

My OA Journey: Keep on Going No Matter What

I first began to overeat when I was very young. My mom was an alcoholic, and my father was an alcoholic who was full of rage. Whenever something went wrong in the house, the solution was baking cookies or going to the Sara Lee outlet store in Deerfield. I can remember my sister teaching me how to make homemade fudge when I was very young. My sister acted as my mother because my mom wasn't there for me, I didn't really have one. Being only a year older than me, my sister wasn't equipped to be a parent.

My father was a type one diabetic, so food played an important role in my home. When I was young, he had constant insulin reactions and the answer always was orange juice and Lifesavers. Most times, we were afraid of my father. Mealtimes were horrendous, because when my father was angry with someone he would pound on the table, moving the dishes and scaring the heck out of all of us kids. I wasn't overweight but food always played an important role in my home. My parents divorced when I was 11 years old, and like other children, I really thought it was my fault and that I had done something wrong to cause their divorce. My family didn't fit in the neighborhood because divorce was not very accepted at that time. It was during this time that my sister and I started to have a regular babysitter who taught me how to smoke cigarettes. She also sexually molested me. I told no one.

In junior high I worked at a bakery, and, binged on day-old baked goods all the time. My dress size went from a size 7 to a size 16 in a quick amount of time. In hindsight I used food to cope with all of my feelings of insecurity in high school. I was always going on one diet or another. At one point I was an anorexic and this helped me become popular in school, because I was thin. I got a lot of attention, and it was my ticket to feel a part of the group.

In college I discovered alcohol and food took a backseat for a while. Alcohol immediately calmed my nerves and all of my social anxieties too. I was uncomfortable being away from home with new people. Alcohol eased the discomfort. But nonetheless I ended up dropping out of college and was hospitalized for mental illness. I believe my body just couldn't handle all the alcohol I was drinking. A few years later I got a hefty scholarship and was able to attend the Chicago Medical School. There I earned a degree in medical technology, which was a very stressful field. Alcohol, drugs and food were my ways of coping with the stress. My binges were starting to catch up with me, so I went to a doctor to get amphetamines, thinking they would help. These really threw my system off and I had to have hormone shots to replace the chemical imbalance in my system. This episode landed me in the hospital again. When I was released, I still didn't realize or understand the connection between my alcoholism, food addiction to my mental illness, so I went back to using.

Around this time, I met my husband who is an alcoholic as well. We married and partied together. We both experimented with cocaine. After the last hospitalization I finally was diagnosed with alcoholism and got sober with AA. This was also when my eating took

off. Someone told me about OA in an Al-Anon meeting so I started to attend meetings. I worked the steps as best I could. The bingeing decreased, but I was never really free from it. After a while I lost hope and the bingeing, once again, became an important part of my life. I would feel sick after every binge and started to purge. That way I could binge multiple times. This happened off and on, even while I was in OA. I was jealous of people with abstinence. I couldn't figure out what I was doing wrong and never was entirely abstinent. After the pain of my bulimia kept getting worse and worse, I finally gave up my binge foods and was abstinent for quite a long time. However, I didn't continue doing steps 10, 11 and 12, which is a must for recovery. I tried sponsoring but didn't really have a good plan on how to lead someone through the steps. Something was missing in my program, but I couldn't figure out what it was or how to change. Finally, the realization came that I had failed to enlarge my spiritual life through working the steps and service to others. Even so, there would be trials and low spots ahead in my life, which I wouldn't be equipped to survive.

Eating compulsively again, I had a relapse. It was during this time that I started passing out after I ate. Depression and anxiety set in quickly. All I could think about was food and knew that it was just a matter of time before my bulimia would return. To further complicate matters, my mental illness was not being properly medicated. I attempted suicide and almost lost my life. After being hospitalized on and off for a year the doctors finally found a medication that worked. A short time after this ordeal, I started listening to *A Vision for You* and attended a Big Book study weekend, which was very inspirational. There I met a man who led me to my current OA sponsor.

I now know that my disease is permanent, progressive, and fatal. I learned that my main problem centers in my mind rather than my body. My problem is not a lack of desire to not overeat, it is a lack of spiritual power. In recovery, I need to work all the steps and continue to work steps 10, 11 and 12 daily. In *Recovery Jam* I learned that I have "food senility". I am unable to remember how painful the consequences are and what happens when I overeat. I remember the painful consequences only when it's too late and the food is already in my mouth. That is why I needed a personality change that could only come through establishing a strong connection with my Higher Power, God.

My entire OA program is based on my relationship with God. Here are some things I can do now that I couldn't do before recovery. 1) I sponsor and I love to do it. 2) I function better at work and can make my own decisions. 3) I have neutrality around the food 98% of the time. 4) I enjoy babysitting my grandson. 5) My children can count on me for things they need. 6) When I visit my debilitated sister in Arizona, I can be of service to her by shopping, cooking and being a shoulder for her to lean on. 7) I show up for my mom and give service to her. She's living in a skilled nursing facility. 8) I maintained my abstinence even when my mom was hospitalized last year for ten days with COVID. 9) Mom has lost her hearing aids many times and I have helped her locate them. 10) My husband can rely on me to take care of the house. 11) He trusts me with finances. 12) Our relationship as solid as ever, and this year, we will be celebrating 38 years of marriage.

This has been a rough year for me physically. I have undiagnosed abdominal pain that goes on every day but have not sought comfort from food. Instead, I try my best to maintain an attitude of gratitude and seek comfort in my OA program. I'm so grateful to God, my sponsor, sponsees, and OA fellows who have helped me along the way.

God has transformed me from a person who needed a "substance" to "survive" to a woman who instead turns to her Higher Power and a spiritual solution. As a child I sought comfort in food, especially when my dad would get angry and pound on the table or when things went wrong in our home. When I struggled with my social anxieties, I used alcohol. When things felt difficult, I used the eating behaviors of anorexia and bulimia to make myself feel better.

Today I don't need to turn to food or any of the other things I used to use for comfort. Recently, I helped my sister who has dementia, and I didn't use food. During my mom's hospitalization, when I couldn't see her, which made me very uncomfortable, I didn't use food. In dealing with my current health issues, I have not used food to ease the pain and the emotional havoc that I have faced.

What I do is work the 12 Steps of the OA Program on a daily basis. Having a strong and personal relationship with God, and in these difficult times, helps. I turn to my Higher Power and He gives me the comfort and strength that I need to stay in recovery.