

A Life-changer

I was a small kid that got very fat in the 4th grade. In our little country school, more than one year of students were in the same room and I had a very tall, muscular teacher for three years. He would harass students that wasted food in our small school's lunch room and brag on those that cleaned their plate. I became a plate-cleaner and even a second-helping kid. As I grew fat, I became a target of teasing. My first diet - in what is now a long history of diets - was a starvation diet at age 10. I lost a third of my weight, and the clean-plate teacher bragged on me about my new food willpower and weight loss accomplishment.

Food had become an issue, but while my weight fluctuated, it was approximately normal through most of college. My high school sweetheart's parents were 50% of my country high school faculty, and they seemed to believe in and accept me. They supported my dream of becoming a large animal veterinarian. My high school sweetheart and I married while in college and still trying to get into vet school. College was real hard, but I had a dream. I was accepted to vet school, only to find a class of "gunners" and my grades could not compete with their aggressive tactics. I begin to eat, and eat, and eat... I became obese during the first two years. With my wife's support "we" (my wife and I) will-powered my weight back to within a normal range. While it was a constant battle, my eating had been mostly tamed through school and the first decade in cattle practice.

A decade into practice, I took a job at a research center and the stress level of grant writing, research and teaching became overwhelming. I again began to eat and eat and eat. Ah - I found an answer: if I drank enough, I would throw up and... over indulgence solved! Now I was an overeating, fat drunk.

With my family and job in jeopardy, I found the 12 Steps. I was scared, really scared of losing everything: family, career, my life. It was a "hit bottom" realization. Motivated, and with the mentorship of my "Trusted Friend" (he preferred that to Sponsor) through the Steps, and the support of my "G.O.D." (Group Of Drunks), I haven't drunk in almost two decades. BUT. As for my OA - not so much recovery there. I was the only man in a group of 30, and I heard more about God than I ever heard in church. As an introvert to the core, this OA meeting environment was a disaster. Having to share is intimidating, especially when the person at the helm has a really strong personality.

I took a shot at OA off and on, but felt out of place, and my growing rebellion over Steps 3, 6, & 7 kept the help OA may have provided out of my reach. My eating behaviors were horrid and I came to accept, I thought, being morbidly obese. My body, however, didn't accept my obesity. My joints, heart, lungs, etc began to fail. Liver, lungs and heart began failing so badly the doctors began discussing splitting my chest for a transplant. But I was not a good candidate: I was a morbidly obese old man with multiple failing organs.

I would have to do something about my weight before they could help. This was my bottom. I had done all the diets, pay & weigh, no-carbs, high protein... everything someone could name. And then there was "LIGHT" when I found the secular OA community. The resources they suggested, along with meetings and fellowship, provided an opened door for this fat introvert and a new way of dealing with my compulsive food behaviors - a new way of living.

I was given a new lease on the food behaviors part of my life, a part which had dominated my head since childhood. I have maintained my healthy weight for the last two years; lung function has improved; heart has stopped enlarging; blood pressure and liver function are now normal. I continue deploring Steps 3, 6 & 7, but the other nine Steps seem useful to help me be a better version of myself. I do Steps, 1, 2, 9, 10, 11 & 12 daily. I continually work on Steps 4, 8 and, from time to time, 5. In the fellowship, I learned how to do Step work to help me be more useful and without beating myself up. I learned the 10th Step "D.G.'s" (What could/should I have done Differently, what went Great, what Glitches did I encounter & what was my part. For what am I Grateful and what are my tomorrow's Goals?). I learned that self-care is critical and was introduced to the "BEES" (Balance all three: Eating, Exercise & Sleep). I now think of my higher power as my S.O.P (Secular OA Power).

I accept I will always obsess about food and I'm compulsive about food shopping, meal planning, weighing/measuring and journaling/logging what I eat. I review what I eat and am on guard for my "triggers" and a "potential relapse." No one has ever had a more supportive wife and family than me, but unless someone fights the compulsive food hungry ghost, all supportive folks can really do is be a help with your environment, be friendly, and provide empathy/sympathy. It is in the fellowship where I find what's working for others.

I just got back from a winter four day camping trip with my son - no electricity, no running water, no internet or cell phone and I didn't need additional oxygen. Prior to recovery, I was tied to electricity to run my oxygen machine and the thought of hiking in the woods for several miles was unthinkable. To the fellowship, I will never be able to repay the acceptance, kindness, nurturing and support you've given me. You changed my life.

- A Grateful Old Cow Doctor in Nebraska