

Today

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Inside this Issue

- 1 Tradition 5
Step 5
- 2 My Story
- 3 How OA Works for me
- 4 Business
Announcements

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Tradition Five: Each group has but one primary purpose--to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers

Twenty-five years ago, I went to my first OA meeting. It was held in a small church in South County on a Tuesday afternoon. The day was beautiful, sunny and warm. I felt sick, mistrusting and nervous. I remember hearing three things that I didn't believe: that God could help with this problem, that people were grateful to be compulsive overeaters and that the newcomer was the most important person in the room.

At break time, strangers approached me with welcoming smiles and words. One asked if I needed a sponsor. Others encouraged me to keep coming back. My doubting mind wondered if these people were for real. My disease wanted to respond, "Stay away from me! Don't you know what I do with food?" When I left the meeting, I felt more hopeful. More importantly, I thought that returning the next week was definitely an option. This I have done, week after week, for the next quarter of a century.

That is the power in Tradition Five: Carrying the message to newcomers and those who still suffer in the program transforms the giver and the receiver. As a newcomer, I needed to feel accepted, but I wanted to isolate. If group members had ignored me at that first meeting, my disease would have been fed. Because they sought me out, however, I was off-balance. Others didn't treat me in shame-based ways, so my self-hate began to have holes poked in it.

After a few years in the program, I took a service job in my home group as Newcomer Meeting leader. During the discussion time, it was my responsibility to take any newcomers and describe the program in detail, share my experience, and answer any questions. I enjoyed this service job. Having a marketing mentality at the time, however, I always watched if people came back the next

Today

week. For a long stretch, I felt like a failure because no one did. What was I doing wrong?

The answer is in Tradition Five. I was doing nothing wrong. The fact that I continued to recover during that newcomer greeter job was the point. We are charged with a mission in OA: to carry the message. We are powerless over whether that message is received. I want always to be willing to carry the message of recovery because that is how I continue to recover.

~Anonymous

Step 5:

Here is one simple method of doing Step 5 with your sponsor. You will need:

1. A quiet, private place to sit together
2. Time
3. Your 4th step inventory
4. Something to write with
5. Something to write on
6. Willingness
7. Trust

Now, the Simple Recipe...

A Before the read Step 5 from the OA & AA 12 & 12. Ask your HP to give you the openness and willingness to share your inventory with the person you have chosen.

B. Recite the Serenity Prayer together. (I also like to read aloud from the OA pamphlet, "A Twelve Step Guide for You & Your Sponsor", where it describes the fifth step.) I find that a couple of good deep breaths help here.

C. Tell your sponsor you would like to read your inventory twice--the first time without interruption, and do so.

Now, comes the fun part,...

D. Fold a sheet of lined tablet paper into 3 vertical columns. At the top of the first column, write "My Problem". At the top of column two, write the title, "What it looks Like". At the top of the third column write His/Her/Their Problem. Yep...after all that time focusing on our defects, we are actually going to list everyone else's problem.

E. Go back to the first item on your 4th step inventory. Maybe it looks like this:

April 2005

"I have a terrible temper. When my ex-husband comes over to pick up the kids, I have to leave the house because he plunks himself down in front of the t.v. His TV. is broken & he says he doesn't have the money to fix it. I get so angry, I want to strangle him!"

Now...here's where step 5 and step 4 differ. In step 4 I have simply described my actions. In step 5 I begin to examine my motivations.

F. Under column 1, write down the character trait you have identified in your inventory.

"I have a terrible temper." "I get so angry I want to strangle my ex-." "I have to leave the house when he comes over."

Under column 3, write your ex-husband's problem. "His TV. is broken." "He can't afford to have it fixed."

Now comes the Motive/Motivation part. Go back to Column 1 and ask yourself, "Why do I get so angry?" Why do I leave the house?" Some possibilities are: "I get angry because I can't change him. I get angry at myself because I let him sit and watch TV. and do his dirty laundry at my house because his washer is busted, too.

I get angry because I am dependent on the money he sends for child support. I hate being dependent on him. I am afraid that if I don't let him watch TV., wash clothes, etc., he will stop sending the money. I don't really believe that I deserve money for the kids because I really wasn't a good wife/mother. I don't believe I have the right to a decent home and privacy. I leave the house because I am afraid to confront him and stand up for my rights."

Wow!!

Suddenly column 1 begins to fill up, and column 2 is easy. "What it looks like," is, I run away from confrontation. I look angry, but I'm really scared.

On careful examination of the exact nature of our behavior and motives, we discover that the character trait we were dealing with at first--anger--turns out to be something else entirely--fear.

G. Continue to do this with each character trait and episode uncovered in your fourth step inventory.

H. When you have completed the process, carefully bend back column 3. It should be on the far right hand side of the page. Tear it off and burn it. What you should be left with is a column entitled "My Problem," and another one called "What it looks Like". (In case you haven't figured this out, this means letting go of His/Her/ and Their Problems).

Sure enough, the focus is back where it belongs--on us.

I. Ask your sponsor for feedback, and LISTEN.

J. Read Step 6 together

K. Share the Serenity Prayer with your sponsor guide, and open your heart to the healing power of freedom from secrets.

One quick note to those taking a fifth step from someone else...You have been chosen with great care. Prepare yourself with prayer and meditation. Someone has resolved to be totally honest with you, holding back nothing.

What is disclosed must be kept in the strictest confidence. As we listen to the heartfelt sharing of another person, it reminds us of where we have been, and as we identify, we disclose similar experiences. We accept, non-judgmentally, as we have been accepted, knowing that our job here may be to clarify, but never criticize. Patiently, we allow each halting statement to come forth in its own time. Remembering our own first attempts at clearing away the clouds of self-delusion and denial, we encourage our sponsees in their attempts to accept personal responsibility. Helping them to discard the labels of "good" and "bad", we help them look instead at what has created positive or negative results in their lives so that they can begin to chose paths for the future.

Lovingly, we remind them that "we are only as sick as our secrets," and that by sharing their secrets, they have taken a giant step toward spiritual and emotional health. Remind them of the

assets they have uncovered in this process. Welcome them on the road of recovery and dignity.

~ Anonymous

My Story

I didn't intend to relapse. The disease just sort of crept back into my life after 6 years of an imperfect yet consistent abstinence. A very important relationship in my life ended. I had a wonderful support network of family and friends within OA and outside of it. But one day, when the pain was great, my mind starting looking around for something to make me feel good; and, since at the time I had not identified sugar as a problem, I picked up a small package of something sweet to eat while I watched TV. It was only a small amount and I didn't binge on it. Then another day I picked up 2 somethings to make me feel good, but I didn't eat all night. Day after day went by until I found myself in the living room late at night in front of the TV with a whole bag of "little somethings" to make me feel good. I had slipped into relapse.

That was about 5 years ago. I would still be in relapse today, but for 2 things. I never stopped going to meetings and I kept a service commitment I had made to chair a committee for the annual convention. Those two bits of program kept me connected to the Fellowship and to a Power greater than myself, tenuous though the connection was. Because of that connection I was around the tables to see two of my OA friends coming out of relapse and renewing their commitment to abstinence. They were working hard on the Steps with sponsors. I wanted what they had, so I asked one of them to be my sponsor. Four years ago, I renewed my commitment to abstinence and worked Steps One through Twelve with my sponsor. I have enjoyed the gift of abstinence for those 4 years. My *experience* was that just working two of the tools did not bring me abstinence. My *strength* lies in working the Steps everyday and keeping in contact with a sponsor on a consistent basis for accountability. We talk early in the morning 4 days of the week. When I am totally honest with her and make

program and the Steps the focus of our time together, my abstinence is strengthened. My hope lies in the fact that this program of action works, as long as I take the actions suggested as a program of recovery.

How OA works for me

My first OA meeting was 16 years ago. I was 26 years old and food ran my life. I was living in a town where I didn't know anyone except the people I worked with. My weekends consisted of stopping at a restaurant or two and getting food, going home, eating, watching TV, and maybe some cleaning.

This is a disease of isolation. When the phone did ring, I often let the answering machine get it. I really didn't want anyone to disrupt me from my food. The more I ate and sat around, the less energy I had to interact with others.

I have a history of compulsive exercising. As a matter of fact, I spent years in this program refusing to exercise because I couldn't seem to do it in a normal, healthy, rational way. I either had to do it on a strict schedule or not at all.

I spent the first 10 years in this program trying to figure out how to make it work. I had sponsors, sponsors and more sponsors. I gave service. I joined in. I made friends. I was much less lonely than I'd been in my adult life. Looking back on it now, I think I believed that if I just surrounded myself with people who had found relief from this disease, I would find the same relief. It didn't happen that way.

I know now that it doesn't matter who I'm with, what I'm doing, how I'm feeling, where I am, what time it is, there is always an excuse to eat when the disease is in charge. Today, the disease no longer runs my life. So how did this happen?

You'll hear in this program that there are 3 parts to recovery: spiritual, emotional, physical. This is true. However, I believe the only part we're required to work on is the spiritual. Recovery from this disease is spiritual, as evidenced by the 12 steps. We talk about tools. I used the tools for years

and years and all I did was get bigger and bigger and more miserable. I'm not saying the tools aren't a helpful part of the program, they certainly are! I used my sponsor, literature, writing and the telephone to help me work the steps. I went to meetings to stay connected to others who were suffering, too.

Working of the steps, all 12 of them, got me to a place where I was willing to put the food down. It took getting a spiritual life and maintaining a fit spiritual condition. Along the way, I have grown in all 3 parts of recovery. My favorite piece of literature is the AA Big Book. In it, on pg 45 it says the main purpose of the book is to "enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem."

My problem was that I couldn't live life without killing myself with too much food. The only way I could make it through the day was to overeat. I grazed thru the days and binged most nights. After joining this program, I committed to abstinence again and again, treating each one just like a diet. At first I defined abstinence as "nothing after dinner". That was literally all I could handle at the time. I heard others talk about 3 meals a day with nothing in between. I thought that was impossible. I heard people say they didn't eat flour or sugar. I knew I'd NEVER have a food plan like that. It was too restrictive. Those people were over controlling their food, rather than turning it over to God.

In March 2001, I was at a non-OA retreat and doing some intensive journaling. My journal turned into a conversation with God. I was angry and looking for answers. I was blaming God for my unhappiness in life. Suddenly it felt like someone took the pen from my hand and started writing. Among many other very personal things, God told me to give him the sugar and the flour. He also told me to give him the snacking and the junk food. That was a Saturday night

The next morning I went to breakfast and the meal was pancakes. I had to stand there and decide whose will was stronger, mine or God's. While

deciding, I literally could not move. Once I decided to surrender the flour, I went to my room and got some other food I had brought with me (you know us compulsive eaters, we can't rely on others for our food!). After that, my daily food plan has not contained sugar or flour.

In December of 2001, I made a commitment to reduce carbohydrate intake. I had already given up sugar and flour so the switch was easy. I lost more weight. This was before the height of the current low-carb craze. I could go on and on about my feelings about the current craze, but its really none of my business what others do with their food. It is my business to do God's will. I really feel like God literally gave me my food plan. Just like all other phases of recovery, he gave it to me in manageable parts.

Today I am around 100lbs lighter than I was at my top weight of 275. Although I am very blessed to have found a way to live without needing to overfeed myself, I am still battling the last 30-40 lbs. They are truly the hardest. What is helpful about giving this service is that I am reminded that it is only my responsibility to maintain my relationship with God. The Big Book says, "What we really have is a **daily reprieve** contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition". I am not cured.

Service Vacancies

- 1 BOT Trustee
- 2 Region Reps
- 2 World Service Delegates
- Intergroup Secretary
- 2005 Retreat
- Cassette
- Public Information
- Twelve Step Within

Reminder

Where & Whens will be published monthly. Each meeting is responsible for making sure there are enough copies at the meetings. If you need a copy, stop by the office or email the office, & we'll send you one.

WANTED

Guest Newsletter Editors

If you are interested in being a guest newsletter editor, please contact Dawn S (see back of Where & When for trusted servant phone numbers) or send an email to the newsletter address.

Writing experience not necessary. Access to a computer is a must!

New Meetings

No New Meetings



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WSO Website: www.overeatersanonymous.org

Region IV website: www.oaregion4.org

Upcoming Events & Business Info

May 21: 9:30-3:00

Esic Baptist Church
1000 Esic Dr., Edwardsville
Sponsored by Sunshine Group
Edwardsville

June: Open

July 16: 9:30-3:30

St. Joseph Hospital
St. Charles
Sponsored by "Steps to Recovery"
Thursday Night Big Book Mtg.

August: Open

September: Open

October: Open

November: Open

December: Open

To schedule a Super Saturday or other event, contact Ginnie H at (636) 723-0658. Any flyers for OA events submitted for dissemination to meetings or for publication in the newsletter must have received approval by the St. Louis Bi-State Area BOT (ask any BOT member).

Editorial Policy

As suggested by WSO guidelines, newsletters are to be a forum for experience, strength and hope. We encourage and give top priority to original material written by members of this Intergroup.

We reserve the right to edit any and all articles submitted for publication. Submission of article or flyers does not necessarily guarantee publication.

Opinions expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily that of the St. Louis Bi-State Area Intergroup or OA as a whole.