

I came to OA in 1983 because my obsession with food and weight had taken over my life. OA says that the reasons for the disease are unimportant, but I like to reflect on my recovery journey.

I come from a culture where food expresses love, but my parents were fat-phobic and said I was fat, although I was not overweight as a child or teenager. Photos prove I was not even chubby, but they criticized what and how much I ate and how loud I chewed. They called me "Big Bear," put me on my first diet at age ten and dressed me in dark slimming clothes like A-line skirts and shirts without horizontal stripes. I was convinced I was an enormous, fat slob unworthy of love.

Sweets were my only comfort. Every day after school, I hunted for the goodies bought for my skinny sister, but hid from me. Of course, I always found them, pretended I wasn't a thief and hid my shame.

I knew I ate differently and always would. The number on the scale defined my self-worth, no matter what it said. In high school I restricted my food and got so thin, friends worried I had anorexia. But I never felt thin enough and thought they would despise me if they knew what I did with food.

In college I gained and lost thirty pounds every few weeks and felt like a loser when I couldn't keep weight off. Vending machines beckoned at night-- two quarters bought a lot of sugar then. My good grades meant nothing since I couldn't control my weight.

I had never heard of OA, but when I saw a meeting advertised on a bulletin board, I had to go. I knew about AA and felt just like an alcoholic with food because I couldn't stop bingeing once I started.

The meeting was held in a church where I was the only person of my race and religion but listening to other compulsive eaters made me feel accepted for the first time. I learned I had a disease and was not a monster, weak or undisciplined. The leader asked what we were willing to do to give up the pain, and I answered in my mind, "give up the sugar," for I knew that was the key to my freedom.

I became involved in OA slowly, at my own pace, went to a nutritionist, got a sponsor (Who had a sponsor) and stopped weighing myself so often. I worked the steps and as I asked for and gave support, made life-long friends.

When I started in OA, I felt obese, even though I was underweight. I left after twelve years because I got bored with meetings. At 5'2", I gained sixty pounds so fast it took my breath away -- it started with a bagel -- I couldn't eat just one.

I found that the disease of compulsive overeating was progressive, but discovered that recovery is progressive, too. I came back to OA because I had nowhere else to go, lost the weight over time and have maintained it for many years. I learned that abstaining from my trigger foods does not ensure me against relapse and that one compulsive bite makes my life unmanageable.

Today, recovery, one day at a time, is the most important thing in my life because I don't have one without it. Freed from food obsession, I enjoy good health, think clearly, have energy and sleep well. I have a rich spiritual life and treasure healthy, reciprocal relationships. Having peace around the food is a miracle I never imagined was possible.

We say that "OA is simple, but not easy." Recovery is hard work, but I am worth it. Don't you deserve recovery, too?

Kate F.