

Novation

OA NORTHERN VIRGINIA OUTREACH INTERGROUP NEWSLETTER

March, 2002

20 cents

Keep Coming Back

Being a frequent participant in the Sunday Morning Men's Meeting, I'm reminded of an important theme: **Keep Coming Back**. And even though for the most part, I've "*kept coming back* for almost 5 years now," this phrase takes on additional meaning that transcends regular meeting attendance. For me, on a daily basis, I've got to *keep coming right back* to the basics of this program.

For starters, I've got to **keep coming back to God**. The minute I think I've got it figured out, or the very thought that says that I can skip-out on a principle of the program tells me that my disease is trying to sneak its way back into me. It'll attack my mind first. It will tell me it's ok to let go of the discipline just this one time. Next, come my emotions. Having done the trick on my mind, it'll play on my fears and self-esteem. Before you know it, my spiritual condition is broken, the compulsion returns and I am back to a life of overeating that wreaks havoc with my sanity. So, I know that where God is concerned, I need to **keep coming back**.

I've got to **keep coming back** to freeing phenomena of **acceptance, surrender and trust**. As it says in the big book, my discomfort with **anything, anything at all**, means that I am practicing the opposite of God's will. Intuition in these matters tells me to accept, surrender and trust God. And in that very instant, I usually find serenity. If I don't, a phone call to my sponsor or friend in the program usually helps to solve the problem. I know that I get to **constantly find the place where I can accept people and situations, and once I find it, I am reminded that I need to keep coming back there**.

I've got to **keep coming back** to every tool of the program that helps me work the **12 steps of Overeaters Anonymous**. Praying, Reading, Writing, Journaling, Phone Calls to my sponsor or other members, Meetings and a Plan of Eating all exist to help me follow 12 simple suggestions that evolved over 60 years ago and have helped millions. If it's

true that I was designed not to be self-reliant, but to rely on God and others as well, then these tools keep me from the isolation that will undoubtedly cause me to draw my own conclusions. When I am left alone with my disease, my disease is free to show me just how cunning baffling and powerful it is. If I use the tools and if I rely on others and God as well, the disease takes a back seat and is quieted. **The tools of the program ensure that I keep coming back.**

The saying is powerful. It implies that there is hope of progress; of an answer. However, perhaps the greatest gift of the program is that I'll never arrive at a final destination, only at crossroads that will allow me to continue to grow along spiritual lines and to enjoy the life that God has in store for me. **For today, I'm certainly keep coming back!**

Spirituality—It's A Guy Thing!

In my three years of coming to the rooms I've been moved by the profound ways in which my brothers have been moved by the power of God working in their lives. As a former church worker, I thought I had a corner on the God business. Was I ever wrong.

Again and again whether in my Sunday Morning Men's Meeting or from men attending other meetings, I've learned and been awed by the stories men have shared. It's this surrender thing. That's not always easy for men. We don't take to losing very well whether on the field, on the court or in life. In losing, we win.

In my religious tradition, Springtime is for new beginnings and rebirth. OA has given me a rebirth in my relationship with my God and with the whole human race. My OA friends have taught me powerful lessons about living.

Thank you God and OA!

Third Step Prayer

**God, I offer myself to Thee
To build with me and do with me as thou wilt
Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I might better do thy
will.
Take away my difficulties
That victory over them may bear witness
To those I would help of thy power, thy love and thy way of
life**

Lots of Ways to Pray

When I was a kid I thought I had learned pretty exactly who God was. I also thought I knew what prayer was. Praying was reciting a traditional prayer like the Lord's Prayer, or just talking to God in one's own words. There was also something called meditation, which I understood to mean sitting around thinking spiritual thoughts.

I hated prayer. Prayer—at least as I understood it—simply didn't work for me. It left me feeling emptier inside than when I started. I never experienced the good stuff that happened to other people when they prayed. At the same time, God became a big problem to me. I had intellectual questions: is there any such thing, and if so what exactly is he, she, or it? Can I prove anything one way or the other? I found myself powerless to answer. I concluded sullenly that faith was not for me, and that indeed I was a spiritual cripple. I was caught in a blind alley.

But when I finally surrendered my insistence on “being sure” and having God safely in a box I could define, I began to experience a voice at the bottom of my soul that I had been unable to hear when I was struggling to control everything. And I learned that this voice was powerful: when I was hearing it, I felt alive, black-and-white days sometimes began to glow with color, and things became possible that had been impossible before. I watched this power conquer my addiction and that of many friends in OA. I can't prove anything about this power. But I don't have to, because I've experienced it.

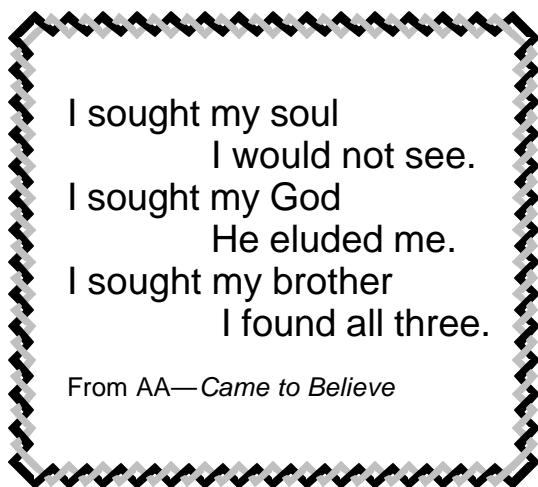
In the same way, when repeated failure forced me to abandon my rigid notions of prayer, I began to discover that there was an amazing variety of actions that in fact worked to bring me into closer conscious contact with my Higher Power. I found that I was not spiritually crippled—it was only that prayer sometimes needed to take a different form for me than it might for someone else. Below is a list of ways to pray that have worked for me. Some are traditional; others are perhaps a little less conventional. They all have some things in common:

- **Time.** They all involve making time to cultivate a relationship with my Higher Power. It's no different from my marriage, whose lifeblood is my wife's and my willingness to make time for each other.
- **Presence.** I find that I am most open to God when I am living in the present, paying attention now, rather than using worry to escape into the future or using guilt to run away into the past.
- **Body.** Whatever spiritual dimension we may have, it is embodied in a physical being. However I pray, I am praying with my body, always encountering God through physical symbols—even when those symbols are only neurons firing in my brain. It has been a surprise for me to discover that I could pay attention to God and open up a space for God by paying quiet attention to my body, experiencing it from the inside instead of judging it from the outside and hating it.

Anyway, here's my list. It's a pretty long one, which is a good thing. It keeps prayer from being a problem the way it used to be. If one way of praying is hard for me today, there are a couple dozen other choices.

- Recite program prayers or traditional prayers
- Talk to (chat with) my higher power, especially asking for help or expressing gratitude
- Assume a physical posture of devotion
- Follow my breaths with quiet attention
- Focus on my body's sensations with quiet attention
- Feel my feelings with quiet attention
- Relaxation exercises
- Focus on some object—for instance a candle or a picture—with attention
- Listen to music, or play it, with attention
- Hold others and their needs up to my Higher Power's light
- Look at, hear, feel, nature
- Serve others
- List things to say "thank you" for
- Sing anything, as long as I do it with my heart
- Move or dance with my heart
- Exercise with quiet attention
- Listen to silence
- Do guided meditation
- Participate in a religious service
- Listen to a sermon
- Repeat affirmations
- Give thanks before meals
- Listen carefully at meetings
- Make a call
- Read spiritual or program literature.

And finally, hug someone. This feels to me like an especially powerful form of prayer, if I am really present to the person I'm embracing.



From This Corner

This March issue of *Novation* is sponsored by the 9:00 a.m. Sunday Morning Men's Meeting that meets in the Education Center at Alexandria Hospital. They have chosen spirituality as their theme.

Leftovers can be lethal for a compulsive over-eater. For an editor, they are a rich blessing. Appearing on pages 5-7 are "leftovers" from last month's issue sponsored by the Northern Virginia HOW meetings. Thanks again to those who submitted articles for this issue. "More is to be revealed."
 Dick D., Editor

APPLAUSE APPLAUSE APPLAUSE

Where were you on Saturday, Jan. 12, 2002? I would like to believe you were with the 100+ OA's who attended the Candlelight Promises Meeting. We had the pleasure to hear 12 dynamic speakers share on the Promises as adapted by Alcoholics Anonymous (p.83-84.)

Take a bow Jaclyn, Rob, Naomi, Chris C., Judith, Betsy, Pete, Jan J., Paul B., Howertene and Jim Angel. Thank you for sharing your experience, strength and hope. The humor and laughter will live long in our hearts as well as the bits of wisdom you passed on to us and the good stories we heard.

To add to the excitement of the evening, the OA literature sale at 20 % discount with Kristen doing her best effort in book sales throughout the evening. Want to give a special thanks to the NOVA Intergroup Special Events Committee who helped make this event a huge success. They are in alphabetical order, Cindy P., Faye, Gretchen, Imelda, Jean, Jennifer, Kate and Nicole. What a pleasure it was to work with these dedicated OA's.

Last but not least thanks to our stage hands who came early to help setup and take down at the end of the evening. This is a we program and this event proved it beyond our wildest dreams. What a pleasure to work with these dedicated OA's. We say, thank you, thank you, thank you. Barbara J. P.S. Trivia Question: How many Promises are there in the Alcoholics Anonymous Book, pages 83-84? Answer in the next issue of *Novation*.

Barbara J.

How I pray and what I pray for

When I came to OA I really had no idea how to pray. I wasn't a very spiritual person. I went to church a couple of times a year (I prayed the roof wouldn't cave in!) and said grace at family meals. Occasionally I'd pray when things got really bad,, or something happened like my car wouldn't start late at night but that was about it. My how times have changed.

Today is quite a different story. It seems I'm praying morning, noon and night. In the morning I pray before I even get out of bed. Often it's just the third step prayer. Sometimes I also pray for abstinence and the release of some particular character defect that may be bothering me that day. Then I read some kind of morning meditation. I usually read For Today, and I have a couple of great meditation books for men (one was a gift from my wife this past Christmas). The one I'm reading now has a short story, an action plan for the day and a quick prayer. I always try to say grace before my morning meal.

Throughout the day - there's not really much organized prayer time. If something starts to bother me - I try to take a few minutes or seconds and turn it over to God. I say Grace before lunch and I try to find a few minutes of break time to sit quietly and meditate if just for a minute or two. I occasionally get to go to a noon time meeting - sometimes OA sometimes AA - so there's always an extra prayer or two there as well.

We say grace at dinner. At bedtime we read from both a meditation book (my wife really likes my men's meditation book as well) and we read a devotional for couples. We then exchange our gratitudes. Sometimes it's a short list and sometimes there is so much to be grateful for. Then one of says a prayer. We thank God for all the things we've been given as a couple and ask that he bless our marriage. We ask blessings on our family and we name them all. We ask blessings for our friends and if we know of someone who's struggling we ask for them by name. We ask prayers for our sponsors and for those who have apparently quit coming back. We also ask for God to bless our co-workers and the people that for whatever reason we don't get along with. We ask to be of service in any way. We also ask God to relieve us of our character defects particularity any that have been bothering us of lately. Sometimes this takes awhile and one of us will fall asleep. That's OK - the other

one can finish it. Sometimes we're really tired and we do are gratitudes and a simple "God we're too tired tonight- we leave our prayers up to you."

I have heard so many different thoughts over the years on how to pray and what to pray for. That it must be done on your knees, that you can't pray for specific things, that they must be said at certain times or in certain ways, that it must be quiet or it must be out loud. I don't really know. I do know that the more I pray the more I am able to turn over to God and that's a good thing. I pray standing up, I pray lying down, I pray out loud and I pray quietly to myself. I pray outdoors, I pray while driving my car and i pray at work. I pray fully clothed and I pray naked. I really don't think God minds. Anon.



What is "Conscious Contact"?

Well, I know what unconsciousness is... living without awareness.

I am unconscious when my eyes are unfocused, I'm slouching, I talk nonsense, I don't listen... eating without chewing, tasting and savoring the food.

I am conscious when my body and mind are awake, when I speak for meaningful connection and communication, when I listen without thinking about myself.

I am conscious when I sit down to eat, chew slowly, enjoy the flavors, swallow, and stop when full.

So, what is conscious contact with God? Sitting quietly, letting my ego and self out and God and the world in. It's when I fill my heart with those I care about and wish them health and happiness. It's when I know my "right size"--in our world, not in my clothing--and try to become in instrument for God's will.

Anonymous

3RD STEP

MADE A DECISION TO TURN OUR WILL AND OUR LIVES OVER TO THE CARE OF GOD AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM.

I don't know about you but it seems to me that Step 3 must be everybody's favorite step. It seems like everyone stays there for so long without ever getting to step 4. Don't get me wrong -- I think a major part of my recovery comes from turning over my will to my Higher Power. It just doesn't stop there. In fact I think step 3 implies that by saying "made a decision to turn our will..." It doesn't say "we turned our will over".

So if you make a decision to turn your will over to the care of God – just how do you go about actually doing that? By saying Steps 1-3 everyday? By saying the third step prayer every morning? My praying and meditating and searching for God's will about all things in my life - not just the food or my weight? Well yeah all those things will help but I think that happens by doing the rest of the steps.

Making the decision to do it implies a willingness to change the way I have been approaching everything in my life. My relationships, family, work, time, money, food, you name it I am powerless over it. By continuing to work the rest of the steps. Making my inventory, sharing it with God and another human being. Become willing to have my character defects removed, asking God to do that. Making my list, making my amends and continuing with steps 10-12 on a daily basis I can then turn my will over to the care of God.

I love the Third Step prayer -- " God, I offer myself to Thee - To build with me and do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of Life. May I do Thy will always!" - I say it every morning before I get out of bed. It doesn't insure that everything goes right or goes my way everyday. but it sure helps me accept that whatever happens is what my Higher Powers wants me to experience that day.

A grateful recovering male compulsive overeater

Hunger for Relatedness

Strange! From so many of us, in the season just past, humankind's festivities to cheer one another around the shortest, darkest days of the year, came sharing that the "norm" of family holiday festivity was lacking for us. We experience a hunger for relatedness that goes deep and is hard to handle.

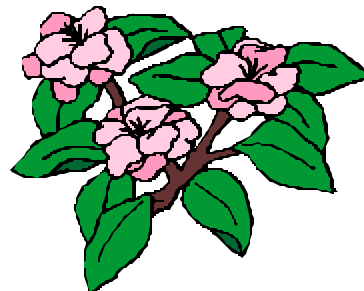
That's not what is strange. What is strange is the healing that our program has to offer. For me, over the years, the heart of that healing is located at about where Step 7 and Step 8 get stirred together.

A story has been told about a king (but everyone who listens knows it is really a story about HP) who gave a party, and none of the rich and famous, beautiful people he invited would come. Is anything worse than giving a party and having no one come? So the king invited those who were not rich or famous or beautiful, even the homeless and those with bottomless, chronic emotional need. Talk about hunger for relatedness! That king, that HP, was so very hungry for relatedness and to party with someone!

The amazing vulnerability of HP seeking human companionship is what is so strange, and this year, I found it to be the "reason for the season."

There was an O.A. marathon, on Thanksgiving and again on Christmas, offered out of a deep understanding of hunger for relatedness. Whether specifically working a H.O.W. program or not, those Honest, Open and Willing enough to acknowledge their own gnawing vulnerability could come and find – what? Shared vulnerability?

The sense of "being without" has not gone away, yet there is a stronger conviction of being richly blessed, that, all things considered, it is OK to be me. Christopher Fry said it in the title of a play, *The Dark is Light Enough*.



H.O.W. (Honest Open Willing) What a Concept!

When I first walked into an O.A./H.O.W. meeting, I was there because the time and day of the meeting were convenient. I certainly hadn't called O.A. because I wanted to admit that I was powerless over food or to adopt a spiritual way of life. Please! I called because I was fat, miserable, and hopeless. I had tried everything else and I was desperate. I didn't have a clue what H.O.W. stood for, I just figured it was a catchy "recovery" name for the meeting.

As the meeting progressed that Saturday morning, I couldn't believe my eyes and ears. Surprisingly it was not so much the physical recovery that most caught my attention (even though that's what I so desperately wanted). It was that these men and women were happy. They were having fun. They were loving and supporting each other. There was a camaraderie and exuberance in the room. It felt good to be in the presence of such positive energy. But when they talked about how they worked their programs, they were deadly serious.

H.O.W. is a disciplined approach that sounded kind of scary, if you want to know the truth. These people talked about weighing and measuring food portions; calling sponsors daily and committing a food plan; reading program literature and doing written assignments related to it; making at least three phone calls to other O.A. members. It sounded like a lot. But it seemed to work. Not only did they have back-to-back abstinence—many of them had *years and years* of continuous weighed and measured abstinence. They had what I wanted—physical, emotional, and spiritual recovery. I look at H.O.W. as the remedial version of O.A.—I am too willful and stubborn to follow the *suggestions* of O.A.—I need those suggestions to be *requirements*.

Unfortunately, O.A./H.O.W. has a bad reputation in the wider O.A. community. Those of us who work the H.O.W. concept in our O.A. program of recovery are considered zealots and, frankly, just plain crazy. And it's true! What we do every day can seem nutty and extreme. But I am extreme in my approach to abstinence because my disease is extreme. My disease wants to kill me and I will never be cured.

I have heard it said that there are those who look at the H.O.W. concept and all of its requirements and say, "I have to do all THAT!?" and those who say, "Is THAT all I have to do?" I am willing to go to any

lengths for that recovery. I thank God every day that I am abstinent because I don't ever want to go back to the days when I was in the food. For me, the H.O.W. concept is what works one day at a time, and I'll just keep coming back.

Jessica B.

Using The Tools Of Reading and Writing

Before becoming an O.A./H.O.W. sponsor an O.A. member must have at least 70 days of back-to-back O.A./H.O.W. abstinence and complete the 70 pre-commitment assignments. The following essay was written in response to assignment 3.a. paraphrased here: Read Step One in the AA 12&12. Discuss and reflect upon the critical nature of the disease.

My response: In order to do all the things required by this program, which is the prescription for compulsive eating, I must believe that I have tried every other cure, that I am powerless over this disease, and that without a 12 Step program of recovery I will die. It is the only way I am going to be motivated to see the nutritionist to get a food plan, to make the phone calls, to weigh and measure my food, to get up early and to stay up late doing the reading and writing assignments, go to meetings, be helpful to other compulsive overeaters, and not gossip.

When a person is in the critical care unit of the hospital their condition is taken very seriously and I must be ever aware of situations that might cause me to eat compulsively – that is – without thinking.

Feeling painful emotions and wanting to respond by overeating is only one manifestation of this disease. The part that is insidious, cunning, and baffling manifests itself when external conditions are neutral or even pleasant. That's awareness of what I'm doing. This can happen at anytime: choosing or washing fruit, cooking a meal, packing a lunch, cleaning up after dinner, going to a school meeting, a party, the office, in the grocery store, at a friend's home or at church. The list could go on and on. Anytime, anyplace that there is food, I stand the chance of taking that first compulsive bite – eating without thinking – and I risk the chance of being unable to stop.

R.

H.O.W. - honest open wide loving

I came into O.A./H.O.W. in the late spring of 2001. I won't say it's been easy. It's been very challenging for this addict. Firstly, through the daily reading and writing I had to honestly look at my disease over the course of my life. Then I had to be open-minded enough to call three (well actually 4 if you include my daily sponsor call) total strangers everyday, not to mention go to two-hour meetings with a completely different format than I had ever known. Lastly, I had to have the willingness to rigorously follow a food plan that I wasn't too crazy about, prescribed by my nutritionist. I had to let go of my control (that I never truly had anyway). What I didn't realize was that I was being called to have the willingness to follow a format that would lead me to freedom unlike any that I could imagine. The footwork is demanding yet the rewards are well beyond the demands.

There have been a number of times that I have wanted to quit O.A./H.O.W., if not every other day. Yet I'm so grateful that I didn't and that I listened to God calling me to this spiritual solution. That is where this rigorous footwork has led me... to... a spiritual solution unlike any other. I now have hope for my recovery. I know that it will take time, but I spent a lot of time in the problem, I'm ready to spend the rest of my life in the solution. Praise God for O.A./H.O.W.

INTERGROUP NEWS

Web-site Up: Our own web site is back up and running. Thanks to Bret S., our new webmaster. Check it out. Just in case you forgot it is:
www.OANOVA.org

Next Intergroup Meeting: 10:00 to 12:00, Saturday, April 20, 2002. Immanuel United Methodist Church, 7901 Heritage Drive in Annandale. All are welcome to attend and join in the activities. You don't have to be an official Intergroup Representative to attend.
Welcome!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Still a few spots available:

MEN OF PRINCIPLE

"Practicing These Principles In All Our Affairs"

OA Men's Retreat

Sponsored by

The Sunday Morning Men's Meeting
Alexandria Hospital, Alexandria VA

April 19-21, 2002

The Bellarmine Retreat Center in
Blue Ridge Summit, PA (Near Gettysburg)

Space is limited - first come first served

Contacts: Rob H. 202-686-2824

Dan C. 703-433-1360

Cost - only \$90.00

(There will be a \$10 charge for registrations received after 4/1/02)

Some scholarships (or partial scholarships) are available - please ask

Editorial Policy

The opinions expressed in Novation reflect those of the writers and not Northern Virginia Intergroup nor OA as a whole, or the Editor of Novation; nor does the publication of any article imply endorsement. The editor welcomes any and all contributions, and reserves the right to edit all articles. Send articles, letters, announcements, or other contributions to Novation to:

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Annandale, VA 22003-5201

Or email to novation@oanova.org

OA PHONE LIST



We use the phone as a means of contact, to help us through the highs and lows of each day without compulsively eating. The following OA members welcome your calls and are committed to helping the newcomer in any way they can. Go ahead, give someone a call!

NEWCOMER OUTREACH

Diane L	703-813-6313	Kelsie	301-428-0562
Kelly	703-815-9775	Maria L.	202-333-8089
Ruth K.	703-206-0559	Janice	703-914-5440
Alan S.	703-370-5505	Dianna	703-425-9480
Betsy F.	703-998-7276	Doree	703-451-7604
Debbie F.	703-799-3282	Cecille	703-658-0873
Sandy B.	703-560-3951	Gail	703-793-4926
Rachel B.	703-532-1824	Gladys	703-968-8476
George J. (h)	703-978-2072	Ginny StP.	703-998-1463
(w)	202-269-0204	Lynn B.	703-222-3279

Support Your Intergroup! Intergroup meetings take place the third Saturday of every month at 10:00 a.m. at Immanuel United Methodist Church, Annandale, Virginia. Find out more about Intergroup by showing up and serving on a committee or by serving as a representative for one of your meetings! Service is its own reward!

NIGHT OWLS & EARLY BIRDS

The people listed here are either up late or are early risers-feel free to call them if you need someone to talk to.

Janice	703-914-5440	`til 10 PM*
David K.	301-248-6334	`til 10 PM
George J.	703-978-2072	`til 10 PM

*anytime in an emergency

Support OA 60/30/10 -After meeting group expenses-rent, literature, etc. It is suggested that the 7th tradition should be sent 60% to Intergroup, 30% to WSO and 10% to Region 7.

NOVA INTERGROUP BOARD

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NOVA Outreach Web Site: www.oanova.org

DC/MD Web Site: www.aa-dcmetro.org

World Service Web Site:

www overeatersanonymous.org

Hotline Phone #: **703-823-6682**

Welcome!

Overeaters Anonymous is a fellowship of individuals who, through shared experience, strength and hope, are recovering from compulsive overeating. We welcome everyone who wants to stop eating compulsively. There are no dues or fees for members; we are self-supporting through our own contributions, neither soliciting or accepting outside donations. OA is not affiliated with any public or private organization, political movement, ideology or religious doctrine; we take no position on outside issues. Our primary purpose is to abstain from compulsive overeating and to carry this message of recovery to those who still suffer.