

Outreach stories from Region Ten

Outreach Committee 2008

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When I had been in recovery in OA for 15 years my husband and I found ourselves talking one night about the possibility of living in Fiji for a period of time. Our three daughters were all born in Fiji and had been adopted by us when they were babies. We wanted to give them the opportunity of getting to know the country of their birth. My husband managed to secure a contract working at Nadi airport for 18 months and before we knew what had hit us, our talk at the tea table had become a reality!

Although I knew there were no meetings in Nadi, I still felt it was God's will that my family go and that I personally would be given what I needed. I had plans to start a meeting in Nadi of course and as soon as we got there I felt myself drawing on every meeting I had ever been to in those 15 years, like drawing money out of the bank. When we arrived in Nadi we were put up in a hotel as our house wasn't ready for us. We were told it would only be for a few weeks but, being Fiji time, weeks turned into months. Since we didn't have our own telephone, I told myself it wasn't possible to advertise OA in the newspaper as I didn't have a number for prospective members to ring! I told myself I would advertise as soon as we moved into our house.

Soon after we moved into our house I had to come back to Christchurch as my mother was having treatment for breast cancer. As soon as I started going to my regular meetings and hearing all that recovery, I realised the money in my bank was running low and I knew I needed to get that ad in the newspaper when I got back to Nadi, which I did. I ran the weekly ad for the rest of my time in Nadi. I got quite a few calls from men, which I thought was because of their problem with food but gradually found out was because of their desire to meet a kiwi girl! I even had one man turn up at our hotel in Suva when I had an OA friend visiting from Christchurch. He had rung every accommodation place in Suva to track us down. In his case he wanted an introduction to a particular company in New Zealand. My friend and I 12-stepped him anyway!

I did get quite a few calls from women with a genuine problem with food, all Indian women, no Fijians. I 12-stepped most of the women who rang me, which was an interesting experience, quite unlike the 12-stepping I had done a lot of in Christchurch. I met a few of the women at their workplace, at their request, and was able to talk to them on their own. When I saw someone at their home it was always very difficult to get the woman on her own, usually a family affair! I always tried to finish off on a one-to-one by suggesting the woman walk me to the car and see me off, so I could encourage her to attend a meeting. The meetings were to be held in a little room next to our house (supposedly the maid's room but we didn't have a maid!). I tried to hire somewhere to have a meeting but no one was at all keen to rent me one. I had the banners set up in our maid's room and literature set out. I was ready for the influx!

In all my time of 12-stepping in Nadi I only had one person come to a meeting and that was a social worker who was interested in knowing more about the programme. Looking back, I think I would do things differently. I feel that the main reason no one came to a meeting was the cultural difference. Had a few women actually come, they would have identified with each other, even if not me, but they never got that far. If I was doing it again I think I would have advertised the meeting in the newspaper, as well as my phone number. That may have meant they would come to a meeting without first being 12-stepped, but would not have given prospective OAs the chance to be put off by that cultural difference.

Even if only two Indian women had come to a meeting, I think that would have been enough for them to get that identification going with each other. It is normal for us to look for the differences, rather than the similarities, when we come to OA. In this case the difference in culture was a greater barrier than the identification with my story could overcome. Perhaps if they had been desperate enough this would not have stopped them, who knows.

The other part of my experience as a loner in Fiji was being registered with WSO as a loner so I could be contacted by others in the programme who were in Fiji on holiday. This happened quite a bit and was a real lifesaver for me. We would get together and talk, usually at their hotel, and sometimes have a meeting. I knew that having a meeting was much better for me than having a talk, but it wasn't just about me and I was very grateful for what I could get.

Prior to leaving for Fiji, the sponsees that I had at that time decided to get new sponsors. They were free to do that of course. I personally never considered changing sponsors and continued to be sponsored by my original sponsor in Christchurch, who has now sponsored me for 27 years. I wrote to her continuously and rang her about once a month. Looking back now I can see that wasn't often enough; weekly would have been much better. My sponsor wrote to me and kept me in touch with the Christchurch fellowship, which I really appreciated, since I didn't have a fellowship of my own. Another member in Christchurch wrote and kept me in touch with Region 10 and the wider OA fellowship, which I also really appreciated as I had a great need to feel part of a bigger whole (a need I didn't really feel when I was in Christchurch). As for the rest of the fellowship in Christchurch, well it was very much out of sight, out of mind, which just emphasised to me that the fellowship doesn't need me but I very much need it.

At the end of our 18 months in Fiji we had the option of staying for another six months. We had our daughters' schooling to consider and in the end that was the main reason we didn't stay. When we arrived back and I started going to my regular meetings I could see (eventually) that I needed to be there very much. I was full of resentment but thought I was fine. I am sure today that that resentment would have led me back to the food sooner or later. I was fortunate that I had had the number of years in recovery that I did when we went to Fiji. While we were there I had drawn on every OA meeting I had ever been to, every OA phone call I had ever made, every 12-step job I had ever been on, and the money in my bank had in fact, after 18 months, run out.

I am very grateful to my Higher Power for giving me the grace to survive that time in Fiji, which was a fantastic experience for my family, off the food and still in recovery. Thank God for OA.

My name is Serena G. I am a compulsive overeater. Today I am free from the obsession to compulsively overeat. That is a freedom. When the food got bad enough for me and I couldn't stop or stay stopped the fellowship of OA was there for me. I came into the rooms half way around the world from where I was born; I had been travelling and working abroad for a few months. Food had taken over my life. Despite being in a beautiful country, one of the best jobs I ever had, living with nice people I felt I was self destructing with food.

I didn't want to ring OA. I didn't want to feel the way I did. The food got bad enough that I rang. I surrendered to needing to ring. My recovery began. By the time it came for me to go back to Ireland I had been to meetings for a few months in New Zealand, I had asked a woman to be my sponsor and I was working through the steps.

I didn't realise what leaving the cocoon of regular contact with members with recovery would be like. I had to travel in a different way than I would have planned before coming into OA. Everyday my priority was to ring my sponsor, stick to the food plan and get a meeting. I found great support in AA. When going through the USA I stayed with other OA members who were in recovery. They were members far away from strong OA meetings but they were living the programme; working the steps, relying on a Higher Power, ringing other members and doing their best to carry the message. It was a privilege to share time with them.

At home things were tough, at the beginning especially. I lived with my parents and they couldn't understand why I needed to ring my sponsor at a certain time, have my meals on time, stick to a food plan, go to AA meetings. With my friends some accepted that this is what I needed to do, others challenged me on it. I leaned heavily on my sponsor and other members across the world. It doesn't come naturally for me to pick up the phone, go to meetings, pray in the morning and evening, help someone else but when I do these things I am more at ease in myself.

I have started a meeting in my area. I looked at a few venues before settling on one. I have put up flyers intermittently and contacted WSO about it. I do this because that is what the people before me

who are well do. That is what Bill W did. The people who recovered and are in recovery from 'a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body' carry the message that we can be well. I get waves of doubt bleakness in my recovery but these pass. Sometimes I am on my own in the meeting – an opportunity to do Step 10 work; sometimes there are one or two people there. All groups started with one or two people so it is no big deal.

When I am sharing with someone who is in the thick of this disease I am grateful that I have been given the grace of recovery. In 'A vision for you' in the Big Book it tells me that when I feel 'jittery and alone' to remember that I have 'just now tapped into a source of power much greater than yourself'. When I look for the help it is there. 'God will show us how'.

Hi my name is Sandra, I'm a compulsive overeater.

I have been out of the food for over 6 months. I started to try and control my food when I was about 13 years old. It was then I realised that boys liked the thin girls and I was not one of the thin girls. I watched the thin girls and I would try to eat like the thin girls. That was a failure, as were all my attempts to eat like other people.

My first real diet was at age 18. I took diet pills and exercised daily and ate what I was told. I lost 5 stone and became obsessed about my weight and food and that was the state of my misery for the next 25 years. I became anorexic and then bulimic. My overeating overpowered all my desires to be thin and I ate all the weight back on plus more. I had two babies and was a crazy mother eating, dieting and exercising and overeating, getting fatter and fatter and more insane.

I went to the gym, I went to Weight Watchers, Calorie Counters, I walked for miles, I took diet shakes, I paid a lot of money to naturopaths, homeopaths, doctors, dieticians and counselors. I had acupuncture, massage and read as many self-help books as I could buy, borrow and read.

I also went to 12 step programs for my co-dependency and adult children of alcoholic issues and Al Anon, thinking that they would help me to stop overeating. It didn't work. I went to retreats every other year for 10 years. I thought if I could sort out my feelings and my emotions I could eat like other people, I felt like a failure because nothing I did stopped me from overeating.

It was after the last retreat in October 07 that I finally surrendered and knew I was powerless over food and I had tried everything humanly possible to stop overeating and eat like other people.

I had met a woman 5 years ago who was not in the food for over 20 years. I was not ready to hear the solution so I went on going to OA meetings and trying to eat and exercise like other people. After the

last retreat I knew that H. was the only person who could help me because she was the only person I couldn't manipulate. I needed that because as a compulsive overeater I could manipulate people and situations to overeat. That's how cunning and powerful the disease is.

I continued to compulsively overeat because I couldn't stop. I was like the man in the barn drinking himself to death until he was rescued and taken to hospital. I was getting so fat that the size 26 work shirts were so tight and the bottom buttons were popping off when I bent over. I was so sick and fat and my mind was crazy. I would have mood swings and my anger was destroying my family. At this point I thought I would lose everything. My family, my job, my house and car, everything in my life that I thought was important to me.

My surrender was when H. walked in to the meeting in late February. It was now time to either keep on going down the path of overeating or the solution that H. was offering. I asked God to help me because I was scared that she would ask me to leave my family, my job. I surrendered and asked H. to help me. She said yes and I have been out of the food for over 6 months now and God willing I won't be in the food today. H. suggested I take a few actions and commit my food plan daily. I have and my life is getting better just as she said it would. H. said that I wouldn't recognise myself in twelve months and not only your weight. I know what she was taking about. My body is getting smaller but it's my mind that is changing and I am calmer and much less obsessed about my body and my weight. My life is getting better.

I am heading over to New Zealand soon to meet other recovering overeaters and to do my 5th step. I wouldn't be going anywhere if I were still in the food today. Giving up my old ideas has been easy because my thoughts, feelings and ideas got me to a place of insanity and anger. I couldn't manage my life so I asked for help and I was willing to listen to another person who had more experience in living and enjoying her life and not overeating. I take the action that is suggested and my life is getting better.

I'm Esther and I'm a compulsive overeater.

The obsession to eat was with me as far back as I can remember. I stole food and would hide to eat it, often in a barn on our farm. I was deeply ashamed of what I did. When I was 18 I moved to the city. I would walk from shop to shop eating, hoping no one would notice.

One day when I thought I was going insane from the driving obsession to eat, I finally rang the Overeaters Anonymous number. I met a member face-to-face for a twelfth step call but I didn't relate – I thought, "I'm not that bad". Another woman from OA rang me soon after from another city where she had gone for work. I was amazed that someone I had never met cared enough to call me. When I realised I could not stop eating on my own, I met with her and she told me her story. I related to her eating, but it was when she talked about people pleasing that I started to cry. I could see that there was more wrong with me than just eating.

She took me to a meeting and I asked her to sponsor me. She told me what I needed to do to put down the food. God has removed the obsession to eat. Today I am not afraid of being at home alone with whatever is in the cupboards. I don't spend hours in the supermarket anymore.

Not eating is the foundation for me, but I also have to put the steps in my life. I have to get rid of all my secrets. Things began to change for me when I told my sponsor something about myself I had never told anyone else. I have made amends to the person I thought was responsible for everything that had happened to me. I was terrified, but afterward I felt free. I ask myself 'What can I do for another compulsive overeater?' and there is always something I can do, even if it just a prayer. It works when nothing else does.

I travelled overseas after joining OA. On my first stopover, a loner member came to meet me at the airport and spent some time with me. I was able to ring her often, and this helped me cope with the difficult circumstances I experienced while I was away.

Talking to loner members helps me. It makes me grateful that I'm able to get to regular meetings and hear the message of recovery because of where I live. But I also know from them that it is possible to get well if there are no meetings or people in recovery nearby.

I could never ask for help before coming to Overeaters Anonymous. I'm grateful that I know now how much I need other people in recovery.

Hi, my name is Sue and I am a compulsive overeater.

I have been affected by my weight all of my adult life. I have tried all sorts of diets and weight loss fads. You name it, I've probably tried it! I always felt that if only I could lose weight, all of life's problems would be magically solved and I would never have another worry in the world! In honesty, what I was actually looking for was a way to keep eating the way I wanted to, but still lose weight. I would have success with certain weight loss schemes, only to put all of the weight back on (and always with extra) once the "novelty" of losing weight wore off. I always enjoyed the attention that I got from losing weight, and once I stopped getting validation for being slimmer, I would resume my normal eating patterns and slip back in to the cycle of my overeating.

In other words, I never treated my disease.

After many years of beating myself up for being "weak", and steadily becoming bigger, I made a decision to contact OA. I jumped on the web site, found out about the Loner Service, compulsively bought every OA book there is to buy, and continued in my disease for another year. I did receive emails from a lot of members willing to share their experience strength and hope with me and I was amazed at the level of support.

It planted the seed of OA, even though I couldn't apply anything of what they said to my life.

My HP was working in my life, even if I couldn't see it. I received a phone call one day out of the blue (many months after my initial contact with OA) from an OA member who asked if there were any OA meetings in my area, as there was an OA member about to visit my area. I was also asked if I would like an OA call or visit, and I said yes, with trepidation, as my disease was very wily and must have known I would hear something that was good for me!! I did receive that call, and was given a phone number which I wrote down. Three months later, after eating my way through Christmas and summer and becoming more miserable, I finally hit a rock

bottom. The insanity of the disease had me beaten, and in desperation I phoned the number I was given. I was in such a desperate state that I was willing to do whatever was required.

It has been 8 months since I made that call, and I cannot describe the changes that have occurred in my life, one day at a time. For the first time, I am able to see my overeating as only a symptom of the emotional, spiritual and physical disease that I have, not that I am weak or a “bad” person. I have a sponsor who I ring every day. I have a list of other OA members that I can ring when the going gets tough, and I do not feel so alone.

As there are no OA meetings in my area, I am grateful for this contact.

I use the tools suggested to the best of my ability – I have a food plan, I weigh and measure my food, I read AA Literature and study the Steps and Traditions, I ring my sponsor every day, I have frequent phone contact with other OA members in recovery. I try to practice the principles of the program in my life. I very often get it wrong and slip back in to old ways, which would have had me turning to the food in the past but I can now ring someone in the fellowship, and get back on track by using the OA program. I couldn't do this without the loving support of OA members who are there for me at the end of the phone. I have not met all of these people in person, but in spirit they are there for me, and for that I am grateful.

This is an amazing fellowship, and works even as a loner!

So grateful for abstinence, no matter what, in my life. So grateful for my Higher Power, no matter what, in my life. So grateful for OA, no matter what, in my life. Just moved 7000 miles to another continent, from summer to winter, from a big city to a tiny town. Loads of changes, but so grateful certain things stay the same: abstinence, Higher Power and OA. Been to 3 meetings in 2 weeks, got a temporary sponsor here, and reaching out a lot by email to OA members. Slipping into lots of self-centeredness and thoughtless talking (saying things without thinking first and hurting people as a consequence) and controlling (wanting people to do things my way, telling folks what they "need" to do.)

So grateful to have a program that reminds me to clean up my act as I go along. Through Step 10, I've made the amends I need to make, and am trying, with the help of my Higher Power, to stay alert to these defects as they arise, or at least willing to admit them afterwards and clean up.

So grateful to have a program that reminds me I'm not alone and I don't have to handle this by myself. Through Step 11, I am reaching out to God through prayer and writing, and by sharing aloud (and on email) with others my need to surrender my desire to be perfect, and work on the things I can improve. So grateful to have a program that thrusts me into community. Through Step 12, I have already collected several phone numbers of people at the local meetings I've attempted, and I've reached out to others whose email I have with me, and I can be reminded to just keep on keeping on, practicing positive principles -- acting more thoughtfully and being less-self-centered. So grateful I'm in a program that helps me grow and improve myself even with almost 3 decades of abstinence.

My name is Fawn and I am a compulsive overeater. As far back as I can remember I have had a preoccupation with food. As a child I remember being intensely aware of where my parents hid the chocolate box and I recall demanding an ice-cream every time we stopped at a garage and if I didn't get my way there would be tantrums.

My weight was never a problem because I was a sporty child, however, at about the age of 16 I decided I was a bit heavy and wanted to lose some weight so I decided to eat less and exercise more. This was normal among my friends, however, looking back I can see that dieting triggered off a craving in me that my friends didn't experience. Once I got a taste for losing weight I just wanted more and more of that nice, light, in control feeling it produced and in order to get that feeling I had to eat less and less.

After 4 years of dieting, I moved to university in Dublin, and there my addiction switched from undereating to overeating. Despite not wanting to eat, I would find myself unable to resist the cravings, I needed food and I'd go to extremes to get it. Full of shame and guilt about my behaviour with food, bulimia and increasing body weight, I became a recluse and came out of my room only when my housemate was at work. When I had eaten all I could from the kitchen press I would go to the shop to get fresh supplies and replacements for any food I had eaten that did not belong to me. I knew what I was doing was wrong, but I didn't understand why I was doing it and why I couldn't stop.

Over the next seven years my compulsive overeating continued. I seemed to be able to control it for periods while I was at university or in a relationship, but it was always just under the surface and if I could get away from people for long enough to binge, I would. In an effort to understand my behaviour with food I visited psychotherapists, a psychologist, I studied psychology, I studied nutrition and practised Buddhism, but after each failed attempt to stop doing what I was doing I ended up more demoralised.

When I was 27, having lost my boyfriend, my house and having become unemployable because of my need to eat, I reached a rock bottom. I came to an Overeaters Anonymous meeting and was overwhelmed by what I heard. I couldn't believe that there were other people who behaved the same way I did with food. At that stage I had nothing in my life, so getting to a meeting each day was my only goal.

Unable to stop eating, I admitted myself into a treatment centre for 5 weeks and following that went to a second treatment centre for 3 months. I thought this was the answer until I found myself slipping back into the same behaviours again a few months out of treatment. Seeking a solution again, I found an AA sponsor who took me through the Big Book, this helped me to understand the program but I still had not put down the food.

By chance, I got an opportunity to go on a trip to New Zealand, and while in Christchurch I went to a OA meeting where I heard a message that I had not come across before. This was the first time that I witnessed members who had given up food in the same way that an alcoholic could give up drink. They had something I wanted so on the last day of my trip I had a chat with a lady who is my sponsor today, and flew home to Ireland with a food plan and an arrangement to call her daily. This I was happy to do if it meant sanity around the food.

Back at home staying on my food plan and having my meals on time has become my primary focus. I speak honestly with my sponsor about the food and my life and try to do as she suggests. I tried many meetings and have settled into those where I feel comfortable and hear a solution. I try where I can to carry the message, after a month or so one member got off the food, 7 months later a second person joined us. I call members who have some experience at living life off the food and I ask for help when I need it, this helps me to feel less alone and different.

Today I have been on my food plan for almost 9 months and my life has never been better. I am not living in fear of when I will next turn to food to escape, I have some peace in my head which allows me to take part in life, to have a job, pay rent, be a sister and a friend. I am still presented with challenges, but today I have the choice to face them rather than turning to food to cope.



My name is Leonie and I am a compulsive overeater.

I was 37 years old when I found OA. All my life I had a number of secrets of which I was very ashamed. The first was my eating and another one was the spiritual hunger that I always felt.

When I went to my first meeting of OA there was one person off the food and she talked about having the disease of addiction. For the first time in my life I felt the same as other people.

I bought the Big Book and knew I was the same as these people. I also knew that I wanted what the girl in recovery had. I abandoned myself to the programme, as I believed that in order to get well I would have to do just as the first recovering alcoholics had done. My sponsor (this girl who was off the food) also was going to these same lengths to get well. And I soon came to see that my Higher Power had been food and not God. In order to get well I had to give up the food and trust in God just as is set out in the Big Book.

I am now 65 years old and have been off the food for almost 28 years.

In my years in the programme I have had some experience of sponsoring people who have not had the opportunity to be at meetings where there are others in recovery.

I share my experience with them and encourage them to work the Steps as per the Big Book and to try and expand their spiritual life and carry the message of recovery to others who want it.

For the most part I have found it more difficult to sponsor people who are loners mainly because I do not get to see them regularly at meetings in my area. I encourage them to visit at least once a year, first to complete their 5th step with me and also to surround themselves with people in the fellowship of OA in my area who are in recovery. They then have the opportunity to get to know others in

recovery here and to build relationships with them. Loners who I sponsor ring several times a week and I continue to encourage them to go to meetings and to work the steps in their everyday life the same as I do.

In the years that I have been in OA I have had a very different life from my first 37 years. In fact I feel as though I have had two lives. One before I found out that I was a compulsive overeater and had a disease, and the present life I have today, which is a life of acceptance of what I am, and the freedom that comes with this.

The most important thing in my life today is to be sober and to carry the message to other compulsive overeaters. For me nothing comes before this. Everything I have today and most importantly the freedom comes from finding this 12 step programme and way of life.