, and not taking free items I don't need just because they are there for the taking. Also, when making each amend, I explained exactly what I was doing, as suggested in the *Big Book* and the *"Alcoholics Anonymous' Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions"*; I explained that I am a compulsive overeater and a member of Overeaters Anonymous, and part of the Programme is cleaning up my past, making amends to people I had harmed.

As a result of cleaning out my house, and my past, and changing some behaviours, I had a new sense of clean that I had never experienced before. I had no secrets. I had nothing to hide. And as I continue living in Step Ten, making amends as I make new mistakes, that feeling of clean continues.

It also cemented Step One in my mind and soul forever; the truth about me was no longer a secret or shameful. The fact that I am a compulsive overeater no longer had/has any power over me: it's just true. I am so grateful for the clear directions to follow in the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*, and for a sane and abstinent sponsor who did not let me get away with less than what I needed to do to stay abstinent. I have never had to go back and clean out anything from my pre-OA past that I omitted from Step Nine, as everything I was aware of came out and was taken care of the first (and only) time I took Step Nine. When I moved about a year later, I found two stolen items buried deep in my home which I hadn't seen or remembered before. My sponsor said I didn't have to go back to Step Nine, for Step Ten is clear, *"When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them..."* (*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001, p.84*). So I worked my Step Ten and made the necessary amends and reparations. Thoroughness and honesty really pay off.

Gratefully abstinent today, one day at a time.

Anonymous, London

Footwork of recovery

OA helped me get clean around food for today. This is a miracle, one I could not have done alone. I needed fellowship, and I needed a Higher Power. Above and beyond food recovery one day at a time, the Twelve Steps helped me become a better person. Here are some of the things that made me a grateful recovering anorexic, bulimic and compulsive overeater:

- **Working the Steps:** I got a sponsor and started those Steps, orally, written, whatever was easiest and natural for me and above all – I tried to *'keep it simple'*.
- **Walking the walk:** *'act as if'*. I joined in with the Programme and even though I didn't believe it'd work, I threw myself in and started saying those slogans like I meant them.
- **Higher Power:** anything but my ego that will guide me towards the most loving actions for me to take today, a mixture of intuition, fellowship and loved ones.
- **Turning it over:** I release the outcomes of my actions to my Higher Power and trust that, if I put in good actions, everything will work out as it's supposed to, and I will be OK.
- **Humility:** I get to meetings and share around people I may feel inferior to or better than. OA teaches equality regardless of background/status/financial position etc.
- **Surrender:** I don't have to be the master planner. I do my best and surrender the rest.
- **Openness:** I am open about my circumstances and share my life with other people. Isolation is where the disease wants me. Communicating is key to good recovery.
- **'Let go and let God':** I trust that I will be OK if I follow what's suggested and I do my best to listen to my Higher Power. God will always take care of me, even in the toughest of circumstances.
- **'One day at a time':** this Programme isn't about yesterday's worries, or tomorrow's fears, it's about doing my best right now, for today, in this 24 hours.
- **Making amends:** when I am wrong, I promptly admit it and move on.
- **Prayer and meditation:** I dedicate time to God at least once a day. This will settle my mind and restore my sense of inner peace.
- **Self-acceptance:** I accept myself just as I am today, no better, no worse. Things are just as they are supposed to be today.
- **Willingness:** I pray for this. I prepare to let go of any past, preconceived notions and ask for the willingness to stay aligned to God's will.
- **Unconditional love:** I accept people without 'ifs' and 'shoulds'. I cannot change others, only myself.
- **Spiritual Awakening:** slowly, by working the Steps, I will start to fill the inner hole with the light of love that my Higher Power will bring me. I will no longer need food to make me feel better.

(continued on page 21)

"Humility isn't thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less"

- **Carry the message:** it is my duty to help others and be of service. This will ensure that I stay well and never forget what is keeping me abstinent today.

Happy Recovery! V

My HP light

Just after I turn off my bedside lamp at night, I have a sort of imprint on the inside of my eyelids. It's a common phenomenon called 'image burn-in' or 'afterimage'.

Most people get it, and it occurs when the scene around you is visible for a few minutes after closing the eyes, or by blinking repeatedly. This effect slowly fades as the retina re-adjusts.

When I tune into it, I choose to think of this as my Higher Power.

As I settle into bed, I take note of the colour, shape and position of the image. Usually it's a fluorescent green and floats just to the left of my centre of vision and up a bit.

I think, "Ah, *there* you are Higher Power, with me, as I go to sleep. You were there all the time of course, but I didn't take the time to notice you and tune into you earlier."

Then as I lie there, I notice how it changes, shifts, fades, moves gently and breaks up, then drifts away into oblivion.

It's a nice way of reminding myself that my HP is there, all the time, looking after me if I will only tune into it, feel its presence, and accept its guidance.

When I am in a bad place spiritually, I don't take the time to notice it. I go to bed worrying about what I've eaten that day, how many calories I've consumed, which food choices were 'bad', how I'm still fat and worthless with no willpower to stick to a diet etc. In other words, all the old thinking, old behaviour, beating myself up and obsessing about my weight and looks.

I follow this by endlessly ruminating on how I'd like my body to be, what I'd like to weigh, which clothes I'd like to be able to wear and how successful and popular I'd like to be... in other words, all the old self-obsession about me-me-me and how I appear to others on the outside. Nothing about my spiritual wellness, my thinking within, and nothing about how I could reach out to others to help THEM.

Anyway, the other night I suddenly developed a slight migraine. I don't get them very severely, no throwing up or headaches, but my vision breaks up and it's usually because I'm tired and stressed.

(continued on page 23)

I was worrying about a work project I had to do the next day. It was difficult and was going to take all my concentration and energy, and I had gone into fear and panic about whether I could accomplish it. Again, old thinking – lack of trusting myself and not asking my HP to help me through testing situations.

As I switched off the light and went to bed, the afterimage on my retina was jagged, jarring and flickering. Black and white stripes mixed with flashing primary colours: red, blue, yellow and vivid green. They jiggled, flickered and jerked about crazily.

I hadn't thought I was particularly stressed, but my body was telling me I was.

I realised, "Yes, my HP light is fractured too. My connection with it is damaged. I've been in the sugar to block out the fear. I haven't reached out to other OAs, and I haven't used many of the Tools."

Just noticing this helped me to reconnect with my Programme.

I told myself that I would just have to take it one minute at a time. I had done all the preparation for the job. I would get dressed in the morning. I would turn up. I would be calm, serene, meticulous and thorough - and do the job to the best of my ability. I would ask my HP for help throughout the day and would 'get out of the way of myself' to do a good job. I wouldn't let fear overcome me or spoil my chances of completing the project. I would "hold my HP's hand" throughout the whole day, as my sponsor had advised me previously.

In the end, that's how I played it.

I took it one step at a time, and it went well. I didn't need reassurance, compliments or praise from my colleagues afterwards. I knew it had been a success. Plus, I acknowledged that - even though I am a perfectionist and always want to be faultless – I may have made some small errors. But that's OK! The overall result was good. I did service for my colleagues and delivered my part well. It was a team effort and I didn't let anyone down.

All good.

But, the danger was that I could have gone into 'rewarding myself' with food afterwards.

I had planned to have a really nice – but quite calorific – lunch, but in the event the job over-ran and I had to rush off to my children's school. I had to change my travel/lunch plans and get a quick salad from a fast food outlet before dashing off to do service for my kids. Good. This kept me abstinent that day, and reminded me that I am not on this earth to glorify myself (although it's nice to feel I've done a good job).

I'm here to be of service to others, to remain abstinent and to be the best 'me' I can be.

Sarah

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Friday 12 th to Sunday 14 th July 2013	13 th Annual OA Recovery Convention on "Steps 10 and 11, Daily Inventory, Prayer and Meditation"	The Hilton Metropole Hotel in Birmingham National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, B40 1PP	Rachel 01384 891 678 Email: contact@hoeconvention.org.uk Website: hoeconvention.org.uk Sponsored by Heart of England Intergroup
Friday 18 th to Sunday 20 th October 2013	28 th Annual OA National Assembly and Convention	Plymouth	Sponsored by OAGB <i>Further details via http://www.oagb.org.uk/</i>
Wednesday 6 th to Saturday 9 th November 2013	5 th Region 9 Assembly and Convention on "Abstinence Comes First"	Hotel Kibbutz Shefayim, Shefayim 6099, Israel Tel. +972-9-959 5595 Email: info@shefhotel.co.il	Adele at asseoadele@gmail.com or info@oa.org OA Israel, P.O. Box 7250, Ramat Gan 52172 Israel Sponsored by Region 9

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.)

Any comments, suggestions or ideas for future editions?

Want to advertise a new group?

Send SBS an email at:

stepbystep@oagb.org.uk

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

*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.*