



# New Horizon

OA Manasota Intergroup  
Quarterly Newsletter – Fall, 2012

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**NOTICE:** OA needs you to fill the open positions above. Contact Paula 487-8027. Email changes to OA meeting schedules to editors.

**Editorial Policy:** Opinions expressed here are solely of the writer and not OA as a whole or necessarily those of the Editors. Articles are edited for style but not content.

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## Attitude of Gratitude

I am fresh out of an OA meeting and felt compelled to write, so here it comes. I am one of those people who skirted around OA for years, sticking my toes into meetings now and then. I was slowly gaining weight, from the year 2000 and on, to what turned out to be 70 pounds. I was attracted to what I heard at OA and to those people who radiated a certain serenity. Yet, I did not commit. I made a few failed attempts to find a sponsor, and gave up. I had a couple of OA books and would occasionally read from them. OA felt like another "should" to me -- something I ought to be doing. After a while, I just stuck the books away somewhere in my living room bookshelves, the caboose of my reading train.

In the spring of 2011, I became very ill and saw many doctors who could not figure out what was wrong with me. It was painful, lonely, frustrating and scary. My emotions were frayed and raw. Luckily, one doctor was able to help me and I am still recovering. Independently, my cardiologist recommended that I "lose weight." I lost 52 pounds over a seven month period. It was a herky-jerky process, using a few different non OA, methods. Within the last six months, still feeling raw in my mind, if somewhat less in my body, I gained back 10 pounds by, of course, compulsive overeating.

I hit the wall. My life had been, has been and was unmanageable. I knew that if I did not somehow change my relationship with food (and myself), did not stop isolating (I was not able to work and was otherwise mostly alone in my home every day) and did not find some genuine peace of mind and serenity, I was in danger of gaining back more weight and maybe wrecking what progress I had made in my overall physical recovery, or even making myself sicker.

I thought about going back to OA, "for real" this time. I hated to go back to the one meeting I used to attend, because I felt like a failure (which was clearly impossible on any level, since I had never entered into or participated in the program in earnest in the first place). Starting about three months ago, I went to a few meetings at my "old" meeting room. There were those people, again, the ones with the serenity I wanted. I knew, from my sporadic OA experience and was learning the same thing in my recovery from my current illness, that I could not achieve a healthy relationship with food, myself (including healing my body) or the rest of the world without a strong spiritual life. In order to get there, I knew that I had to "work" the program. For me, that first meant more meetings per week and taking the risk of looking for a sponsor.

I added a new meeting and ended up sharing, literally, one sentence. Through blubbing and tears, I said that I was trying to break out of my own prison. It was not the first time I ever cried at an OA meeting, but I was embarrassed, especially since it was a "new" meeting for me.

Yet, after the meeting, many people came up to me to give me hugs, offer their names, telephone numbers and support. I was surprised and very happy. It felt wonderful and I was and am very grateful to those people and the rest of the people at that meeting. I also dared to ask someone who -- even after only listening to her once -- seemed to have what I wanted, to be

Since then, I have been calling my sponsor, even if not reporting my food or being abstinent at the moment. (She seems to have infinite patience and be very wise.) I have made phone calls. I have gratefully received some calls from people. I took the OA books off my bookshelves and put them next to my bed, and am doing some reading and meditating. I made an attempt to start working the steps. I felt especially honored and grateful when, last week, someone else from the program -- someone I barely know -- actually called me seeking help in getting through a craving on her way home from work. I was starting to feel a real connection to the people in the program. (Can this be the beginning of experiencing my Higher Power?)

Which brings me to today's meeting -- a Big Book meeting. As I saw and heard the reading going around the circle heading towards me, the passages hit me hard, sharply reminding me of my deceased brother, whom I loved dearly and missed very much. I wasn't sure that I could hold it together when it was my turn to read. I was determined to read and not give in. I haltingly read the paragraph when it was my turn, pausing, in vain, to compose myself. Through tears, I explained my connection to the words that were read. The man to my right passed along some tissues to me. Under my breath, I thanked him and told him that I felt like an idiot, this being the second meeting in a row at which I cried. He said that I should not feel that way and that it was okay. I was very grateful for his understanding and kindness.

OA feels different this time. Not a "should." Maybe it's the small connection to people that I am building, maybe it's my sponsor. Maybe it's more meetings or all of the above. All I know is that even though tears are coming lately, I want to keep coming back. I guess it \*is\* welcome home.

JoEllen

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#### ON THE PATH TO GROWING UP

As I think back on my time spent in this program, I am amazed at all the changes that I never would have thought possible, and even more that, their divine timing. Recently my sponsor asked me to share my story out loud. When there was a request for this newsletter, I felt moved to volunteer. That's usually how my life works... When I feel moved to do something, that's my cue to act. So here goes. As I write, I ask my Higher Power to speak through me and hope that someone reading this might be helped.

I imagine that I was always a compulsive eater, the difference was fine as long as the evidence did not show up on my body. Being a gymnast through my early twenties did a pretty good job of keeping my compulsion a secret from myself, though probably not from others. When asked to lose one pound (literally) my freshman year in college, everything changed. I realized that food was my solution and regardless of my effort, I had no control. I spent Monday through Wednesday at the gym for practice, followed by the sauna, Stairmaster, and running, all while dehydrating myself and eating as little as possible until after weigh-in. I'm not sure how I got anything done the rest of the week between all my binging. Looking back, I had my fair share of humiliating eating moments, although mostly, I was keeping a secret. It's funny how naïve I was...so typical of an addict.

I clearly remember how I felt when I decided to no longer compete after my sophomore year. I was sad and scared about leaving the sport that I thought had defined me for so long, but there was also an incredible sense of relief knowing that I could again eat without being held accountable.

The next ten years consisted of a slow gaining of weight, periodic losses, and more gaining. My ability to control my food or to exercise on a daily basis was shot. I was exhausted and resolved that this was the hand that I had been dealt. I couldn't diet anymore and made the decision to eat what I wanted because the obsession and resulting loss of control, always won.

Years later as I was finishing graduate school and, ironically, counseling a client regarding his drug addiction, my world unexpectedly changed again. After he missed an appointment, I learned that he was smoking crack cocaine again. It was January and he was living on the streets during one of Michigan's coldest spells. I had a sinking feeling that he died that night. I can only hope that I was wrong and that he has since stumbled back into recovery. The following day, I went to my first OA meeting.

I was afraid that I would be criticized because I wasn't overweight at that time and thought that not wearing any make-up might help me hide. Instead, what I found was a room full of welcoming people, laughing, telling stories, and nodding their heads when others shared. I never knew that a room existed where people could talk openly about eating out of the garbage while everyone knowingly nodded. I remember my body feeling warm as I looked around in disbelief. I felt so comfortable, so loved, and so understood. I remember thinking, "oh my gosh, is it possible that I don't have to live with this anymore?" I know this is not everyone's experience and I think that my HP probably knew that it needed to be mine. I had no idea this feeling could exist...I will always be thankful.

(Cont'd on next page)

In the years that followed I have had three sponsors, all wonderful and all arrived at just the right time. My first abstinence consisted of three meals a day, up to three snacks with specific timing, and up to three deserts a week with no more than one desert per day. That lasted about a year until I no longer felt abstinent. I then followed a food plan from a nutritionist and eventually eliminated desert all together as I felt that I was wishing my time away until I could have another. Finally after five years of abstinence, I decided to give up sugar and artificial sweeteners. Even though I had not been eating desert for years, I was amazed at where my sugar was coming from...my coffee I understood, but stove top stuffing and my "healthy" morning cereal? I was stunned but learned how to shop and eat again. I had a short grieving period, but after three weeks I was pretty well adjusted. I was absolutely astonished by how much better I felt. My appetite decreased, as well as my cravings and blood sugar crashes.

Recently at 39, I got engaged for the first time. If that were not a big enough change, my fiancé had been continually asking me about my chronic stomach aches. I fought against seeking help as I had already been through batteries of tests yielding no answers and was tired of diagnoses that did not fit. My nutritionist recommended food allergy testing and gave me the name of a holistic MD. Low and behold, my numbers for wheat, gluten, eggs, dairy and soy were off the charts. I again was completely stunned and returned to the grocery store to learn how to shop and eat. This was followed by three more weeks of grief. When one more test came back with high numbers in the category in the category of legumes.....more learning and grieving ensued.

Where am I now? My stomach aches are virtually gone. I have them occasionally and was warned that that would be the case for probably a year. I lost a little weight unintentionally, but am now at a healthy weight. My energy is better and I really feel good. God's timing amazing. If I had been told that I would need to make all the above changes on my first trip to OA six years ago, I would have failed miserably and knowingly continued to injure my body. The right sponsors, the right food plan, my "just enough" willingness, and the support of our OA family all worked toward this new place. What I know so clearly, is that I could never, and I mean never, have done this on my own. As a matter of fact, since I walked into program, I never felt like I was the one doing this...thank God. Because I know I not only wouldn't, I couldn't. Now when I read Step One, I am able to focus on other areas of my life that are unmanageable, not my food. Coming from someone who thought she was so grown, I'm now starting to grow up, one day at a time.

Holly  
Royal Oak, MI

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## VACATIONING WITH PROGRAM

"Don't forget to take your program on vacation with you" was something my sponsor would quote to me before I would leave. The half-hearted "no problem" would mentally be internalized with "I'll see what's going on". Vacations; especially those where I'm meeting with friends and family, were always challenging to make my program match with the various planned events. God forbid, I would disappoint anyone or not feel included or whatever excuse was at-hand.

A funny thing happened this year; I decided to put my program first. I've become pretty disciplined about doing my various readings and writing in the morning, making daily calls to my sponsor, working with people I sponsor, and attending meetings. All these activities help me maintain an abstinence that is working...Finally! Living the program by making priorities, listening to a Higher Power and doing the things that will keep my abstinence at the forefront, has given me the ability to lovingly take my program on vacation.

I have always felt that I would be missing something; that I would somehow not feel a part of; that I would not feel comfortable. Instead I found a freedom that I have been enjoying over the past year that they talk about in our literature. Vacationing with my program has been the best time I could have imagined – Freedom that was enjoyable, simple. There were challenges; but usually a quick prayer got me through.

My vacation was so enjoyable. I spent time with lots of friends and family – concentrating on the good time and not the food was a great benefit. The most amazing thing was when we returned home, I actually lost weight – go figure. Thank God for this program and our fellowship.

Marilyn T.

## ABOUT HONESTY

In Step One I examined myself and learned about honesty. I began compulsively eating when I was just a child. I discovered that food, especially sweets, numbed painful feelings or moods. I thought it helped me face problems and fears. During my childhood I let the food help free me of fear, worry, loneliness, discouragement, regret and boredom. Because life is full of conditions that prompt these kinds of feelings, I resorted to my food addiction more and more often.

When I reached my teenage years, I took a good look at myself and decided I would have to slim down in order to attract the opposite sex. I put myself on my first self-styled “diet” which consisted of very small portions. My mother took in boarders, so since there were a number of people at the dinner table, others seldom noticed what I was doing. We always had stimulating dinner conversations to distract us a little.

In a matter of a few months boys started noticing me. This incentive worked for me pretty well during the rest of my teens and into my twenties. During this time my life was interesting and active. I did well in school, was in the orchestra, worked on the school newspaper, and won prizes in art, music and I was on the National Honor Society. When I was a senior in H.S., I fell in love, and I turned down three college scholarships in favor of getting married. I went to Japan with my husband who was in the Air Force during the Korean War. I had such an interesting time in Japan; I wanted him to stay in the Air Force so we could see Europe too. I was unsuccessful in that attempt.

My husband, who had been a very easy-going guy during his years in the Air Force, suddenly changed when we got back to the States. He was obsessed with “getting ahead”. We returned to the Midwest to live near his family. We built our first house and my husband returned to work at the meatpacking plant and finished his college education while I started having babies at an alarming rate. My husband said that we were “living our real life” now, and I realized our two year honeymoon was over. My food addiction raised its ugly head.

I was born and raised in New York and now I found myself in the middle of nowhere, all alone most of the time. My husband worked all the extra shifts that he could get, which were most of the weekends. Since we only had one car, in order to go anywhere, I had to drive him to work at 4:30 a.m. and then pick him up again. I did a lot of reading and I tried to make friends. His ambitions seemed sensible to me at that time, but I didn't realize it would go on 55 years, the length of our marriage. He always worked two jobs, plus he began building and selling houses.

It has only been since I've come into OA that I've realized that he had his own addictions: over-working and over-spending. He had to over-work in order to over-spend. Through OA, I have come to understand this, and it has made a huge difference to me, turning my resentment of him into compassion. We were not honest enough with ourselves to admit we were both addicts. I denied to myself the seriousness of my overeating. I was deceiving myself always believing if I could just slim down all my troubles would be over. When I resort to lies and secrecy, hoping to excuse ourselves, we are weakened spiritually. With each act of dishonesty we only perpetuate the addiction. It has taken me all these years to admit I am powerless over food, and only by turning it over to my Higher Power can I hope to overcome my addiction.

Joan

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GOD'S LOVE

Breath, the gift of Life.... It is in the stillness as we go within that connection is made with the God of ones understanding. It is the unconditional love of God. For the multitude of gifts that each day brings; for opportunities to strengthen and enhance the Truth of who we are.

For clarity through awareness; even when anxiety and fear take a hold of ones mind, gifts come in a variety of ways. For the many ways one can meditate; such as mindful walking, Yoga, journaling and letting go and letting God. Trust that the good is being revealed through the openness to hear the still small voice within.

Janet H.

***INTERNATIONAL DAY EXPERIENCING ABSTINENCE  
(IDEA DAY)***

***NOVEMBER 17, 2012***

***LOCATION: PINECRAFT PARK***

***TIME: NOON UNTIL 4:00 P.M.***

***BRING YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR FOOD (AND DISH TO  
SHARE, IF YOU WISH)***

***MANASOTA INTERGROUP***

***FALL WORKSHOP***

***STEPS 10, 11 & 12***

***WHEN: OCTOBER 20, 2012***

***TIME: 8:30 UNTIL 2:00***

***WHERE: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH***

***3975 FRUITVILLE RD, SARASOTA***

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