

My Journey to Secular OA

My story around food is like many others I have heard in OA: early memories of sweet treats, many of them gotten clandestinely; occasional binges and self-soothing with food in my teens and twenties; giving up smoking, drugs and drinking at about 30; then dieting and yo-yoing for the next few decades, both in and out of OA.

For much of that time, I thought deep down that overeating wasn't a REAL addiction, not like the others I was abstaining from. It was more of a moral failing, and I was ashamed and angry and baffled that the weight kept coming back on after every attempt to lose it. I found myself lying and hiding, eating in secret and not acknowledging to myself, let alone my wife, all of the many "little treats" I soothed myself with. In one moment of honesty, I told her, "If you want to know how I drank, watch me eat." The catch was I made sure to hide the worst parts from her as well as I could. What wasn't a "real addiction" proceeded to rule my life for almost 40 years.

I did the Steps as well as I could, first in another program, and then once or twice in OA. Each time I had to grit my teeth and pretend that I believed Steps 2 and 3, and then 6 and 7. Step 11 I just skipped the prayer part and tried meditation. But really, it all felt dishonest. I am a preacher's kid and have been a nonbeliever for as long as I can remember. Perhaps because my father (who after all worked for god!) died suddenly right after my 6th birthday, faith in there being a just and loving deity never made sense. And if there isn't a "big" god, why should there be a "personal" one? As an adult, the more I learn of science and evolution, the more my conviction is strengthened.

So I have for quite a while been caught between the dishonesty and chaos of overeating, and the dissimulation of pretending to believe in the Steps as written in my efforts to get clean with my food. Mostly, dishonesty and overeating was easier and more comfortable. So that's what I did.

I found myself in late 2022 sitting in my home AA meeting, overweight and uncomfortable, mouthing platitudes of recovery and mentally obsessing over what treats I could go eat in my car as soon as the meeting was over. And finally I decided I couldn't stand this lack of integrity, and I would either quit going to meetings or do SOMETHING, though I wasn't sure what that would be. I knew the pay-and-weigh route wasn't going to work. I couldn't bear another round of getting on my knees for the 3rd Step (fingers firmly crossed, by the way) just to get on to the 4th Step, etc., etc. That simply was not going to happen.

I don't know exactly how I found the secular OA community—probably some version of a Google search. I took a deep breath and logged into a Zoom meeting, and immediately felt at home, in a way I never had before. I learned that people were getting and staying abstinent without "the god stuff," and through meetings, podcasts, and other resources, I began to believe that I could, too. Oh, and did I mention that for the first time in maybe forever, I have been able to be abstinent from sugar for the better part of a year so far?

Through discussions in meetings, the power of example that others show me (my personal higher power), and yes, some outside resources, I am discovering and beginning to travel a path through the Steps that I can finally take with my full heart and head. My need to hide and lie about many aspects of my life (not just food) has all but disappeared. In fact, in some ways I don't recognize myself, and that is oddly exciting.

I won't dwell on any regret that it took me this long to get where I am, but rather celebrate the path ahead. Perhaps it's the road of happy destiny we hear so much about!!

- John G