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Always to extend the hand and heart of OA
to all who share my compulsion;
for this, I am responsible. OA©

Quarter 3, 2025

Expanding

At the 2011 World Service Business Conference delegates voted nearly two to one to expand the definition of abstinence to address healthy body weight. The Statement on Abstinence and Recovery has been revised to include the italicized words: "Abstinence in Overeaters Anonymous is the action of refraining from compulsive eating and compulsive food behaviors *while working towards or maintaining a healthy body weight*. Spiritual, emotional and physical recovery is the result of living the Overeaters Anonymous Twelve-Step program."

The 2010 OA Membership Survey reported that 82 percent of our 54,000 members came into OA overweight, and only 50 percent had significant improvement in overall physical health. Fifty-one percent are maintaining a healthy weight, and of those, 77 percent have maintained a healthy weight for more than one year. Forty-one percent of our members are *not* sponsors.

I'm a trusted servant in Region Eight, which contains seven of the 10 most obese states in the United States according to one government agency. Recently someone asked me if I thought obesity was an outside issue in OA. The OA Bylaws state, "The general purpose and power is to promote the public health, and to work with and furnish charitable and cultural assistance to those with problems of obesity . . ." (OA Bylaws, Subpart A, Article II – Purpose, p. 1). If we don't address weight, are we ignoring the elephant in the room?

When I came into OA in 1986 at 250 pounds (113 kg), I was looking to escape a fat body. In the beginning I didn't know I needed more. Today at 125 pounds (57 kg), I know OA has more to offer me.

Why is a healthy body weight so important? First, we desire and deserve healthy, useful lives. Second, we *are* the message. If we don't demonstrate that the OA Twelve Steps work, we lack credibility to do the Twelve-Step work vital to each of us and the survival of OA.

Using a food plan is a starting point to physical recovery. Using the tools of recovery, including the new action plan, will support us as we continue to work the Twelve Steps. Each of us has the promise of a healthy physical, emotional and spiritual life in OA. Let this new expanded definition of abstinence, which is the goal of recovery, help us focus on our personal abstinence, and help newcomers and OA's growth.

Stephanie D., Clearwater, Florida USA
Lifeline, February 2012

Healing Relationships with OA Traditions

I was one of those people who, when first arriving at OA, is interested in all aspects of OA except for _____. And I had a list of what I was interested in and willing to give my time and attention to. The Twelve Steps? Yes. Telling someone what I ate? No. Getting a sponsor? No!

Then came another bottom in OA, and by something divine I was guided to my first sponsor, who not only had me read the Big Book but also *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*. I had to study the OA Traditions and write answers to Traditions questions. Well, by George, did my eyes get opened to a whole new way of living – really good, top-of-the-line, feel-good-about-yourself-and-the-people-you’ve-surrounded-yourself-with kind of living. No longer were my parents responsible for all the crap that happened to me (blaming others). My brother wasn’t hated because he’d gotten everything (resentment)—now he was the sibling I adored. Coworkers weren’t “itty-its” who couldn’t do a damn thing right (expectations). These results were gems of our Twelve Traditions. I have a deep connection with the Traditions and they are directly proportionate to my sanity and serenity when I practice them with genuine affection in my daily affairs.

I’ve had to learn to re-parent myself in OA, an ongoing process. The Traditions were my yellow brick road to self-understanding. Before, my motives were all about selfishness and self-will running riot, but in OA there’s awareness that others’ needs and well-being are important factors. Relationships of all kinds need time and energy. When I’m in the food, I cannot be present for my life or able to be there for you. The Traditions taught me that this self-destructive behavior and way of thinking is the second half of Step One: unmanageability.

There is woven interconnectedness between our Steps and Traditions, and their delicate balance is evident in our spiritual Principles. Being guided by HP and the Traditions helps me get through most days better than picking up the first bite or thinking the first thought that would feed my not-good-enough syndrome. Today, instead of my binge foods, I crave love and good living.

I want to be of service to OA. It has given me so much, including long periods of abstinence and some of the best friends a girl could ask for. (Never call a Twelve Step friend when you want to hear something other than the truth, though.) There have been times during a meeting when I’ve interrupted and said, “It’s my observation we aren’t honoring our Traditions right now. We need to bring this to a group conscience or a business meeting.” And there are times when I’ve asked to talk to someone one-on-one to check in with them about their knowledge regarding our Traditions. (For the longest time, I’d presumed other OA members knew what I knew, but I found it’s not so.) When I was sponsoring, I too took sponsees through the Traditions and they were almost always thankful when we were done. They too felt they had a new lens to see the world and the people in it. They do a body – and a mind – good!

*Ruth S.
Lifeline, May/June 2018*

Eating to Be Undesirable

I spent the first part of my adult life wearing sizes 7 and 9 in clothes, until the event, the incestuous encounter. What made my incestuous situation unusual? My perpetrator was my father, and I was an adult when it happened. I was in such shock after the event that for the next few days my brain (to help me survive, I guess) worked as hard as it could to make me believe it didn't happen.

The day of the event, I walked into my therapist's office and told her what had taken place that morning. I explained I needed to forgive him. I'd been raised in a religious home where we were taught to forgive. I saw forgiveness as the carrot at the end of the stick, so I felt I had to capture this carrot and hold it close to me. In her wisdom and training, my therapist patiently explained the importance of feeling and expressing my anger.

What was anger? I didn't know. I didn't ever remember experiencing it. I was always taught – perhaps brainwashed would be a better way to put it – to never yell, disrespect your elders, or talk back to your parents. I worked so hard at pleasing my parents and trying to be perfect, as my religion dictated, that any anger, which I certainly must have had from an early age, got shoved deeper and deeper. As an adult, I really had no clue what anger was.

So how does this tie in with my 60-pound (27 kg) weight gain? I became very depressed and suicidal, and I ate to feel better. I read that it's common for incest survivors to eat to put on weight to make themselves unattractive and distance themselves from others. Deep down, I wanted physical distance between me and any available men I came in contact with, though I didn't know what I was doing and why I was doing it. I just ate and ate desserts. Sometimes I even gave in and ate desserts for breakfast. All those years after the encounter, I wouldn't wear dresses or skirts unless they were longer than knee-length, and it wasn't until this summer that I finally wore shorts again. On many levels, I was trying to make myself unattractive and undesirable to men.

As I worked through the emotional pain, the anger gradually began to fade, fear of my father began to lessen, and the forgiveness came. I can now be in a room alone with him, give him a hug, and tell him I love him. Time heals all wounds.

But while those years went by when I was working on releasing anger and feelings of betrayal, I continue to put on weight. I hated myself for my lack of discipline and willpower. Many, many times, I thought, "What is wrong with me? Why can't I overcome this habit of running to desserts?" It happened when I was angry, or sad, or even when I was celebrating some occasion. About a year ago, it hit me. I'm an addict and my drug of choice is sugar in all forms.

I'd heard about OA from two friends. One had gone to meetings about fifteen years ago and lost all her excess weight and got off blood pressure medication. She really inspired me, so I went to a couple of meetings. But I wasn't willing to face my demons.

Four years ago, another friend entered OA. Week by week, I saw him gradually lose weight. Again, I went to a couple of meetings, but I wasn't ready.

It wasn't until four months ago that I realized I must do something to stop living in this pit of despair, because nothing was working. I couldn't manage to stay on a diet, let alone give up my drug. I looked up meetings in my town and went to my first meeting again. I continued to go but I resisted the Step it would take to become willing to let go of my love of sugar.

About four weeks into it, after listening to stories from other members, I began to feel I wasn't alone, and I wasn't a horrible, undisciplined person: I have an addiction. The people at the meetings gave me hope that maybe I could do this too. They made me feel loved and accepted. After three weeks, I purchased two books, *The Twelve Steps and*

Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous. I found a sponsor and began to work the program. Now as I write this, I have lived in abstinence for ninety days. Never, ever before had I lasted on any eating program longer than two weeks.

What surprised me most about this wonderful program is the spiritual practice of it. I walk a spiritual path, but I never thought OA or any Twelve Step program could help me in my walk with God. It's a joy to meet and communicate with supportive members at my weekly meetings, and I am so grateful for the constant support of my sponsor.

OA has changed my life. Not only am I getting healthier due to eating so much better, but I'm losing weight. I look forward to my meetings. I look forward to each day. I look forward to being "real."

OA is helping me open up. Emotionally, it's helping me be willing to tell people how I'm really feeling. I'm learning to set boundaries and express myself in ways that are not destructive to those around me or myself. I now have the courage to say how I'm feeling when asked. I realize when you truly love yourself you are able to focus on others.

I want to live in love. I'm learning that when I'm alone with my thoughts I can love myself. I believe we come to this planet to learn what it is to love ourselves, so we can then be free to love others. I believe we are here to love one another.

*Cecilia B., Laporte, Colorado USA
Lifeline, May/June 2018*

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Listen to Your Heart

The normal feeling of the newcomer is either "I am home" or "I am in hell," but it doesn't seem to matter. We can make it with both feelings. Sometimes, those of us who are the most cynical, stubborn and negative hang around the longest to get the new attitude.

Nineteen years ago, I sat in the back row (I call it the shoe department: the slippers, the loafers, the sneakers, etc.), weighing over 300 pounds. I was an equal-opportunity hater, and hated everyone in the room. Today I have learned to love those same people; because of them, and with my Higher Power's grace, I have maintained a weight loss of over 100 pounds for 18 years.

I recently returned from a retreat with 50 men in various stages of recovery. One gentleman had lost 350 pounds, and said he still had some to go. Recovery ranged from a newcomer with 25 years in AA who broke down and admitted he was killing himself with food, to a gentleman with 22 years in the OA program. The empty chairs there reminded me of all those who've left our program and never made it back.

Over the years, I have learned that it is much easier to keep my abstinence than to lose it and try to get it back. We share our mistakes

with one another so that we can learn from each other. This program works because it is about changing through the Twelve Steps. My sponsor and I still attend a weekly Step-Study meeting; they told me when I was a newcomer that the directions are in the Steps.

If you are new, keep coming back. Don't listen to your head, since it will probably lead you away from recovery. Listen to your heart, because this is a program of the heart. Read the promises, because they were made for us.

*P.S., Jacksonville, Oregon USA
Lifeline, January 1996*

Calling All Readers!

This newsletter is only as good as the contributions of our readers. YOU have something to share! It can be something you shared at a meeting, what came to mind as you read our literature, a new way you handled a situation. Please contribute to our newsletter. We need to hear from you! Use this link to submit your article:

<https://oa.org/newsletters-2> or send your article to newsletter@oa.org

After six years of relapse, this member realized she had to be willing before the program would work for her

Welcome Home

After two years in program and a sixty-seven pound weight loss, I awoke one morning believing I was cured. This was the first insane thought before the first compulsive bite.

It took six years of overeating and suffering for me to make it back to OA, although I tried to several times. I'd go to meetings searching for a person or sponsor who would say the right thing and "fix" me. I thought someone else should be responsible for my recovery – or blamed for the lack of it. I didn't realize I had to be willing.

The "geographic cure" didn't work. Neither did diets. Self-control was nonexistent. I was powerless over food and completely miserable. I continued to pray for an answer even though. I thought H.P. had given up on me.

Three and a half months ago I read a notice in the local newspaper. Someone was starting a new OA meeting in our small town. Little did I know that this person would become my sponsor and dear friend. I went to this meeting and came home abstinent!

I'm back home again with my OA family. I've learned a lot in the past six years, including the biggest lesson of all: I can't live without OA. In the last three and a half months I've experienced God-given abstinence, recovery from my disease, and an understanding of the program I didn't get the first time around. And I've made many wonderful friends.

In our world of fast foods and quick fixes, my great hope was always an overnight change, a magic pill, an easier, softer way. I was too impatient to wait and too lazy to work long and hard to make it happen. This, I'm grateful to say, is what I *used* to be like. One thing is for sure – breaking old habits doesn't come instantly.

Nothing takes longer or requires greater effort than practicing the principles of the program in all my affairs. Nor is there anything more satisfying than a life lived fully, free from compulsive overeating. Thanks, H.P., I'm glad you waited for me!

*P.M., Weatherford, Texas
Lifeline, February, 1993*

The Sponsoree's Gift

Very often I hear struggling newcomers say they don't have a sponsor and can't call anyone because, "I'm afraid I'll bother people." This article is for them and for all who are afraid to reach out. I want them to know how valuable they are to my program.

I've been a member of OA for four and a half years and have maintained a back-to-back abstinence for almost two years. At meetings, I offer myself as a sponsor. Sometimes I think I have enough people to sponsor, but I let God make the decision. Consequently I make and receive a lot of calls – but it was not always this way.

In the beginning my sponsor was the only person I ever called. If she wasn't home and I was in trouble with food, I'd think that I had to stay in my disease because I was afraid to "bother"

someone else. My self-esteem was so low that I was afraid I wasn't *important* enough for someone to talk to. Today I know that I am important, but it took a long time and consistent abstinence for me to realize it.

This past summer God gave me a new challenge. A newcomer who was struggling and needed a lot of unconditional love and attention asked me to sponsor her. God had never brought a sponsoree like this into my life before. What a blessing!

Shortly after I started working with this young woman, twenty-three years my junior, I began to feel that helping her was a way to make amends to my own children for my behavior while in the grip of my disease. I knew that God had put her in my path so that I could take a closer look at how I related to my daughter.

This sponsoree was like a sponge soaking up the program. She'd call to talk food. She'd call to make appointments. She'd call so we could go to meetings together. She'd call and talk for long periods of time, and I felt compelled to stay on the line. I loved her from the beginning with a rare and beautiful feeling that I haven't often experienced.

At the same time, she challenged my thinking. She asked questions that made me look at my program and forced me to grow even when I didn't want to.

And then a serious problem occurred in my marriage. Suddenly there was a huge financial burden and some hard personal decisions to be made.

I felt as if I were drowning. Step one was about the only step I was willing and able to work consistently. I had no serenity and struggled to maintain my abstinence. The freedom from obsession with food thoughts, a freedom I'd enjoyed for such a long time, had vanished.

I realize today that these thoughts were the result of fear and not hunger. Most of that summer I just barely got myself to the two jobs I was working to keep us afloat. I was exhausted with stress and fear and overwork.

I was overwhelmed by the needs of this newcomer. Since my first relapse thought is: "I am junk!" I tried to push her away with my behavior. I felt I had no recovery to give her, and told her to get another sponsor. She stuck to me like glue anyway. "You're not getting rid of me that easily!" she said. "I want you and I'm keeping you!" Often she'd challenge me, saying: "I haven't seen you at a meeting lately. You can't afford to give up your meetings because you're busy." To my disease, this newcomer was an annoyance. To my recovery, she was a lifeline from my Higher Power!

Never *ever* feel like you will be bothering someone when you call or ask them to sponsor you. This is how the program works! Today I am at peace once again, maintaining my abstinence and working all of the steps. The problems of yesterday are solved. If I hadn't had this persistent sponsoree I might not be abstinent and in recovery today.

I want to thank her, all my sponsorees, and everyone who calls me. It is only in giving my program away, no matter how little of it I think I have to give, that I can keep what I've been so generously given.

Anonymous

Lifeline, March 1992 (pages 19-21)

For Discussion:

The rewards of sponsorship go both ways, as was discovered by the writer of **The Sponsoree's Gift**, page 19. Going around the room, ask those who've been or who are sponsors to share the rewards they've received from this important tool of recovery. What intangible gifts have you received from your sponsorees? Has sponsoring another member helped you to "keep coming back?"