

# TODAY

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 3

March 2010

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## RECOVERY OPPORTUNITIES



**Intergroup:** March 14 at 1:30 p.m. St. Louis Bi-State Intergroup at Missouri Baptist Hospital at 3015 North Ballas Road. All are welcome to attend.



**Convention:** April 16-18 St. Louis Bi-State Annual OA Convention at the Holiday Inn Airport West, 3400 Rider Trail South, Earth City, MO. Go to [www.stlouisoa.org](http://www.stlouisoa.org) for more information.



**Super Saturday:** Ask your group to schedule a Super Saturday. Contact Connie H. at [coniehsl@aol.com](mailto:coniehsl@aol.com) or 314.291.7658 for details.

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## STEP THREE: MADE A DECISION TO TURN OUR WILL AND OUR LIVES OVER TO THE CARE OF GOD AS WE UNDERSTAND HIM.

Step Three is well known as the third part of the statement, "I can't; God can; I think I'll let God." As I walk along in my recovery journey, I see the progress I have been moving towards both in ease and in depth of letting go in my greatest times of need.

OAs *12 Steps and 12 Traditions* states that we need a way of living abstemiously over the long haul, through good and bad times. I was not given all the pieces of my recovery and food plan at the starting gate. Boy would that have been overwhelming! I turn to God to find the willingness to surrender my food plan.

As I write this, I am making some dramatic changes in my food plan. Along with so many OAs, I have a wealth of nutritional knowledge and ethical views about the food I place in my mouth. I have had chronic GI distress for as long as I can remember. My food choices weren't a threat to my abstinence when I came to program. They were, however, most definitely impacting my quality of life and my serenity. I am turning to

God, turning over my food plan, and my nutritional needs.

After tests were run, I found that the choice was mine to make about what foods I wanted to put into my body. I had the opportunity to help myself feel better by taking the risk of stepping outside of my comfort zone. I have stopped eating some foods that were central to my food plan and adopted a plan with entirely new foods and goals. Within a few days, all my pain and fatigue faded. It wasn't easy to let go. Fears of eating fat, massive weight gain...basically loss of perceived control tip-toed through my head. But each time I pass through the process and see I can trust my body and trust my God, I remember what Step Three is all about.

Fear kept me in a food plan that simply was no longer in my best interest. Recovery is dependent on practical use of my step work. When I hold God's hand, I never lose my way. Talk to your HP Let the miracles happen to you. Ryan B.

## TRADITION THREE: THE ONLY REQUIREMENT FOR OA MEMBERSHIP IS A DESIRE TO STOP EATING COMPULSIVELY.

To me, Tradition Three is the most welcoming and unifying of all the Traditions. When I read the sentence comprising Tradition Three, I honestly feel no need to read the chapter explanation of this tradition in the *OA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, although reading and studying the Traditions definitely strengthens my recovery and deepens my understanding of our program. However, Tradition Three, as stated above, really needs no additional clarification, in my view.

Interestingly, I'm not sure that I entirely met OA's only requirement for membership when I first heard about the program. I had been bingeing and restricting uncontrollably for eighteen years and could not maintain a stable, healthy weight for any length of time. Before program, when I was "on the wagon," I still never felt at peace with food or my food behaviors, because I never knew when I'd be back in "food hell." It became increasingly obvious to me that my reactions to certain foods and my crazy food behaviors were beyond my control, but my self-will would not allow me relinquish the idea that I could find a permanent solution to my problem on my own. In my mind, there had to be a way

that I could continue doing what I wanted to do with food and still be healthy, happy and sane. I wasn't at all sure I wanted to give up the substances and behaviors that I was using as my Higher Power.

Thank goodness for OA literature! I discovered a reference to OA in a health book I was reading, and immediately (compulsively, of course!) found copies of OA's Brown Book and the *Twelve and Twelve*. It was in these books that I found my answer, and my new home. I realized I was a compulsive eater (and restrictor) and that my addiction had progressed far beyond my control. In story after story in the Brown Book, I read that the answer to my problem lay in abstaining from compulsive eating and restricting, the OA program and the Twelve Steps. I read the steps and traditions, and although I didn't fully understand the content or significance of what I was reading, I understood that the Twelve Traditions provided the framework for the OA program to function effectively. The literature provided me with so much hope that I realized I wanted what the stories' authors had. I wanted to stop eating and restricting compulsively, and Tradition Three was the tradition that

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invited me to join the fellowship.

Had there been any other requirements for membership, I don't know that I would have joined. When I hit bottom, it was all I could do to simply attend the first meeting, knowing that I wanted what others had, but not knowing how to get it. My first meeting was an apt metaphor for Tradition Three. I was welcomed warmly, was given names and phone numbers, and was invited to participate in the meeting in any way that I chose. Nothing else was required of me, and I was so grateful for that. I was able to sit, listen, and absorb the experience, strength and hope provided by members who were living in recovery. I received exactly what I needed at that meeting, and in its gracious simplicity, I received *everything* I needed as well.

Tradition Three is the tradition that reminds me to keep life simple. This

is still a profound challenge for me, since I have a tendency to “over think” things, and my life circumstances themselves are somewhat complex. I often assume that I need to be actively working on solving all of my life's challenges, and I occasionally take on too much. My recovery in OA has begun to change that for me. For the first time in my life, I now realize that life *isn't* better when I'm trying to tackle everything in front of me. When I'm overwhelmed, my program invariably brings me back to center and to what's most important: my recovery and my relationship with HP. I am still amazed by that fact that when I simply focus my attention on my HP and do the next right thing on my program, life becomes simpler, clearer, and much more manageable. I don't need to add more requirements, “shoulds,” and action items to my life. Tradition Three reminds us to keep our fellowship honest, straightforward, and uncomplicated. I am grateful that I am learning to apply this tradition to my own life. Thank you, HP! J.S., Olivette

## REFLECTIONS ON TRADITION THREE

What does Tradition Three mean to me today?



It means that all who want to stop eating compulsively are welcome in OA. Personalities, religious training, socioeconomic background, and educational level are irrelevant to OA membership. When we say we want to stop eating compulsively,

we are members.

OA members have a variety of plans of eating, and this is okay. A food that is a dangerous trigger for one person may not be an issue for someone else. We don't have to have identical programs to fit in and be welcome.

Membership requires the desire to stop eating compulsively. Those who are not currently able to abstain still have a place in OA. When we have a personality conflict or a disagreement with someone at a meeting, we must remember that we and they are members of the fellowship, that both of us have a right to participate. The other traditions can guide us in resolving our conflict.

Most of all, Tradition Three reminds me that I don't have to work a perfect program to be welcome in OA. I don't have to be liked by everyone. I don't have to fall into lock-step with every other member of the program. I can be myself, and I can be a part of the fellowship.

How do I see a change in my attitudes since I joined Overeaters Anonymous?

I used to think that if people really got to know me, they would think I was a bad person and not like me. Now I think that people like me, and I don't have to hide. I used to be very perfectionistic and focused on achievement because I felt that I had to have a lot of achievements in order to look good and be “worthy.” Now I try hard to achieve because I like to do my best. I don't have to be perfect anymore; I just have to give it a good faith effort.

I used to use food and fat as ways to hide myself. Food enabled me to hide my emotions and my pain. Fat enabled me to hide my body. I tried to make my feelings and my body invisible by constantly overeating.

I used to think I didn't deserve to have friends. I thought I was too sick and too flawed for anybody to want to be around me. Now I know I have good qualities and am a pleasant, loving person in spite of my emotional problems.

I used to think that food was an ideal way to comfort myself. I thought that because food tasted good and filled me up, it was the most reliable source of pleasure in my life. Now I have lots of other ways to take care of myself and feel good, including exercise, taking a bath, reading program literature, and petting my cat.

I used to think that I was unattractive, both inside and out. I thought that I was ugly. I didn't want anyone to see or know the real me. Now I know that I am okay just as I am and that I am a worthwhile person. Thank you, OA! Melissa H.

## THE THREE DOORS

Before I came to OA, I was a prisoner, a prisoner of my own mind and body. Food was my captor and constant companion, when I wasn't eating it, I was thinking about it. It was my substance of choice for self-medication against feeling emotion. The real insanity was that I had been doing it for so long and with such conviction that I allowed myself to believe that I was living my life to the best of my ability. This way of living became my “lot” in life, and I was fully compliant, as I had convinced myself I didn't deserve any better.

Years ago a story was shared with me. I never realized what a personal and profound effect this story would play in my life until I reached “rock

bottom.” As the story goes, there was a kingdom long ago that had a very ruthless king. In the kingdom was a prison, and imprisoned in it, a man who had been there most of his life. Word spread the ruthless king had died and soon his son, said to be far more ruthless than his father, would take the throne. Fear and apprehension filled the hearts and minds of the townspeople but none more so than that of the prisoner, for he was aware the newly crowned king would soon be paying him a visit. Not knowing just when the king would arrive, the prisoner waited anxiously in his prison cell, gripped with fear. As expected, the new king did indeed arrive in all his grandeur. The king commanded the prisoner's

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cell be opened, that he may enter in. At this point the king looked sharply at the prisoner and began to speak saying, "I am your newly crowned king," to which the prisoner reacted submissively getting onto his knees, bowing his head. "Look up at me when I speak to you!" the king yelled.

The prisoner quickly complied looking up to the king with fearful, tear-filled eyes. The king began, "I am here to offer you a choice: you may choose one of three doors. Behind door number one is life in prison; behind door number two is certain death; behind door number three, it is unknown what will happen to you. Which door is it that you choose?"

The prisoner's mind was racing, immersed with fear. Trying to think, the prisoner quickly contemplated the fate that lay behind each door: door number one: life in prison; I have lived my entire life a prisoner, and I have survived. I have clothes on my back and rations to live on. Door number two: certain death, even though I am imprisoned, I am allowed to live. I am such a sinner; I am afraid to die! Door number three: unknown, unknown! This could mean a fate far worse than death! This ruthless king could have me tortured mercilessly, starve me, and then have me killed, along with my family! I can't bear to think what will come of me! No! No! He shuttered.

Abruptly the king bellowed, "Which door is it you will choose?"

"Door number one! I choose door number one; I wish to remain alive!" The prisoner cried out in anguish.

"Then so it shall be, door number one, life in prison!" As the king turned to leave, he paused benevolently, looking back at the prisoner and said, "Since you are safe in your decision, and your life will be spared, would you like to know what it was that awaited you behind door number three?"

With tearful relief the prisoner shook his head, "yes," in reply.

"Behind the third door, my son, awaited freedom. Your freedom! Rather than daring to believe freedom could ever be possible, you sold yourself short and allowed fear to rule your mind."

Sadly, the prisoner in our story would never know what it is to be free. In the end, it was his own tremendous fear of the unknown and complacency that ultimately imprisoned him. He came to believe life was merely about existing. Living a life rich in experience was beyond his ability to reason. He had lived in darkness for so long he did not know to look for the light.

I relate very much to the prisoner in this story. I, too, have been victim of my own complacency, fears, and self-will. In choosing to avoid the inevitable pain of dealing with the events and emotions of my life, in my secrecy and denial, they became my prison. I, too, just as the prisoner, had convinced myself there was nothing better waiting out there for me.

Ingesting food became my comfort as well as my bludgeon at a very tender age. When I was happy, I ate. When I was sad, I ate. When I was hurt, I ate. When I felt victimized, I ate. When I was anxious, I ate. If it is said that a person shows their emotions passionately, they are "wearing their heart on their sleeve." In my efforts to bury my emotions with food, one could say the end result for me was that I ended up wearing my emotions on my waistline, hips, and thighs!

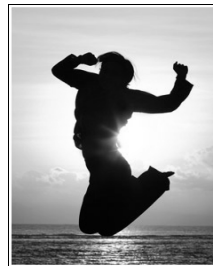
I thought if I buried my emotions in enough food, I wouldn't be able to feel them; if I couldn't feel them, I wouldn't have to acknowledge their pain. Nonetheless, I wasn't really hiding anything from anyone, least of all myself. I was painfully aware of my self-cruelty. Even though I could hide my

feelings masterfully from those around me, I realize now I was not nearly as practiced in the art of self-deception as my pride would have me believe. Not only would I not deal with my emotions, over the years I convinced myself I'd be better off if I just never allowed myself to encounter emotional circumstances. I quit watching certain types of television for fear of coming across an emotionally charged program; I refused to read books that were fiction because I did not want to be transported to a realm where dreams, for some people, really did come true. Any activity that could tap into my emotions was painstakingly avoided. When I didn't outwardly reject intimacy, I made sure I had adequately "medicated" myself with enough food, and later alcohol, that I wouldn't have to feel anything.

As I earnestly turned a blind eye to my own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, I did the complete opposite for the loved ones in my life. Over the years, I've worked tirelessly to spare my loved ones any form of unpleasantness, even if it meant being anyone and everyone's daughter, sister, wife, parent, neighbor, friend, caretaker, therapist, cook, maid, nurse, gardener, secretary, chauffer, room mom, and laundress. You name it - I would do it. I duped myself into believing that if I could just be the be-all-end-all for everyone and everything in my life, and do it with complete perfection, no one would ever suspect the wretchedness that lived inside of me.

In my desire to save the world, I was killing myself. It wasn't until the physical side effects of my malady became undeniable, that I knew I could no longer exist. I would perish from this world a wounded, angry, bitter, and resentful worn out husk if I did not change my ways.

On Monday, January 5, 2009, at 3:00 a.m., with my teeth clenched and heart pounding out of my chest, yet again, waking in physical pain and mental anguish, drenched in sweat, I knew this charade needed to end. Suddenly, for the first time, the tide had turned. No longer was I more afraid of seeking help than I was fearful of living one more day in the quiet chaos of my life. On this darkest of nights, I would find my brightest day. I wrestled to the family computer, booted up, and began seeking information of how I could enlist myself in Overeaters Anonymous. By the grace of my Higher Power, I found the OA website, and not only that, there was to be a meeting later that very evening at 7:00 p.m. Later that morning I phoned the OA contact person and was captivated by the beautiful love of a stranger that instantly brought comfort and enveloped me. A feeling of hope, grace and peace filled my heart. I knew that very moment, by the grace of my Higher Power, I had finally found the key that would open the "third door" of my life.



After experiencing the love and camaraderie of my first OA meeting, I was hooked. I immersed myself in OA literature and philosophies, quickly seeing the results of all they promise take hold in my life. I lost forty pounds in my first four months of OA. Never had it been so simple. Not easy but simple. Not only did I allow myself to feel true hunger for the first time since I cannot remember, but, slowly, I've begun allowing myself to begin feeling, contemplating, understanding, and releasing my emotions. There have been moments along the way that have been absolutely gut wrenching. With the grace of my Higher Power, I have grown in appreciation that those moments are necessary and vital to my recovery. I've even termed the tears I now cry as my "OA tears," for I know even though they can at times be painful, they are no longer my captors. No longer do I have to bury them in food. They, too, will pass and as they do, they carry with them new, enriching, healthy knowledge of a better way to live and freedom beyond my wildest dreams! I thank my Higher Power and also all of you for allowing me to share with you my OA freedom! Lisa W, St. Peters

## STEP THREE



I've turned over the earth to plant  
I've turned over a page to learn  
I've turned over a pillow to release  
Wrinkles and stale smells  
Words read over and over  
Compacted dirt.

In rich, fresh soil, scented of life,  
New ways of thinking  
Can be planted with care  
Because when I turn my will and life over  
To release, to learn, to plant,  
I "cannot fail to recover."

~Anonymous

## OA MEMBERS CARE

Have you heard about the We Care Fund? It was established some years ago by our Intergroup to assist OA members who want to attend the Spring Convention or Fall Retreat, but don't have the money required for registration.

Registration forms for both these events include a space where registrants can donate an extra amount to help cover costs for those who could not otherwise afford to attend. We Care contributions are also accepted from those who are not registering, but wish to add to the fund.

Members interested in using We Care funds can call the contact person listed on any registration form, and let her know that help is needed. The amount available to any individual covers the registration fee for the event, but not food or hotel lodging.

Overeaters Anonymous  
St. Louis Bi-State Intergroup  
9907 E Gravois Road  
St. Louis, MO 63123  
314.638.6070 tel  
314.638.6071 fax  
[www.stlouisoa.org](http://www.stlouisoa.org)

Region IV Website:  
[www.oaregion4.org](http://www.oaregion4.org)

World Service Website:  
[www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org)

Articles for the newsletter:  
[stlouisoaatoday@hotmail.com](mailto:stlouisoaatoday@hotmail.com)

The opinions expressed in *Today* represent individual members' hope, strength and experience and do not necessarily represent OA as a whole. Take what you like and leave the rest. The editor reserves the right to revise submissions for practical reasons.

## INSIDE OUR INTERGROUP

Highlight of the Jan. 10, 2010 St. Louis Bi-State Area Intergroup Meeting:

IG takes on Public Information!

Tradition Five says, "Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers." With that in mind, your Intergroup Board and Representatives are directing their energies toward developing an initiative to carry OA's message to those outside the program. Focus will be on reaching out to the medical and mental health communities, the media, and the general public. Watch for more information in the future!

About the St. Louis Bi-State Area Intergroup:

Sanctioned by the worldwide Overeaters Anonymous fellowship, an Intergroup (IG) is a collection of "local" OA groups who join together to share their experience, strength and hope. Our IG performs a wide variety of services, all of which are aimed at carrying the message of recovery to compulsive eaters. Our IG meets once a month. Every one of the 46 groups meeting in the St. Louis Bi-State area is invited and encouraged to select an Intergroup Representative to attend, and exercise voting privileges. IG meetings are open to all who wish to observe.

## Announcements

- Save trees and money! Read *Today* online at [www.stlouisoa.org](http://www.stlouisoa.org)
- For guidelines or to schedule a Super Saturday, contact Connie H. at [conniehsl@aol.com](mailto:conniehsl@aol.com) or 314.291.7658 for details.
- Are you interested in a men's meeting on Friday early evening, such as 6-7pm? Contact Bill at 636.795.2634.
- World Service has a new pod cast posted on the web site: *To the Man Who Wants to Stop Compulsive Overeating, Welcome*. You can listen at <http://www.oa.org/podcast/>.
- Order your OA Convention Shirt. \$25 If you are going to Convention and would like to have a shirt, send your order and payment to Barb Massey, 12 Valley Rd, St Charles, Mo, 63303. Make sure you specify what size you need and write your check to OA Convention. For more information, contact Barb at 636.724.2419 or [bmassey0631@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bmassey0631@sbcglobal.net)
- The St Louis Bi-State Intergroup has a lending media library with over a thousand tapes/CDs that are available to members in our intergroup. The CDs can be checked out and returned to the OA office, Intergroup meetings, and/or Super Saturdays. An Intergroup representative can also bring CDs to you and your group. Just ask! The cassettes are now limited since the recordings in the last few years are now on CDs. In 1984, during Twelve Step Day, which is now convention, OA began recording members' shares. The latest recording is from the Super Saturday, December, 2009. There are recordings from World Service conventions, conferences, Region conventions, St Louis conventions, and Super Saturdays. Please consider borrowing a CD for your group to listen to at a meeting. If you are interested in helping with the conversion of cassettes to CDs contact Connie at 314.291.7658 or [conniehsl@aol.com](mailto:conniehsl@aol.com).
- Our Bi-State Area Intergroup needs a volunteer to chair the 2010 Fall Retreat. A location and date are already reserved: Sojourn Retreat Center in Dittmer, Missouri; Oct. 22-24. Questions? Call 2009 retreat chair, Carol H. 314.961.7253.