

Hello my fellow OA friends!

Well, as the school holidays have now come to an end I imagine that most of you will have already had your summer holiday and are now getting back to 'normal' (whatever that is!). I don't think I've ever been quite so pleased to do so. Don't get me wrong – my summer holiday wasn't awful by any stretch of the imagination, but I was given a timely reminder of just how cunning, baffling and very very powerful my disease still is.

When I approached my fellow SBS committee members as to what they thought I should base my editorial on one person suggested writing about how to survive a holiday abstinently and the fact that – just like SBS - our Programme is portable. My reaction at the time was that I actually needed to survive it first! And as for my Programme being portable - yes, I took OA literature with me (and read it virtually daily) and yes, I remained in daily email contact with my sponsor, but somehow I stupidly didn't make time to maintain conscious contact with my Higher Power and consequently a fair amount of "*self-will run riot*" [*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001, p.62*] went on. To hear the rest of my story, please go to page 13.

The Tool that we've asked you to share about in this edition of Step By Step is one that is very dear to my heart indeed, namely service. I just wish there were more hours in the day to do all the service I currently do and indeed would like to do. However, I've recently had to review my present service commitments prior to deciding whether to put myself forward for a position on our Intergroup Board. I've been quite involved in the North of England Intergroup this year, what with us having the privilege of hosting the National Service Assembly (NSA) and Convention next month, and I've really enjoyed it. However, after consultation with my Higher Power, my sponsor and my husband, much to my disappointment (and embarrassment) I have had to acknowledge the fact that I already do enough service and accept that I don't have capacity for any more right now.

Before I take anything else on, something else will have to go first – it's all about that magical word that can often still elude me...*balance*. I would like to think that in two years' time when the position I was most interested in is up for rotation, my current situation may have changed slightly and I will be able to serve beyond group level, but just for today I'm not there yet. Just like with the disease, becoming aware of this on an intellectual level, but then the harder bit of accepting it in my heart, has been quite a process for me.

I look forward to hopefully getting to know a lot of our SBS readers and authors at the NSA in Sheffield soon – it's always really nice to be able to put a face to a name, so please don't hesitate to come up to me and say hello. Hopefully I'll be living up to the theme of our Convention on the Sunday **"Living The Serenity Prayer"** and not dashing about like a headless chicken, although knowing me, there will probably still be an element of that, as I've had to come to accept that this is my default position and I am actually quite effective under pressure! I take service extremely seriously and whenever I'm asked to do a job, I try and do it to the very best of my ability, thus putting my character defects to good use for once!

Love in Fellowship

*Lucy, SBS Editor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

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

Share with fellow 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 2014 edition of SBS is Friday, 31st October 2014. Topics:

Step Six *"Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character"*

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

Tool of Recovery: Telephone

Topics: "Living The Serenity Prayer" and "Surviving The Holidays"

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

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

Step Five

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

Dear Newcomer

I felt compelled to write to you to share my experience, strength and hope. I have difficult days and still find it hard to say how I'm feeling because I think I should be more positive or doing better than I am. What I've come to realise is that I am doing my best and that is all I can do.

I struggled with the Higher Power/God concept in the beginning. My mum is in another Twelve-Step Fellowship and at the beginning, her Higher Power (HP) was a tree in the back garden she'd go and sit under and talk to. So she also found it difficult. I still don't believe that there is a conscious creator with thoughts that cares about me: this is far too much of a wild surmise for my brain to grasp. What I do believe is that we are all connected by the life force of the universe.

I watched a programme about physics a few years ago and it explained that every single atom has to have an individual energy signature: no two can be the same. This means that if I boil the kettle, every single atom in the universe has to very subtly change its energy signature to accommodate the atoms in the kettle warming up and changing. I'm sure it's much more in depth than that but I have a natural affinity and love of science and this is my understanding. I like knowing, albeit it basically, how things work. Or how can I explain what keeps my heart beating, my lungs breathing and my body functioning? It certainly isn't my conscious mind. I don't have to think about these things for them to just happen. Something inside of me, whether I choose to call it an unseen energy, science or God, keeps me alive.

My Higher Power is this unseen energy that connects us all. I can't see it or feel it, I don't believe it feels anything particular about me or my situation, it can't speak to me, and yet my experience has been that when I *'act as if'* a Higher Power exists, I get to tap into an internal resource that I never knew I had. Some days, my analytical brain takes over and tries to make sense of how I have been relieved of the obsession with food, but most days I just put one foot in front of the other, put my hands together in prayer and *'act as if'*. I don't need to question how something works when my experience shows me that it doesn't matter how: it just matters that it does.

Step Five was an incredibly positive and freeing experience although it also brought up some painful experiences of my past that I didn't know had affected me so badly. When I was 11 or 12 I stayed at a friend's house and woke in the night to find her father touching me inappropriately. There was also another incident of sexual abuse with a teenager who I believe was on drugs. I was a child and didn't know how to stop either thing from happening. I never told a soul until doing my Step Five with my sponsor. After my sponsor left, I had an overwhelming outpouring of emotions; fear, loathing, sadness, self-pity. I cried and cried for the child I was and the adult I had become.

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It was excruciatingly uncomfortable but I knew I couldn't stop it and that food wouldn't push it down this time, so I helplessly let the feelings wash over me and through me and felt empty once I had eventually stopped crying.

It was like a release, an outpouring of emotions I'd refused to feel for years. It was healthy and healing. It was also very tempting to stop there. To go back to the food which I knew would embrace me warmly and fill the void inside of me and stop all the terrible, confusing churning feelings. I was struck dumb with fear, afraid of going backwards and afraid of moving forwards, and so I prayed to an unknown power deep inside of me and I found the resource to move forward. I'm now on my Step Eight and, although not every day is easy, my life has utterly changed.

What I've come to realise is when I was anaesthetising my difficult feelings with food, I was also numbing wonderment and beauty and love and light and happiness and excitement and joy! Feelings of deep gratitude, happiness and love have started flowing slowly into me. I notice things much more now too. Before OA, I'd be in a rush, my brain swinging wildly between feeling fake grandeur and thinking I was better than everyone else, to feeling self-loathing and fear and thinking I was the scum of the earth. Now I realise I am equal to everyone I meet and this wonderful truth has opened me up to making new friends, meeting new and interesting people, being more accepting, more gracious, more forgiving, and softer with myself and with others. I find beauty in the most unexpected places and feel like a child discovering the world for the first time (just think the water we drink from the tap could have been pooped in by a dinosaur! What a new and brilliant discovery thinking about how old water actually is).

I really believe the Steps are in order for a reason. I know I couldn't have made the decision to hand my will and my life over to an HP in Step Three, had I not felt utter despair in Step One and a glimmer of light and hope in Step Two. Step Three doesn't say I MUST hand my will and my life over: it only says I made a decision to. I really think the rest of the Steps teach me how to hand my will and my life over and I honestly don't think I'll fully realise how to do this until I've worked all of the Steps.

I'm writing this because I know you can do this. I know you can work the Steps and find serenity because I can. Keep coming back - it works if you work it!

Love in Fellowship

Sam D, Nottingham

The Power of Reading Aloud

I was blessed to be involved with a 'Big Book' study weekend.

The script all ready, I turned up, sat down and began.

Literature is an awesome Tool, necessary to convey the message of working the Twelve Steps as fast as you can.

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"I can't think my way into right actions, but I can act my way into right thinking"

Accents, pitch, intonation, pauses, mistakes, volume.

Sat side by side with another, turning pages, pre-empting, supporting.

Encouraging, listening to the words bounce off the walls, coming back in much stronger.

Explanations bringing understanding beyond my wildest dreams, the simplicity of our founders.

If I follow the instructions page by page I will be well day by day.

Helping others to get what I have, saving souls.

Humility, acceptance, joy, tears, laughter, all for the taking.

Being willing to read aloud, grateful for my voice, the voice that abstinence and recovery helped me uncover.

Mutual book studying is an ancient art, knowing others are in the moment, there with you, doing our best to move closer to our Gods.

Holding hands, saying the Serenity Prayer, inviting wisdom into the room.

Strength in numbers, many ears open to learn new ways of living.

Pens of many colours putting notes on paper, reinforcing the words that will change lives forever.

Teachable, willing, a trusted servant, anonymous and happy to help.

Sharing, giving, the gift of patience, tolerance, love and compassion.

Hearing the words of another's Step Five, connecting with strangers upholding anonymity, trust and faith.

The Book came alive with meaning and purpose, written with love, believing, empowering.

I came home full of awe how the words had sunk in, now is my time to write my own.

Sharing, receiving the love of another with the same desire to recover fills me with hope.

Stepping forwards backwards, up, down, side to side, keeps me moving as I journey.

Into the world of spiritual things.

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I still read aloud, as a teacher does, for I am the student eager to learn the tricks of the fellows who went before me.

The words sink deeper into my memory, words of instruction to keep me well, one day at a time is all I do.

Good enough for me and it can be for you too.

Blessings galore for the psychic change and thanks for reading the words on the page.

Love and peace, Suzi – North West

Moving Forwards

For the first time in a long time, I was in turmoil yesterday and I took my will back. Over and over in my head, the thought and obsession turned to bingeing. I couldn't see the wood for the trees. I felt broken, shaken, afraid, dumbstruck. I didn't know how to deal with the conflicting feelings and so I made the decision to have an all-out binge, knowing it would quieten my raging head. Once I'd made the decision, I felt immediately better. In fact, I felt like a child desperately rebelling against a parent. Shaky and brave. Up yours, God!

I went into the shop with purpose, having already decided what I would buy to binge on, and they didn't have any of what I'd already decided I would buy. I scanned the shelves in desperation, trying to decide what would taste better than abstinence feels. I left that shop with a pack of sugar-free gum in one hand and a tin of tomatoes in the other. I wasn't proud, I didn't feel relieved or happy or saved, I felt furious! I got in my car and I raved at my Higher Power, "It's your bloody fault I'm like this! Before you, I would have found relief in bingeing, now I'm too far along the path to turn back, but I'm afraid to move forward!" I cried and I cried (chewing my gum furiously) and after running out of curses, I sobbed for relief. Please God, take my will and my life, please help me to step outside of myself, relieve me of selfishness and self-seeking and FEAR and dishonesty.

As my sobs became less dramatic and my heartbeat slowed, I felt an answer. "Work the Programme. Work the Steps in order. One after the other. Carry on working on and finish my Step Nine. Trust my Higher Power. Reach out to other people who need it most. Accept that not every day I will feel wonderful. Be gentle with myself. Do my best."

Meetings I go to often end with a reading of the Promises, and when I was new to the Fellowship, through my rose-tinted specs, I assumed these were the Promises of the Twelve Steps. I later found out that they aren't. The Promises don't come true midway through the Twelve Steps: the Promises come true midway through Step Nine. Page 83-84 of the 'Big Book' [*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001*]: "*The spiritual life is not a theory. **We have to live it...** If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No*

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"If I'm debating; the answer's 'No!' If in doubt, DON'T!"

matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realise that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves."

When I was on Step Three, I panicked about Step Nine, but I now know the Steps are in order for a reason. Having finished my Step Three, I was ready to do my Step Four. Now I'm on Step Nine and I am ready, I am fearless and I have a strong desire to move forward. Someone once said to me in Programme that if we're not moving forwards, we're going backwards. Yesterday was irrefutable proof that this is the case for me. Today I choose to move forwards.

Sam D, Nottingham

Recovery from Relapse Month

The Tuesday evening Chryston meeting in Scotland is a grateful part of Caledonian Intergroup. As a group, we were aware of a few members who had gone into relapse after a good period of abstinence, or had been in relapse for some time. One regular visitor to the meeting had mentioned she felt very ashamed of still being in relapse and although she always received a warm welcome and offers of help at meetings, she felt judged and 'less than' others for being in the food for so long.

At our group conscience, we talked about our group experiences and what we could do and share to help others. Some of us had experience of being in and out of relapse for some time; some had left the Fellowship and come back; some of us were currently in relapse. Some of us became abstinent in the early days of our recovery and had been blessed with continuous abstinence and recovery since; some came from other Fellowships where the concept of abstinence was still being learned and fully understood.

All of us had a different experience but we could see where devoting some focus to relapse recovery and prevention could be useful for us all. Our biggest hope was that it would raise awareness of the fact that the still suffering compulsive overeater is not just the newcomer, but is also the member sitting next to us or, even worse, sitting at home knowing there is a place to find help but too frightened or ashamed to come and find it.

A member researched on the World Service website and found a wealth of information and suggestions on the Twelfth Step Within. Our meeting usually focused on a Step and a Tradition for the month as part of our format, but we agreed to spend July looking at Steps Six and Seven combined and have June as our 'focus on relapse recovery' month. From www.oa.org, we found a suggested recovery from relapse meeting format, which we used as the basis of how we would chair the meetings, removing parts which didn't feel appropriate in our setting and adding in some of the familiar parts of our usual format which worked well.

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The group talked about how useful it would be to have visitors to leave with something tangible to help them after the meeting, and it was agreed everyone attending would receive a pack to take away. We found some OA-approved literature on www.oa.org which had been drafted by a Twelfth Step Within workshop suggestions group. Two pieces of literature spoke to us: '*12 steps to a slip*' talking about some of the dangerous behaviours and ideas which can sometimes ultimately lead to a relapse, and '*Been Slipping and a Sliding*', a writing tool with questions for those in relapse. We also selected the wallet card '*Think First*' which we felt would be helpful for members to keep handy in the days between meetings. We arranged for printing, ordered extra cards, and the literature was then collated in a pack along with a list of all group members and their contact details.

We organised two speakers for each meeting in June, both sharing for 15 minutes on their experience of recovering from relapse, or how they prevented it. Sharers were asked to focus on the Tools, literature or actions they used, and the solution provided by Overeaters Anonymous and the Twelve Steps. We made up flyers to raise awareness at other meetings and shared our plans through a local email loop, as well as sharing on the OAGB email newsletter. We also asked fellows to get in touch with anyone they knew who was struggling or they hadn't seen in a while at meetings.

We were all set, now just to pray people would come...and we were not disappointed! We had an average of 20+ people at the four meetings in June, compared to our usual average of 10. Many were members who had not visited our meeting for a while, or were in relapse. Members offered lifts and filled cars to come and support us; some came to all four meetings. Both the sharers and the members around the room shared their experience, strength and hope with great honesty, and the atmosphere was amazing. Sharing both the pain and sadness of relapse, some real strength and courage in the face of such a deadly disease, and, best of all, hope for those who were struggling.

We had some newcomers who visited the meetings in June, and they were able to get a strong message of support and recovery from the meetings too. By the end of the month, some members were sharing that they had found abstinence during June, thanks to the message and support they had received in the rooms.

The feedback has been extremely positive and members across our Intergroup have thanked us. Other groups have mentioned they may also look at having more focus on the Twelfth Step Within and we will definitely run another month with a similar format. As a group, we are very grateful for the support, and overwhelmed by the power of this Programme - we had goose bumps all month talking about the meetings and listening to people share. It has also put the member in relapse more at the front of our minds when looking at topics and how we keep our meeting strong, which can only be good for our group as a whole. We would encourage any group to give it a try!

Laura, Chairperson, Tuesday Chryston

True Hunger vs Emotional Hunger

The reading in *For Today* [Overeaters Anonymous, Inc., 1982, p.199] says *"Nature did not make me a compulsive overeater. My hunger pangs are like everybody else's: they tell me when I must take nourishment to sustain my life. When I began eating to satisfy emotional hunger, this simple mechanism went out of kilter..."*

Over the years I've read a lot of literature about food, hunger signals, nutrition, etc. thinking that the more knowledge I had, the better I'd be equipped to deal with my food issues. Needless to say this knowledge didn't stop my decline into using food to deal with emotional hunger. One of the articles I read talked about how true physical hunger is felt in the mouth and throat, which at the time I thought was absurd.

A few years later I decided to fast. I told my husband it was for spiritual reasons but really I just wanted to lose weight. I didn't eat a single calorie for 14 days, living entirely on filtered tap water. It was both a liberating and terribly desperate experience and I recognise now the insanity of it. The good thing that came about from my experience was feeling real, true hunger and I felt it in my mouth and throat!

I have spent years working on being mindful of what I am feeling and recognising the feeling for what it is. For me, true hunger is very gradual; it starts as a vague/subtle feeling and gradually, as time passes, gets stronger. I tend to feel it mostly in my mouth and sometimes on my tongue and in my throat. Emotional hunger is loud and it comes on quickly and feels very urgent. I feel emotional hunger in my stomach and in my solar plexus. Then there is thirst. Thirst has been a tricky feeling for me to grasp. I feel thirst in my stomach and solar plexus too and it's very easy for me to think the feeling of thirst is hunger, as it also comes on gradually.

In the past when I've thought I've felt hungry, I now recognise it as either thirst or emotional hunger. I still get confused over this, particularly if I'm thirsty and hungry at the same time, so will often have a glass of water and wait a little while before eating to see if that has changed the feeling. It's nearly 11am now as I'm typing this and I think I'm hungry; however, questioning myself, I realise I'm feeling what I think is hunger in my stomach and as I had breakfast and then my morning snack less than an hour ago, I'm pretty sure I'm feeling thirsty. I sit with a jug of water at my desk and glancing at that has also confirmed I've not drunk sufficient water this morning. How odd that I don't know my own body!

Something else I've discovered over the years is that when I am physically hungry, food tastes better and as I eat a meal and hunger diminishes, the food very subtly stops tasting as good when I've eaten enough. This is a difficult indicator to use to determine fullness though, because sometimes I'll be eating a meal I'm really, really enjoying and so I don't notice the subtle decline in taste and I carry on.

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There is also an internal switch I have and this too is quite hard for me to recognise when it's about to flick on. The switch flicks when I've eaten too much and once the switch goes, then I find it near impossible to stop eating. Personally I think this is the point where I stop eating for physical hunger and start eating for emotional hunger. Once I've triggered this switch, I usually only stop eating when I feel very physically uncomfortable or sick. I know my danger foods - mostly foods that are high in calories but empty in nutrients - and today, because of OA, I make better food choices and so it takes much more food than before to trigger my switch.

The very important thing I want to say is that before OA I knew about my internal 'trigger switch'; I knew what situations would always end up with me overeating; I'd experienced the feeling of true hunger before OA so knew what that felt like; but none of this, not anything, stopped me from using food to deal with life. The one thing that has changed me as a person to the point where I can use this knowledge is the Twelve Steps. All of these feelings, all of this knowledge, all of the intuition was not enough - I needed to work the Twelve Steps to find recovery.

Today I choose to listen to my body, knowing that what I'm hearing CAN be listened to because of the Twelve Steps!

Thank you OA for saving my life and continuing to do so daily.

Sam D, Nottingham

Reaching Out

My husband has been away working and I have been feeling a bit overwhelmed with all the extra chores and childcare, not to mention all the emotional mix of a pubescent daughter with me a menopausal mother, ahhh! Add to this working from home and you get the picture!

I can afford one babysitter a week to get to a meeting, which I truly value, as money is tight right now so as well as my weekly meeting, my connection with my sponsor is my lifeline.

One particular day I was set to burst and worse still was on the verge of really hurting myself with food that does not work for me. I tried to get hold of my sponsor, to no avail, so then decided to ring another fellow overeater who I really liked and respected. I got the answer machine! I decided to leave a message, which was very long, explaining what was going on for me.

An amazing thing happened: I realised that I got the relief I needed, just by leaving a message. Wow, what a miracle that was.

I have tried this with sending emails and it works too.

I am not perfect and some days I can forget that I have yet another set of great Tools I can use to stop me hurting myself but I know I have an amazing Programme in OA. I am so grateful as my life is changing beyond recognition, making me a better person, one day at a time.

Elaine, Lewes

"Let go or be dragged!"

I must drive at a speed I'm comfortable with

"*They drive like car thieves,*" is a saying I've heard a few times, and it's true! They do drive very fast, swerving, accelerating round bends, nudging out at every opportunity to try to overtake, even if it's only to gain one car's length on the road. You see them in your wing mirrors, with their lights on, willing you to pull over so they can get past.

The temptation is to feel pressured and hassled: I must drive faster; I'm driving too slowly; I'm irritating the other road users; I am a dawdling, plodding, backward driver from boring old England.

But - I don't know the road; I am driving on the right (which is foreign to me); I am driving an unfamiliar hire car (a manual, whereas I'm used to an automatic) and **I must drive at a speed I'm comfortable with**. I don't want to be careering round hairpin bends, missing turnings, putting the lives of my passengers at risk, and making everyone feel sick into the bargain.

This strikes me as a good metaphor for OA, and the way I am now living my life (imperfectly!) according to the Twelve Steps.

I need to do what's right for me, regardless of what other people think, provided I don't hurt other people.

On holiday with my in-laws recently, I wasn't consuming bread, sugar, caffeine and alcohol – the four things that really mess me up. The others, not being compulsive eaters, were chugging these foods and drinks back at every opportunity, and good luck to them. They kept asking me about my food choices and didn't seem to understand why I had to stay away from these items, and there's no reason why they should, of course. I explained to them that I feel worse if I eat them: bloated and negative with wheat, and irritable, moody and anxious with sugar. Caffeine just gives me a headache so it's not really a compulsive food for me. I gave up alcohol when I realised, through doing Step Four, that a lot of the things I regretted doing or saying had happened when I was drunk or 'merry', and I kind of became a whole different personality when I was drinking.

I started to feel that my in-laws all thought I was a fussy eater, an attention-seeker, overly picky, constantly on a diet but never losing any weight, and in any case, always the fattest one in the group. Over the years they know I've been on one fad diet or another: low-carb, no bread, eating chocolate/not eating chocolate etc.

But (a) what other people think of me is none of my business, (b) they probably *don't* think any of these things and aren't bothered what I eat/do/say, and (c) I have to eat what's right for me, because I want to be **well!** Physically and spiritually freed from the obsession, going from one meal to the next eating moderately, cleanly, abstinently and **doing life in between**.

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And, getting back to the driving analogy, if other people want to go faster than me, to take more risks, to swerve more erratically or accelerate and brake more violently, or just to drive differently, that's fine. But I have to go at a speed that's right for me.

Sarah

"Cunning, baffling, powerful" *(continued from editorial)*

I've been blessed with more physical recovery since the Ilkley Retreat in May 2013 during which time I was released of a further five stone in excess weight (in addition to the other seven already released). For the first time ever my body weight was healthy and I was wearing clothes in sizes I've only ever previously dreamt about. Healthcare professionals were even starting to indicate that 'enough was enough' and my sponsor had even dared mention the word 'maintenance' to me which, if I'm entirely honest, I didn't take too kindly to because in my eyes all the time I could still 'pinch more than an inch' I hadn't completely arrived yet.

Nevertheless, I was clearly delighted by all the positive changes and reactions to such, yet at the same time it was unfamiliar territory and all a bit scary, albeit exciting too. However, I hadn't a clue about maintenance. Let's face it - I know all about how to pile on a vast amount of weight very rapidly and before my disease progressed to being 'terminal' I'd always been pretty good at losing substantial quantities over a short space of time too. However, like I said, I'd never ever reached a normal body size before and therefore knew nothing about hanging onto it either!

As is so often the case, my disease is always lying in wait, patiently waiting for an opportunity to enter through the back door without me even noticing half the time. I suppose in hindsight spending a fortnight in a 4* all-inclusive hotel where the food was quite literally 'to die for' was the perfect opportunity. Since I'd finally become willing to do all those things that I've read about in some of the OA literature over the years which I had previously dismissed as being somewhat extreme and not for me, namely planning, weighing and measuring my food, counting the 'c' word etc., I'd already started to notice that whenever I went out for a meal where it was sometimes just not possible to plan in detail in advance, I would sometimes overindulge and prove the validity of the slogan '*to fail to plan is to plan to fail*'. No surprises then that going on such a holiday was going to cause me some grief if I not only failed to plan, but also stupidly decided to rely on Lucy's will as opposed to my Higher Power's! It doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out that that could potentially be a recipe for disaster and yet it took me almost by surprise!

I don't know if anybody else can identify, but I suspect that being at a healthy body weight has messed with my head somewhat on a whole different level which I have previously had no experience of. Seeing as my body size is now classed as 'normal', the disease fooled me into believing that my mind had actually followed suit and that maybe, just maybe, I was now cured. It tricked me further into believing that I could therefore act just like other people - so-called 'normies' - who generally overindulge whilst on holiday, so in my wisdom I must've subconsciously decided to give it a try! Like I've ever had a 'normal' relationship with food - who was I trying to kid?! It may come as no surprise to you that the disease is indeed progressive, for example, I was eating things in week two of the holiday that I'd successfully avoided throughout week one; the quantities were also on the up as was my weight. I'm not proud of it and was in two minds as to whether to write about it, but this Programme "*demands rigorous honesty*" [*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001, p.58*] of me.

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"We wear our disease on the outside"

Thanks to social media just recently I was reminded of a very pertinent paragraph in the 'Big Book' [*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001, p.30*] "...our drinking careers have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could drink like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his drinking is the great obsession of every abnormal drinker. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity and death". Harsh words indeed, but they definitely rang true as this last holiday has served as a real wake-up call for me and I've learnt some pretty harsh lessons from it too. Thankfully, the damage wasn't too great and I'm still classed as being at a normal/healthy body weight (just!). I'm even more grateful for the fact that as soon as I returned from my holiday I reverted straight back to doing all the things that keep me firmly rooted in recovery which I'd failed to do on holiday, i.e. planning, weighing, measuring, maintaining a conscious contact with my HP etc. And guess what? *'It works if you work it!'* Ironic that because I'm the comedian who usually adds 'it doesn't if you don't' to the end of that slogan! High time I ate my own words, methinks - but only if they're on my food plan, of course!!!

Last month I celebrated 20 years of abstinence. That negative voice in my head, which in my opinion is the disease trying to get its foot in the door again, keeps trying to tell me I don't actually deserve the shiny new gold-plated recovery coin that my Group kindly presented me with, along with lots of lovely cards and gifts. Granted, some people may be well within their rights to question its validity given my recent experience, whereas the bottom line for me is the fact that I've not had to endure a full-blown binge since joining this amazing Fellowship on 29th August 1994 and I simply cannot express just how eternally grateful I am for that. Yes, I've had times when my abstinence has become a bit sloppy and I've gained some weight, but maybe the very fact that my definition of abstinence hasn't been as rigid as some people's has indeed helped me to *'keep coming back'*. For somebody like me who is still very prone to being both a perfectionist and a control freak that is massive progress as both of these character defects could have easily led me to give up at the very first hurdle I ever encountered in recovery – and believe you me, throughout the past 20 years there have been absolutely loads of them!

If I'm entirely honest I've probably never before come quite as close to relapse as I did just recently, which again confirms the progressive nature of this crippling disease. I've always stated that whilst we're getting well, the disease is doing push-ups in the background, getting stronger and stronger, just waiting for an opportunity to strike. I suppose it stands to reason, then, that whilst I've worked harder than ever on my recovery over the past year or so, the disease has had to up its game too in order to try and win me back over. Let this serve as a word of warning to anybody who's been around OA for a while and/or whose body has been transformed from being classed as morbidly obese to 'normal' thanks to this wonderful Programme. As I mentioned in my editorial at the beginning - this disease really is *"cunning, baffling, powerful"*! [*Alcoholics Anonymous, Fourth Edition, 2001, p.58-59*].

Love in Fellowship

Lucy, Newcastle upon Tyne

Tool of Recovery: Service

Outside Professional Outreach (PO) Talk

I have always been told that getting abstinent is one thing, staying abstinent is quite another.

Service is one of OA's Tools of recovery and my desire to stay abstinent by the grace of God meant that once I had a good period of recovery and had been guided by experienced members, it has been a joy to get involved firstly in group service and then at Intergroup.

Example and encouragement of recovering members has led me from GSR (Group Service Representative) to Professional Outreach, helping to carry OA's message of recovery to those who still suffer and to the professionals who can benefit from our experience.

One piece of work we were recently involved in was responding to a call from a local addiction support service.

They knew about other Twelve Step fellowships, and brilliantly for us, thought that a fellowship that dealt with food could be of great benefit to some of their clients and helpful to staff in the field.

Consequently, they invited OA to give a short talk on food addiction and recovery. Their observation was that once a service user had some recovery from drugs and alcohol, **food often became an issue.**

Myself and a male member attended on 19th June 2014 and after sharing our individual stories of recovery, fielded an open Q & A session and distributed leaflets which included **printed** meeting lists. They were delighted to have hard copy of these, as they placed them in their information rack. Not everyone, especially sufferers, seek IT information immediately.

On the day, seven staff attended, with three members from another Twelve Step fellowship, and were greatly interested, attentive, and appreciative of our openness to share and asked some great questions e.g. how to deal with cravings on a practical level.

The team included staff from other council support services. We left them with an invitation to contact us again, should there be anything in the future that they felt we could attend, that would be of benefit.

Often, take-up to attend meetings isn't immediate, but **the seed has been sown**, the message carried, that help is available and there are people as living examples of what OA can do to enable sufferers to live happy and fulfilling lives.

Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive overeating and to carry this message of recovery to those who still suffer.

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"Positives attract positives and negatives attract negatives (and that applies to attitudes as well as science!)"

As I and the other member walked out of the office into warm sunshine, my gratitude went up another notch as I realised yet again how much misery, despair and destruction I had been released from.

As my dear sponsor always said, "It isn't what you accumulate that makes you happy, it's what you give away."

I came away grateful... Thank you God... Thank you OA.

Angela: 17 years abstinent (ODAAT – one day at a time)

An Attitude of Gratitude

I am on the train to the Intergroup meeting. The agenda includes Public Information (PI), de-registering defunct meetings, finding a new treasurer and discussing how to encourage service. On the wall of the train there is a poster saying that children are dying of hunger and inviting me to pay £3 for something that will save a child.

"One child?" I say to myself. Half measures! I should be saving ALL those children! I should be devoting body and soul to rooting out and curing the fundamental cause of their shortage of food. NOW. Why am I going to Intergroup to indulge in trying to keep affluent people with hang-ups about food a bit happier than they might have been?* Isn't that a waste of my talents – I mean, my omnipotence?

Well, no. If I have £3 to spare, it's because OA-induced sanity helped me to get and hold down a job. And while I don't know enough politics or economics to solve the hunger problem myself, the person who does have that gift might be a suffering overeater who sees the PI announcement my Intergroup will (probably) decide to make, or rings my Intergroup's phone number (and gets a human voice at the end of it) and then gets along to a meeting and starts on the Steps – assisted, of course, by the workshop on recovery that my Intergroup's committee has organised.

What I do with my charitable donations is outside the scope of an article for OA, but the fact that I can make charitable donations and make rational choices about them, rather than guilt trips, is thanks to OA.

Sheila

(*Note, there is an article in July 2006 Lifeline, p.16, that describes compulsive eating among poor people in a very poor country, so this is a very bigoted statement against myself.)

"Playing with the Big Boys and Girls"

At the end of last year, I responded to a public information (PI) request submitted to OAGB by a local day rehab centre based on the Twelve Steps for people seeking recovery from drug and alcohol problems. As is so often the case, once we addicts start to recover from our 'drug of choice' another addiction becomes apparent; hence OA was invited to share our experience, strength and hope as regards compulsive eating and recovery from such.

On 2nd December 2013 I offered to represent OA and went along and shared my story with five ladies in relatively early recovery. Most seemed to identify and were able to pinpoint their difficulties with addiction having actually begun with food. One lady's story particularly surprised me as she shared about how her struggle with alcoholism had come about as a direct result of having had a gastric bypass and no longer being able to 'get her fix' by consuming the same quantity of food that she'd previously binged on. I'd never considered such consequences, but have since been assured that this is indeed not uncommon.

For whatever reason, a last-minute decision had been made to exclude male clients from the session, which I felt was a real missed opportunity. So, when I was invited back on 7th July 2014, I made a point of suggesting that the men may also benefit from hearing the message of recovery from food addiction. Male OA members are still outnumbered by female, but they're definitely on the increase and deserve not to be discriminated against. This time I had an audience of around 20, consisting of both men and women. I shared my story and then proceeded to answer their many questions. It was pretty full-on for the hour I was there and I came away feeling as if I'd had a very animated interview - it was exhausting and yet totally exhilarating too. As is so often the case whenever I give service, I generally feel as though I'm gaining far more from the experience than I'm giving. Needless to say, I came away buzzing - on a total high far better than any that I used to get from my drugs of choice!

On my way home, I had what I can only describe as a kind of spiritual experience. Firstly, I'd travelled in on the train as parking is a problem at the day rehab centre and besides, they're situated right next to a train station. I generally drive everywhere, so travelling on the train really took me back to my early days in Programme when I used to have to travel on two different underground lines in Munich (Germany) to get to my weekly OA meeting - I was grateful to my HP for that little reminder. Secondly, at one point I was able to spot the roof of a prestigious music venue in where we were due to go to that very same evening in order to watch our 11-year-old daughter - aka 'OA baby' - singing in her school choir. My HP gently spoke to me, reminding me that doing the kind of service I'd done that afternoon enabled me to attend such prestigious events and venues like we had tickets for that evening, thereby going out and 'playing with the big boys and girls'. Thank you for that insight, Higher Power, and thank you for the new life you and OA have given me over the past two decades - I'm truly grateful and if part of what I have to do in order to hold onto that is give up an hour of my time every now and again in order to carry the message to the compulsive eater who is still suffering, then I'm more than happy to continue doing so.

Love in Fellowship

Lucy, Newcastle upon Tyne

"When all else fails follow directions"

Experience of OA Heart of England Convention

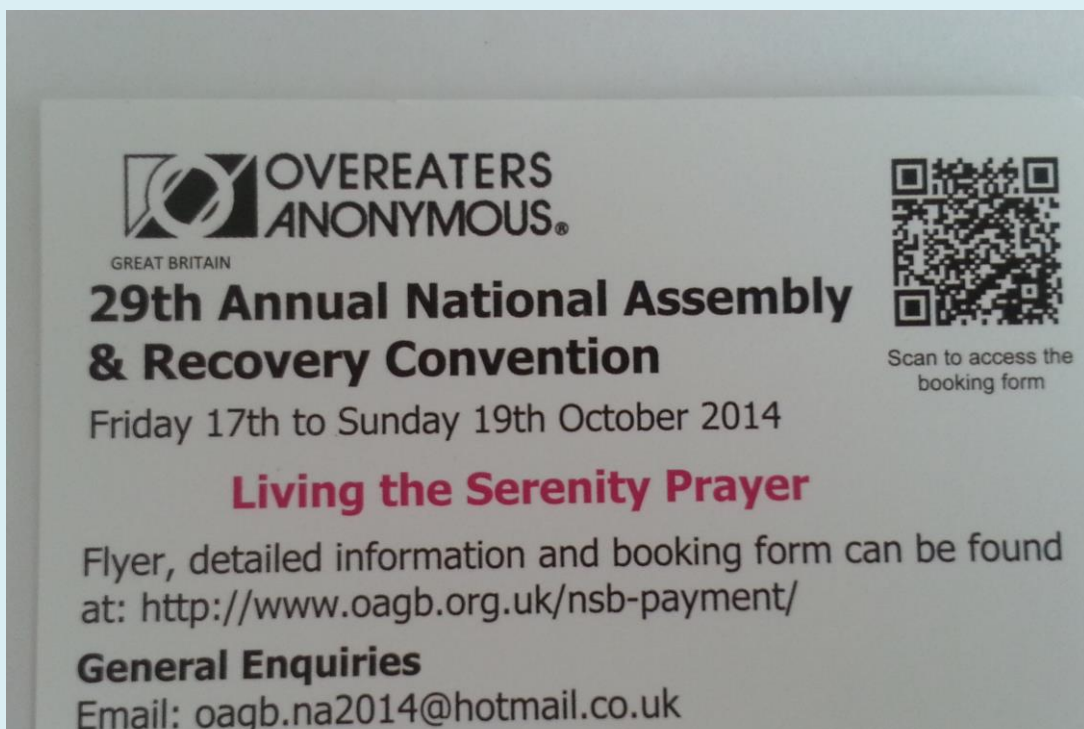
I attended the HOE OA Convention in July in Birmingham. The experience will last me a lifetime. Some things of note were:

1. Meeting a friend I knew from service work across my own Intergroup
2. Being recognised by **two** OA members from England who knew me from online meetings I attend
3. Having to intermingle with members of a convention for a 'nerdish' TV show which was also held throughout the weekend
4. Getting a rude awakening about how expensive Birmingham is in comparison to my own country
5. Hearing a 6-7 minute poem which put me to shame. (I aspire to become a poet, but find that I get 'writer's block' quite often and lose my muse.)
6. Realising my dependence on energy drinks and trying to multitask between recovery and 'normality' wasn't going to work
7. Staying that Sunday night to watch the football
8. Getting friendly with a night watchman in the hotel. (I am not a good sleeper when I travel.)

All these experiences will stay with me forever and have allowed me to develop a greater need to work the Steps and use the Tools better. As well as that, it has occurred to me that my compulsive spending is in direct correlation with my compulsive eating. Addiction is intertwined so much, it's mind-boggling.

As fans of one of the football teams in that city say, "Keep right on to the end of the road."

Desmond D, Northern Ireland



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29th Annual National Assembly & Recovery Convention

Friday 17th to Sunday 19th October 2014

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General Enquiries
Email: oagb.na2014@hotmail.co.uk

Scan to access the booking form

Calendar of Events

Workshops, conventions and other OA happenings...

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	CONTACT
Fri 17 th to Sun 19 th Oct 2014	29 th Annual OA National Assembly and Convention – “Living The Serenity Prayer”	The Copthorne Hotel Sheffield Bramhall Lane Sheffield S2 4SU Reservations ☎ 0114 252 5480 quoting OAGB171014	oagb.na2014@hotmail.co.uk/ ☎ 07977 395 013 Sponsored by OAGB <i>Further details via</i> http://www.oagb.org.uk/nsb-payment/

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*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.*