

NOVATIONS

"Acceptance" P. 2

Two strong meetings P. 3

Holiday Marathons P. 6

This month's issue is sponsored by two meetings: the Arlington HOW Step Meeting and the 100 Pounders' Meeting. The articles are amazing and filled with wonderful recovery messages.

STEP 11

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

TRADITION 11

Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films television, and other media of communication.

SERVICE CONCEPT 11

Trustee administration of the World Service Office should always be assisted by the best standing committees, executives, staffs and consultants.

FRUIT OF STEP 11

Omnipresence (constant awareness) of God.

PROMISE OF STEP 11

We will suddenly realize God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

RELAPSE AND RECOVERY

Whenever Thanksgiving would come around I would become extremely nervous because I had relapsed so often. I would literally feel crazy with the obsession to taste and then to eat what everyone else was preparing, bringing and eating. Once I took that first compulsive bite, I was without control. I wouldn't eat any of the desserts during the meal, because my entire family knew about my strict abstinence. That and fear of doing something shameful helped me to keep control during the meal. But after the meal I turned into a sneak—I would go into the kitchen and binge. The act of sneak bingeing in any family member's kitchen went back to early childhood.

This action was rooted in this powerful compulsive eating disease and in my powerful envy of what normal people could eat, namely sweets. Clearly I had still not taken the first step after being in the pro-

gram for so many years.

The relapse would last for many months during which I would binge on sweets throughout each day. I gained on average of 30 pounds each month. The food obsession would repeatedly push aside all other thoughts and all interest in every aspect of my welfare and the welfare of others. I had become an eating machine.

This past Thanksgiving was wonderfully different. I had been able—by going to several meetings each week and working the other tools of the program—to finally get out of relapse. As I called my sponsor each day and made additional phone calls and received them as well, the love and support which I received drew me back into the program and recovery. Yet I still had to hit a painful physical bottom before I was willing to fully return to absti-

nence and recovery. I have been abstinent for many months and happily so. I attribute this to taking the first step and relinquishing my envy of other people's food. I now accept the fact that I will never be a normal eater.

To continue to live in peace and serenity I happily follow my dietician's food plan and always weigh and measure my food even in restaurants and weddings. This keeps me sane and happy. This low bottom food addict is grateful to God for the answer. Anon

"Our Higher Power is the only source of help that is always available to us, always strong enough to lift us up and set our feet on the path of life."

From *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters*
Anonymous

CELEBRATING ABSTINENCE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Abstaining is the way to truly celebrate the holidays. I came to OA in October 1988 just before the holiday season of Halloween to Super Bowl. That was my main "no holds barred" never diet period. It was truly an act of my HP that I was willing to

seek help at that time of year. Instead of going off my diet, I joined OA and continued going throughout the holiday season. I did not regain the lost weight and at the end of the season I had an OA sponsor, a 30 day medallion and

the gift of a copy of *For Today*. Celebrating abstinence each day whether it is a holiday or not is the way of life that has proven to be best for me. This will be my 19th holiday season in recovery. (contd P 6)

ACCEPTANCE – THE ANSWER TO MY DISEASE

As I was thinking what I could share of my experience, strength and hope around the challenges of the upcoming holidays, my favorite paragraph from the "Big Book" came to mind, page 449 in the third edition. I tend to go back to this paragraph many times, especially when I am feeling needy or upset about something. This paragraph always brings me back to where I am and what I need to do.

When I took the "plunge" and decided to do the OA program ten years ago, I thought that I would just stay long enough to get the "weight off." Trouble is, when I got the physical weight off that's when I found that I still have a lot of excess weight – the weight between my ears! It was hard for me to think about not having any flour or sugar products for the rest of my life and I have to say that I did panic in my first 90 days. What got me through that was the reassurance from those who had been in longer and had more recovery that it was only for this one day. So, how does that relate to the acceptance paragraph? Until I am able and was able to accept that I do have a disease and that there were never, ever be a cure for me, I would never stay abstinent and would struggle and struggle until I let go absolutely. That was hard for me even though I could see that this was so, I still thought I could play God – "have my cake and eat it too"! Well, I couldn't and once I got there, then it got much easier for me to say "no" to things I knew would be hurtful to me.

My first major holiday was Thanksgiving, November 1996. Having just recently achieved my goal weight and becoming 100 lbs lighter, I was very scared to be around family and have to face the food that I use to and still loved to eat. I did not feel confident enough that I could say no and that I would not be resentful and feel deprived because I was not able to have it. These were my triggers. What I did instead was to stay home and attend OA meetings that were going on that day. What a gift that was to me – there were people every hour telling their story of their path and how they arrived in OA. It felt so good to be with other

people who were just like me and would give me the support I needed to get through this day. I was then able to go home, have my abstinent meals and feel good about myself because I had not binged and bloated myself so badly that I fell asleep because of the excess food. I was clear headed, I had a peaceful and serene day and I could enjoy the gifts that God had given me. My dog and I were able to take a walk, and she really loved to go for walks, and enjoy the brisk air and sunshine. You know, when I got abstinent, I craved sunlight – still do! I was able to read a book, go to a movie or enjoy my hobby of quilting or decorating my house for the Christmas holidays. The energy I had let me do things I would only think about doing in the disease.

Today, the holidays are not so challenging for me but when they are, here are some of the other things that were suggested to me:

1. If invited to someone else's home for the meal, offer to bring a dish that you are able to eat. You will feel that you are contributing to the meal and you are also taking care of yourself.
2. If you are asked to bring something that is not on your food plan, don't make it – buy it. That way you do not have to deal with the item that is a problem for you and if it is a baked item, you don't have to smell it or, clean up after making it!
3. If you are comfortable asking, find out what they are serving and if there is nothing that is on your food plan, take your meal(s) with you. I am sure that they would much rather have you eat your abstinent food and have a happy and sane person than one who is back in their disease.
4. Take an OA phone list. If the smell of things gets too great, excuse yourself and make a phone call to another OA'er. You would be able to share your experience, strength and hope with another person and get the shot in your arm to say "no" to what ever is calling you. (contd P3)

ACCEPTANCE contd

5. Plan on getting to an OA meeting that day. Most meetings still meet on the holidays because we try and treat it as just another day – which it is – to maintain our abstinence.

6. If you are unable to make a phone call – take a walk and get a change of scenery. I had people ask me where I was in the house – if I answered that I was in the kitchen and really had no business there, it was strongly suggested that I get out of the kitchen and take a walk. Fresh air is good for us!

7. Lastly, remember that you have a loving Higher Power who wants nothing better than to help you through this challenge. Ask Him/Her for help!

I leave you with this thought from my favorite paragraph (paraphrased) – “And acceptance is the answer to all my problems todayUntil I could accept my food addiction/compulsive eater I could not stay abstinent, unless I can accept life completely on life’s terms, I can not be happy. . .”

Have a great and wonderful abstinent Thanksgiving!

-Janet L

The Friday Night Arlington H.O.W. Step Meeting

This meeting is held from 7:00 to 8:30 P.M. at Saint George's Episcopal Church on the corner of Fairfax Dr. and Oakland Street. We read the steps and traditions from various pieces of program literature. The leader is also the speaker. The readings are followed by individuals sharing.

The sponsor line is impressively long at this meeting. To become a HOW sponsor one must have 70 days of abstinence and do prescribed reading and writing assignments based on the first three steps.

Although we recognize the seriousness of our compulsive eating disease, our spirit is very positive and we share fun and laughter. Come join us!!

Why a 100 Pounders' Meeting?

When I first came to OA in the mid 80's, the concept of a special focus meeting never entered my mind. I came in to program through a treatment center where everyone in the group was classified morbidly obese like me. The stigma and aloneness I felt were erased simply by being among others who shared my plight.

After I relapsed for 9 years and could neither find nor afford such a treatment center. I had no idea what my weight was. The doctor's scale stopped at 350 pounds and I was too ashamed to seek out a scale that could weigh me. All I did know was that I felt alone and I had lost all hope of losing the weight . I was convinced my fate was an early piano case sized grave.

Still, I launched a desperate cry for help to the OA email loop and learned that there were “100 Pounder” meetings in our area. I went to one and have been coming back ever since. Here I once again found others who had done all the perverse things I had done with food and felt the same shame I had. I was not the only one who had to buy the last decade's fashions at the “Big and Tall” store. I was not alone in the discomfort of sitting in a movie theater or plane seat. I actually found someone else who had been assigned a different seat on a small plane for reasons of ballast. I found the hope and inspiration I needed to believe this could again work for me as I heard and saw others who had once been twice their current size.

While the meetings have a special focus, they are open to all who desire to stop eating compulsively. I have been grateful to hear bulimics and anorexics share at these meetings about their own body image issues and learn that emotionally they have felt the same level of shame and humiliation that I once felt at my top weight.

The 100 Pounder meeting in Oakton has been my home group for several years now. It's in these meetings that I have the opportunity to work closely with others who have experienced the same extremes of this disease that I have. And it is through working and sharing with them that I get right sized and learn to accept the battle scars of extra skin and stretch marks that are a part of losing over 100 pounds multiple times in my life. I am grateful for these reminders of just how powerful this disease is and the misery I would be in if I was to again return to the food. Positive outlooks like this are not possible when I try to work this program alone. I owe my life to this fellowship and especially to the 100 Pounders meetings where I first regained the hope and faith to KEEP COMING BACK.

STEP 11

“In step eleven we are challenged to actively seek to improve our relationship with our Higher Power in the same way we might develop any relationship by taking the time on regular basis to be with H. P.”

“When meditating, we consciously choose to focus our minds on something other than our everyday desires and concerns.”

“If time spent in prayer and meditation makes us even a little bit saner or more loving, if it encourages or strengthens us even a tiny bit, we can be sure God has ‘spoken’ and we have ‘heard’.”

“OAs who have made prayer and meditation a regular part of their lives have found a resource for healing and strength which cannot fail.”

From The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous

CHANGE

Because the suggested topics for this month’s *Novations* articles are “Abstinence through the Holidays” and/or “Gratitude” of course this defiant compulsive overeater has found something else to write about. Change. I write this from an austere ski lodge in the foothills of Mount Snow in Vermont. God has painted a stupendous rolling landscape of color. I couldn’t help witnessing this miracle without feeling sadness that the summer really is over and that fall and winter are arriving with or without my permission.

So what does this have to do with abstinence? For me, everything. It was only six days ago that I lost my nine months of abstinence because the disease of compulsive overeating is cunning, baffling and powerful. It was the “whiskey in the milk” experience. I chose to eat one carbohydrate more than my food plan allowed late Sunday night because I felt hungry. The disease took over. Certainly one carb wouldn’t matter, I

rationalized. Within a half hour, one carb grew to four. The next morning, on a business trip, I picked up a sugar item. I ran into my client at the airport, and he knew that usually I ate in accordance with food plan. With shame I lost all integrity and hid in a germ filled stall in the ladies room with my pants at my ankles consuming this gooey, high fat sugar item. Within six hours, I had consumed approximately 10 sugar items and was sick to my stomach. The good news is that at 3 in the afternoon I used the telephone to contact an abstaining compulsive overeater who intervened and talked me into throwing away the rest of my binge food, which I did. And I have been abstinent by the grace of God for five days.

What does this have to do with change? When we abstain and work the steps we are rocketed into the fourth dimension and when I pick up an extra food item that isn’t on my food plan, so to am I transformed. I changed from a woman of respect

and integrity to a woman who lied, hid and practiced avoidance of anything that was good for me. The change that I am so grateful for is the change that overcame my psyche the instant I said to an abstaining overeater that I would throw out my stash. Call it a spiritual experience — I will. After all, every day that I stay abstinent is a spiritual experience. Each day that I remember that my motives and behavior are transformed when I pick up the food, so do I remember that abstinence is the most important thing in my life without exception.

I guess I did write about the topics of abstinence during the holidays and gratitude after all. Maybe by reading this article you won’t have to repeat the experience that I did six days ago. Together we can stay abstinent one day at a time no matter if it’s November 23rd or December 25th. For this I am grateful. So come on Winter, bring it on. I’m abstinent today. We can handle change. Mary I.

THE ELEVENTH STEP

The AA Big Book states, “We are not cured of (compulsive overeating or food addiction). What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition.” That has been my experience: I’ve had this disease my entire life, and the only force powerful enough to keep it in remission is God. The hard part for me is the willingness to let go of self-will and to turn to God in humility—to seek a relationship with Him through prayer and meditation—so that “God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.”

The 11th step says we “*sought* through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God...” Several years ago I heard a speaker with long term recovery talk about “seeking” to improve our contact with God. He said that “seek” (contd P. 5)

SPIRITUALITY...WHAT A CONCEPT!

I once heard a program tape where the speaker said "Religion is for those who believe in Hell... Spirituality is for those those of us who have been there."

Part of my story involves losing a sibling to a religious cult and having religious folks tell me whenever a loved one passed that it was God's will. Frankly, I didn't care that kind of God. I figured I could do better without him. Boy was I wrong!

When I came to OA, I was not at all convinced that a power greater than myself could or would restore me to sanity. In fact, if there was such a being, I surely did not feel worthy of the gifts promised unless I did things a specific way to perfection. It took listening to others who had also questioned the value of spiritual principles and trying

some of the things they had tried. When someone suggested I define my own higher power and went so far as to say God could be nothing more than an acronym for "Good Orderly Direction" or "Great Out Doors", I was still skeptical. But having seen it work for them and being as desperate as I was, I tried.

At first my prayer and meditation was simple and unstructured and lasted only a few minutes. (I didn't want to take more than my share of God's time) Still it helped to calm me down and open some channel for me to better understand what my higher power's will was for me. Eventually, I was reading out of five or six daily meditation books and praying for an hour every morning. God had all the time in the world for me and I could even pray and meditate whenever the need arose, not just at a

specific time each day. I even went back to old church but still had my own definition of my higher power that worked for me. This all worked great and I was experiencing all the promises the program offered. My focus was less on the physical recovery and more on the emotional and spiritual.

Unfortunately, for reasons I still can't put my finger on, I got lazy and complacent and let up on my prayer and meditation. I was unemployed and things in my life just weren't going as rosy as they had been and I was beginning to lose faith. The disease saw an opening and struck. I started to do it my way again and soon relapsed. It is no mistake that the first few warning signs of relapse relate to weaknesses in our spiritual program. I was still going to church and pray-

ing but I had stopped praying to understand, accept, and do God's will.

Since returning from relapse, I learned that, for me, the essence of spirituality has center on the quest to understand, accept and do God's will trusting that regardless of what is going on in my life at any given moment, I will be taken care of.

Today, my prayer and meditation are not as structured as they once were, but I am finding that this need not be perfect either. My God listens to me however, whenever I and wherever I need. Anon.

THE ELEVENTH STEP CONTD.

is an action verb and noted that when we played hide-and-seek as kids, we searched actively and with great enthusiasm for our playmates. The speaker suggested that if we "sought" God with equal intensity that the results could be amazing.

Our literature includes many examples of formal prayers we can use to approach God. I have found that asking God in prayer each morning and before every meal to help me stay abstinent has been very helpful. Completing the day (and each meal) with a "thank you" is also a clear reminder to me that my recovery depends totally on God's grace—it is not a product of

my will power. I think one of the benefits of a prayer life is that I feel more centered and less anxious or upset about those things I cannot control—which is everything except my own attitude. And the calmer and more serene I feel, the less likely I am to turn to addictive or compulsive behavior to "take off the edge."

Some say that praying is "talking to God" while meditation is "listening to God". The AA 12 and 12 says "One of (meditation's) first fruits is emotional balance. With it we can broaden and deepen the channel between ourselves and God as we understand Him."

For me meditation is a time of silence before God,

of emptying myself to the extent possible of all my concerns and just surrendering a piece of my day totally to God so that He can use that time to shape me in any way He sees fit.

I have a tendency to try to evaluate my meditation and to give myself a "grade" on how I did or think "did anything happen?" or "is this working?" None of that is any of my business. My only job is to show up at the appointed time and place and sit still. The results are not up to me. The experience may feel wonderful or it may feel like a total waste of time. It doesn't matter what it "feels" like. What matters is I'm consistent in my practice—just as with all the tools and steps of my program.

This practice does improve conscious contact with God. On a daily basis, He has the elbow-room to work on me from the inside out to change me for the better and to prepare me to be of greater service to Him and to my fellows. And I in turn not only grow closer to God, my life becomes more full of love, peace, joy, freedom, and a sense of purpose.

May this upcoming season of Thanksgiving remind us of all the blessings our Higher Power has bestowed on our lives and fill us with a sense of gratitude for God, for our abstinence, and for our OA Program. And may the 11th Step become a daily part of each of our programs. Anon.

*Celebrate in Style
Beach Retreat XV*

Sponsored by the Tidewater Area OA Intergroup

March 16-18, 2007

Virginia Beach

MORE INFO TO COME

Since November is typically the "gratitude" month, the articles for this issue contain this theme. But in putting together the newsletter, I realized they also contain and live out the "promises" of the program (found on page 83 of the AA "Big Book"). The founders of AA were very precise in their language throughout this book, and here is no exception. They say these things WILL come true and this month's writings reflect this in a wonder way. How marvelous is our recovery and fellowship. MF

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 matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can help 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 outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do of ourselves. The promises of the program are not extravagant. They are being fulfilled among us- sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

CELEBRATING ABSTINENCE CONTD P. 1

Abstinence makes it possible to truly celebrate the holidays and not spend them recuperating from food fogs, hangovers and stomach aches. Abstaining is such a spiritual experience that it makes the meaning of the holidays clearer. I am better able to truly observe them.

People are such a special part of the holiday experience. Abstaining from compulsive eating and drinking lets me celebrate the people that I love in a much better way than when I was dwelling on the food, grazing and binging.

During the holidays, I have more time off from work and each year I have increased my meetings. By seeing program friends who go to different meetings than I normally attend has been a wonderful way to celebrate the season.

Celebrate abstinence! By celebrating abstinence I celebrate Higher Power. It is also a reminder that "abstinence is the most important thing in my life without exception."

Howertine

TOOL OF THE MONTH: LITERATURE

We study and read OA-approved pamphlets; OA-approved books, such as Overeaters Anonymous, The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous and For Today; and we read Lifeline, our monthly magazine on recovery. We also study the book Alcoholics Anonymous, referred to as the "Big Book," to understand and reinforce our program. Many OA members find that when read on a daily basis, the literature further reinforces how to live the Twelve Steps. Our OA literature and the AA "Big Book" are ever-available tools which provide insight into our problem of eating compulsively, strength to deal with it, and the very real hope that there is a solution for us.

EMOTIONAL SOBRIETY

I have found that maintaining my emotional sobriety during the holiday season is critical to maintaining my abstinence. There are so many ups and downs and expectations associated with holidays. The best remedy is for me to plan my activities— including both what I will and will not be doing—in a careful well-thought out manner. I look at my expectations and see how they mesh with those of other family members and close friends. If there is a disconnect I try to discuss it early on and resolve any differences. This makes things go much more smoothly during the holidays.

I take a close look at that kind of holiday I would like each year. Some years I send out cards and newsletters and some years I don't. I no longer bake goodies or buy gifts because I find it too stressful.

When I am emotionally balanced, abstinence is easy. Therefore, maintaining that balance is the main focus of my holiday planning. The payoff is great and well worth the effort! Anon.



The Honest Open Path to
Everyday ABSTINENT
Living
**Annual OA/HOW
RETREAT**
November 10 - 12, 2006
Join Us at Bon Secours
Spiritual Center



Overeaters Anonymous NOVA Intergroup
presents a Workshop on Worldwide IDEA DAY*
Abstinence thru the Holidays

Saturday, November 18, 2006

1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Hope Lutheran Church 4604 Ravensworth Road Annandale VA

There will be speakers from HOW, Relapse
Survival, Bulimia-Anorexia, 100 Pounders, and Regular OA.

Open sharing from 3p-4p

**International Day of Enjoying Abstinence



**The DC-Metro Intergroup of Overeaters Anonymous presents:
An Autumn Retreat at Wellspring
November 24-26, 2006**

Wellspring Conference Center, Germantown, Maryland

Join your friends in OA...and meet new ones. Refresh and renew your recovery! Workshops, speakers, meetings, relaxation, fun. Comfortable cabins with baths, kitchens, refrigerators, stoves, and lounge areas nestled in beautiful woodlands. **Contacts: Carrie F. at cfeldman530@gmail.com or 301.509.5993 or Rosemary T. at WhereandWhen@aol.com or 301-627-7005**

ARLINGTON SUNRISE OVEREATERS ANONYMOUS

THANKSGIVING MARATHON : OA 12 STEPS—12 HOURS



Thursday, November 23, 2006 8am (step 1) - 8pm (step 12)

ST. CHARLES CHURCH –UPPER ROOM 3304 N. Washington Blvd, Arlington

1 ½ blocks from Clarendon Metro stop—opposite George Mason Law School

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Editorial Policy: The opinions expressed in *Novations* reflect those of the writers and not Northern Virginia Intergroup nor OA as a whole, or the Editor of *Novations*; nor does the publication of any article imply endorsement.

The editor welcomes any and all contributions, and reserves the right to edit all articles.

INTERGROUP CORNER

I have just finished my 2 year commitment as a Regional Rep from NOVA Intergroup to Region 7. To get this position I had to attend a minimum of 6 months of intergroup meetings and have fulfilled the abstinence requirement. I was not really interested in this service but found that I have been rewarded by meeting so many recovering members from all the other states: PA ,NJ , WV, MD and DC. Our regional chairperson, Janice J, is a mom with 4 kids and has maintained a 100+ weight loss forever 8 years.

We have 2 assemblies each year: October and April. My attendance was paid for by NOVA intergroup. I am thankful to all of you who paid my way for a weekend of OA recovery at Rehoboth Beach through your Seventh Step contributions.

Each assembly has a few general meetings and then 4 sessions for small committee meetings: "12th Steps Within", "Newsletters", "Ways and Means", "Unity-First Tradition", "Intergroup Insights," I agreed to be secretary for the website meeting. I really had to pay attention and work with the Chairperson. Then I wrote up notes for the whole assembly to read. Amy L, from Philadelphia is the new webmaster. There are 11 intergroups with no websites. Some of those attending who have websites are going to help these members start websites or create links to Region 7 via e-mail addresses. I am recommending every member go on the website www.OAregion7.org to keep informed about what recovering members are doing, to post questions to and get answers from the Region 7 board members.

I also attended the 12th Step Within meetings. I heard members share how they got out of relapse: becoming teachable, willing and honest; making phone calls; going to different meetings; doing 90 meetings in 90 days; reaching out, asking for help, and accepting help. Many of the intergroups also sponsor Relapse meetings.

Region 7 has a budget to send speakers around the region so if your meeting wants fresh voices of recovery go to the region 7 website and to find out how it works. Thank you NOVA intergroup for sending me to the assemblies - I recommend this service to any recovering OAer. Gail W.

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