

Not Too Far to Travel

From my earliest memory, I always had an issue with food. I loved food, especially sweet flour and sugar products. I couldn't get enough. I always wanted meals as big as those of my brothers and dad, and it didn't seem fair if I didn't get what they had.

The biggest part of my journey commenced when I was about 36 years old. A guy I was dating left me -- he stated that I was too good for him. In truth, we met when I was dieting and he left when the weight came on. This was a pattern in my life: I would diet, meet a man, then put the weight on, and then they would leave. After this particular relationship, I attended a workshop called *Relationships and You*, in which a woman spoke to me about recovery and suggested that I attend Overeaters Anonymous (OA). This was the beginning of my recovery journey around food. Before this point, I had thought I was just a fat person - not a person with a disease.

I was in OA on and off for 15 years. For the first two years, I had some physical recovery. Although I was having three meals a day, they were huge meals. Even so, I thought I was going to die between breakfast, lunch and dinner.

I eventually found the OA "HOW" program (Honesty, Openness and Willingness) and my weight dropped from 111 kilograms to 68 kilograms (244 pounds to 149 pounds). But I then started dating men, and my pattern repeated itself. I thought that now, I could just eat normally and I would be ok. I thought I could just order meals in restaurants, without checking the sugar and flour content. For the first few weeks I was doing fine. Then the disease set in and I added this sweet and that sweet and ended up back in the food.

For about ten years I was in and out of the OA program, looking for a way to get well, while eating "normally". I would tell myself that even though I was a big person, I was still well, emotionally. I was a trained counsellor, working as a youth coordinator, and I loved the job. I got bigger, but I was looking at everyone else, seeing their issues and believing that I was ok. Nonetheless, it got harder to tell others what to do, and support others in their recovery when I, myself, was out of control. I couldn't wait for a client to leave so that I could eat. I had food all day long at my desk. I was suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which I now believe to be sugar and flour syndrome, and I wasn't able to do my work very well. I was stressed and crying a lot and looking at my boss, thinking she was the one with the problem. Of course, others in the work place backed me up as well, so this suited me. (Addicts always seem to find the people who will back up our side of the story.) I left that organization and went to another, where others liked to eat, too. We would have a "sweets run" in the afternoon. I would only buy a couple of items, but that would just be the start of my afternoon; I wouldn't stop. After work, I'd stop at the shop and eat in the car all the way home. Then getting rid of the papers was a job in itself.

Finally, frustrated with myself, I visited a new doctor who ran several tests on me. She agreed to see me on a monthly basis and keep an eye on my blood, due to the Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. My liver function, like my general health, was not so good. I recall that the doctor wrote several times on a piece of paper, "energy in equals energy out". I just didn't get it. I thought that I could eat my sweet binge foods and not put on weight, even though the facts did not support this theory: I was bingeing and putting on weight. I was still in and out of OA, but when my doctor suggested that I go to weight

management training, prior to considering surgery, I decided to give that idea my best effort. I would weigh in with the nursing part of the practice. I attended a dietician and an exercise physiologist. My doctor was stumped, because I continued to put on more weight. I was truly lost.

She then suggested that she send me to the best eating disorder psychologist that she knew of. This also didn't work. I was searching and searching for how to get abstinent and stay abstinent. At the very least, I wanted to just stay the same size.

My doctor then admitted that she didn't know what to do with me. She recommended that I have my stomach stapled. I argued with her, but she said she couldn't see another way.

I then decided to find the best spiritual person in OA, as that was probably what I was missing: I hadn't ever clearly handed it over to God. I found the woman I believed to be the most spiritual to be my sponsor. For 12 months, she sponsored me. I adopted an "abstinence" of no *recreational* sugar and flour. This worked for her, and in the 12 months I lost 9 kilos (18 pounds). Still, I was miserable even while I was praying to God. Then one day, through my Al-Anon sponsor, God told me of women in another state in the FA fellowship. I called one of these women and she told me of the FA meeting in Sydney. I live on the Central Coast of NSW in Australia, about two hours north of Sydney.

The following Tuesday, I drove to Sydney to find the FA meeting and a couple of people who were waiting to meet me. Those two people at that first FA meeting have been a huge part of my recovery. I have been in the program for four and a half years now, and have been abstinent since coming to the program. I have been lucky enough to find the best sponsor for me and have had great support since joining. I have travelled to the US, firstly for the Fellowship Convention in California, followed by three trips to the Business Convention in Massachusetts. These trips have been spiritual experiences for me and well worth the cost.

I laugh when I hear people who live in the US say it's too far for them to travel to the convention. I also laugh when people who live in Sydney complain about traveling to meetings. In the first couple of years, I travelled to Sydney two hours each way, three times a week. I needed this program and was determined to go to any lengths. My recovery is worth it. I wished I had got it earlier. At 59, my life is just beginning. I am 140 pounds lighter and have been this weight for over three years. I continue to work AWOLS and love the growth, both spiritual and emotional, that I have experienced. My life is continuing to get better and better. I am a work in progress and this program is definitely spiritually inspired. Thank you God.

Sharan P