



NOVATION!

NOVA Outreach Intergroup June 2004

Special Tools Issue

HOW WRITING HELPS MY PROGRAM

I am sitting in a chapel. My HP must be present. I am thinking how much help the tool of writing has been to me in OA. Paper and pen are almost always available in my purse.

The Writing Tool:

- ✧ Sets boundaries for me. I write down resentments and difficulties. I can see that resentments and difficulties have a beginning and an end.
- ✧ Helps me be honest and accountable. I write down my food at the end of the day and e-mail it to my food sponsor or a fellow OA traveler. I am not alone with my food.
- ✧ Helps me be grateful. Many years ago a sponsor suggested I write down five things each day for which I am grateful. This helps me dwell on the positives, rather than the negatives, of life.
- ✧ Let's me know my accomplishments and that I do have value. Most days I write a TO DO list. Surprise! I accomplish many things on the list. I can also put unfinished things on tomorrow's list. There is a tomorrow.
- ✧ Has helped me keep friends. I can express feelings, angers, etc and not take a friend's time listening to a bitch session.
- ✧ Has been a clarifier. I begin to have compulsive thoughts about food. Instead of eating, I sit down and begin to write. I write down the problem I am experiencing. And I write and write and write. Often I will write something that I had no idea that I was feeling. "Oh that is why

I'm hungry for food. I am trying to suppress a feeling that I feel alone, overwhelmed, etc, etc."

- ✧ Has helped me turn over problems to my HP. I have a God box. I write down people's names or my concerns. Somehow in a tangible way I am turning it over to HP. I am not in charge.

The reader has probably found many other ways that writing has been a tool in recovery. I am looking forward to reading them.

--Joan



LEARNING TO LOVE MEETINGS

MEETINGS AREN'T MY THING. I'm an industrial-strength introvert. Groups scare me, because they often make me feel shy, insecure, and alienated. Meetings are my least favorite part of work. At my first OA meeting, I heard the words, "Take what you like and leave the rest." So I decided I'd do OA, but without very many meetings.

Two years and 40 more pounds later, I decided that "Take what you like and leave the rest" was lousy advice, at least for me. Working the program my way didn't work. So I finally got a sponsor and asked him what I should do. He told me he had gotten abstinent by going to 90 meetings in 90 days. My life was so packed that this seemed utterly impossible to me, and I couldn't see what good it would do. But somehow I found enough openness to say I'd try it.

Three odd things happened. (1) When I added 10 additional hours of meetings-plus-travel to my already jammed schedule, my life got more peaceful, not more stressed. (2) I stopped eating crazily. And (3) I lost a bunch of weight.

Going to meetings is still not my favorite thing to do. I go to the minimum I can get away with and stay abstinent. Right now, that's three meetings a week. But I have to admit that I'm enjoying them more these days. Some people find an instant sense

of fellowship and belonging when they walk into the rooms. It took me a couple of years attending the same meetings before I really felt like I belonged. But now I'm at the point where looking at the faces of my friends in OA meetings is one of the best ways for me to pray.

--Rich



ANONYMITY, INSIDE THE PROGRAM AND OUTSIDE

Anonymity as a spiritual tool? The spiritual foundation of this program? How much sense does that make? When I first came into OA 18 years ago (yikes!!!), this concept was difficult for me to understand. I could get the part that we need to have a place where we can reveal anything about ourselves and be completely honest, completely real, and completely vulnerable and trust that we will not be talked about once the meeting is over. But I did not get how that related to spiritual growth.

It was easier for me to relate a break in anonymity with gossip, a character defect I have worked on for years in recovery. It is too tempting at times to want to know more about a person or his/her "issues" just for the sake of being in the know. As I began working the tools of the OA program, I found that my recovery carried over into other parts of my life. I did not have to be the "one with the news" (read know-it-all) about a person's fortune or misfortune. Of course, I was using gossip as a means of feeling important or belittling another so I could feel better about myself.

I have worked hard not to instigate gossip and to avoid participating in it. It is amazing what a simple response such as "I don't know" does to stop a line of inquiring minds (even if, in fact, I do know). I have come to realize how guarding someone's anonymity is indeed a spiritual tool--it gives him or her trust that what was said in a meeting or what personal struggles were revealed--or even good fortune--will

remain his/her own to tell. It is not my business, good or bad.

Each time I keep my mouth closed about someone else, I grow spiritually, too. It is a gesture of respect for another human being, a sense of boundary. Each person gets to reveal as much as he/she wants to, and it is not my business to make that decision. It is a relief to have a clear sense of what is others and what is mine.

Since coming into OA, I have had many opportunities to practice anonymity outside of the rooms. And, like any tool or spiritual axiom, it improves by practice. Sometimes, if my husband and I run into a program person, or someone calls whom he does not know, he asks how I know that person. I have to think before I answer: "OA." Rather, I have become artful at vagueness: "Oh, a friend of a friend," or something like that. This gets a bit tricky when the person is another male. In the past, I would have blabbed about who this person was, what his/her issues were, etc. Once, I was sponsoring someone who had a mild level of local notoriety and who worked in a field my husband is very interested in. It was a test of my spiritual condition not to let him know I knew this person. Again, I have seen how recovery and progress in OA is a direct result of working this program, of showing up and participating in recovery, and being open to the gifts and grace of my Higher Power.

--Respectfully, Anonymous



SURPRISE, FOOD PLANS HELP

For many years in the Program, I resisted having a food plan or sharing it with my sponsors. I used what I saw as other OA members' rigidity around food planning as an excuse to avoid action. What I was really doing was delaying my recovery and taking other people's inventories.

But about a year ago, after taking a hard look at why I was not losing my excess weight or having consistent abstinence, I got serious. I got nutritional advice about amounts and types of food, then started structuring my food to avoid spontaneous eating. (When, oh when, had I ever managed spontaneous eating successfully, anyway?) And I finally prayed for and received the willingness to drop questionable foods from my plan.

Everyday I now write down my food, meal by meal, the tools I've worked, and how I'm feeling. I have restructured my food to be a 5-0-1 plan of three meals and two snacks because I often go six or more hours between meals. Seeing it in black and white helps clarify if I've broken my food boundaries or am simply feeling guilty or compulsive.

Guess what? Keeping track of my food shows my abstinence has improved, although it is not yet 100 percent. And my weight has dropped off as I've gotten honest about what and how I'm eating and surrendered to a simple, flexible food plan.

--Anonymous



FINDING A HEALTHY BALANCE WITH SERVICE

"Service is slimming" is a slogan that made little sense to me in my early years in OA. There was so much to do to take care of my own program--how could I have any time or energy for service to others? That service was necessary for the upkeep and survival of the program made sense. I was brought up with a strong tradition of volunteerism. I knew that groups needed help and commitment of its members to survive. But this concept of the service benefiting me was not immediately obvious.

As time went on I realized that when I was responsible for some aspect of the meeting, it meant I had to show up. Showing up when I didn't "feel" like it was a bigger service to me than to the group. Sharing at meetings may have helped other people

but being heard was a great service to me. Taking phone calls did much more to keep me on track than it ever helped anyone who called. Service did, in fact, help my program.

One of my character defects is over-involvement. I learned that service was critical to my program, but that I could be so busy giving service that I forgot to use the rest of the tools and work the steps. Moderation was something I had to learn. OA will not fall apart because I cannot do everything. I need to listen to God who guides me in my level of commitment. Sometimes I can do intergroup, be a secretary, and sponsor. Yet at other times I have to do less to maintain a healthy program.

One of the most valuable forms of service comes from those who are steeped in the traditions. I have been to meetings where the traditions have been marginalized. After a while problems begin to appear, especially among newcomers who aren't familiar with the traditions. The oldtimers who pulled us back performed a service which saved the integrity of those meetings.

OA does take the commitment of a lot of people to keep going. The more people are involved, the better things work at all levels. OA has made my life so much better. Giving service is a way to give thanks and also to make sure there is a meeting when I need it. I am grateful for all those who give service. I am also grateful for the benefits I have received from giving service.

--Anonymous



HOW LITERATURE MADE A DIFFERENCE TO ME

My first OA meeting was a speaker's meeting. I cried all the way through the meeting and left before anyone could talk to me. I tried this way of working the program a couple more times and had the same reaction. I didn't know then why I was

crying. I also didn't know then that OA was a safe place to cry. I never stayed around long enough to see the literature table and certainly didn't sign anything that would give anyone my name or a way to contact me. So for several months that was my entire program.

Then I saw a flier for the Arlington Sunrise meetings. I decided to take a chance and called for information and directions. The contact person told me that these were literature meetings and each day would use a different book. She also said we would be reading the Twelve Steps, On Awakening, The Promises, and there would be information about the other tools. I listened but did not have a clue what she was talking about. Steps and tools, promises, and traditions were all Greek to me. I just wanted to lose weight and not have to join Weight Watches or Jenny Craig or some other fat club again. But I wanted to be polite (not look stupid) so I just said, "Hey, that's great".

Then I started attending meetings every morning on my way to work. I didn't like some of the literature very much - especially the Big Book. I didn't have a drinking problem and I didn't want to consider the possibility that AA's Twelve Steps could in any way help me work the Twelve Steps in OA. I just ate too much and wanted to learn how to manage my food. But they didn't have any diet books. (At the time, I thought this was a serious deficiency in their literature.) At this point I was very immature, chronically unique, and spent most of my time at meeting comparing out. But I kept coming back and I knew I needed to be there. Besides, I liked "most" of the people and they were nice to me. (Translation: They never asked what I weighed.)

But the question remained, what do literature, writing, phone calls and all those other things have to do with losing weight? How did it all work together and how was I going to get a handle on it so that I could figure out if I belonged or not.

My epiphany or awakening came when we started reading the Second Step from the OA Twelve and Twelve. It listed eating behaviors--such as eating from the trash, eating frozen and burnt food--and this paragraph really caught my attention. "Maybe these people do know me and I do belong here," I thought. I started to focus on what had been written and I became teachable. I started listening for answers and not just sitting back and acting dumb.

So how has literature contributed to my recovery? It gave me access to the experience, strength and hope of all those who struggle with the same problems I do. Through literature I discovered that although I could relate to the problem - I had a lot to learn about the solution. I didn't have all the answers. I had a lot of failure but very little success to share. Literature also reminds me of all those slogans I hated when I first came to program: Easy does it; Keep coming back; Don't leave before the miracle happens; and, Let go and let God.

I love OA Literature because it is:

- ✂ Life-giving
- ✂ Invaluable
- ✂ Truthful
- ✂ Exciting
- ✂ Real
- ✂ Available
- ✂ Transforming
- ✂ Uplifting
- ✂ Rich
- ✂ Essential

---Anonymous



NO TIME FOR FEAR

As long as I can remember I have woken up with suffocating fear of the day ahead. I can't easily define it, or draw you a picture, but I know it is there. Most of the time it manifests itself as

anxiety and an incurable need to plan my life. After a few minutes of lying in bed, waiting for some miracle of clarity to arrive, my frustration and confusion get the best of me and I head to the food to shut off the mental chatter.

This spring things are different for me. A few weeks ago, I found the 7 am Arlington OA meeting and now realize that community is to be my new gift from God. These days I wake up and jump out of bed to get to my meeting and pray for guidance. No longer do I need to stuff my fear with food, because I can let it out constructively and fill the emptiness with faith and friendship.

--K.B.



WSBC HIGHLIGHTS FROM OANOVA DELEGATES' REPORTS

"Without doubt one of the most gratifying and inspirational experiences I've ever had" is how one NOVA OA describes last month's World Service Business Conference in New Mexico. The most important business of the week was approving a draft of a new "Dignity of Choice" pamphlet on food plans. The new flyer seeks to balance OA's understanding of individual freedom about food choices and avoiding outside issues, with many newcomers' desire for some guidance about developing a food plan. It should be available by fall through the WSO website.

WSBC is also working on developing literature to serve two underrepresented demographics in the Fellowship, anorexics/bulimics and African Americans. The WSBC is actively looking for stories and other contributions from OA members that speak to these issues; NOVA delegates can put you in contact with the right people if you'd like to help.

Good financial news: WSO decided to move to New Mexico from California to save on real estate costs. Now it has paid off the mortgage on its

building and land in Albuquerque, which means that about \$100,000 more a year can go to OA activities instead of rent/mortgage.

WSBC deferred the issue of whether to register online meetings for further research and discussions.

--Bret and Dick



NEWS YOU CAN USE ABOUT OA SERVICE BODIES

World Service is now maintaining a speaker's list. Our Intergroup website has a form you can use for volunteering for this service. Listing yourself will enable another meeting in need of a speaker to be put in touch with you, through WSO. Your contact information will not be available online. Part of the reasoning behind starting this list is that new meetings often have trouble finding speakers, especially speakers with a lot of recovery. Please note how far you are willing to travel to give service to a new meeting.

The form can be found by going to oanova.org, click on Public Outreach, then Speakers List Volunteer Sign-up Form. You just click and submit, couldn't be simpler.

Information for starting up a new meeting can be found on World Service's web site, www.oa.org, click on Member Support, then Group Support, then Start a New Group.



SUPPORT NOVA IG

We meet the third Saturday of each month at 10 am at Hope Lutheran Church, 4604 Ravensworth Rd, Annandale. This is the place to get new Where and Whens, NOVATION, and the latest flyers for retreats. Come see what you have been missing.



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