

Anchorage Area Intergroup  
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# THE NORTHERN LIGHT

*May/June 2012*

*Note from the Editor: Thanks to those who sent in articles about having a portable program, working it on the road.*

*For the July/August newsletter, we have two topics. First, for those who attended our summer retreat, please share the gifts, insights, aha moments you experienced. Second, the Lifeline writing topic has a summer theme- "When life gave you lemons, how did you stand up to compulsions and make abstinent lemonade?" Lemonade articles received by **July 15** will get submitted to Lifeline. The submission deadline for both topics for our own newsletter is **August 15, 2012**. Thank you for your service!*

*~Rebecca S, Editor*

## ***Having a portable program, working it on the road:***

I've been thinking about making my program "portable". This is what works for me. I recognize that different plans work for different people. My abstinence is to not eat compulsively and to follow the steps and traditions to the best of my ability. My food plan consists of moderate meals using fruits and vegetables, lean meats, whole grains, including whole grain pasta. I avoid deep fried foods. A moderate dinner for me is one serving per food choice with some plate showing. My trigger foods are anything with frosting and bakery goods in general. I do eat muffins and fruit for breakfast sometimes. I also include a limited amount of sugar as in salad dressings and gelatin. I'd rather have the sugar which I think is a natural food as opposed to artificial sweeteners. Trigger situations for me are gatherings with celebratory sweet foods, buffet restaurants and feeling HALT. (Hungry, angry, lonely or tired) I eat no more than 3 meals a day and a fruit snack if I'm hungry. Therefore, I eat an abstinent meal before the celebration so I'm not hungry or carry a piece of fruit with me. I do not go to buffet restaurants and I use the tools and steps to deal with HALT. So, it's pretty easy for me to get a "food plan" meal in a restaurant or to pack and carry a lunch in a cooler if I'm traveling by car. When staying with friends or relatives I buy part of the groceries anyway as a contribution to the household. So, I buy whole grains, fresh fruits, etc. and they are available to everyone including me. People in my family don't mind a meal of meat, potatoes and vegetables, salad, etc.. I skip the dessert if one is served and it's a trigger food. For me, the less of a production I make out of my eating, the less emphasis I put on it, the less I obsess about it. I'm endeavoring to develop good eating habits that are automatic so I don't fill the day with food compulsion and worrying that a restaurant won't have foods I can eat. I plan my food when I buy my groceries. At this moment, I'm having some trouble with abstinence, so I'm being more detailed with my food plan and calling it in to my food buddy. This helps with the obsession as once I've made the plan I can forget about it for the rest of the day as I know what I'm going to eat. My goal is to live by. "It's not what you eat but why you eat it". When I get to the point of eating for nourishment and enjoyment of the food in the moment and for its own sake and not as a substitute for spiritual joy, my abstinence will be truly portable because it goes with me wherever I am.

*~Anonymous*

I have had the exhilarating and terrifying experience of traveling to many remote places as a compulsive overeater in recovery. I never had this type of freedom before I came to OA; how could I possibly control the FOOD in exotic places? What if I couldn't get enough, or the right kind, or find private time to binge or compulsively exercise or WHATEVER? I always dreamed of going to Africa, but without the twelve steps and a loving higher power I never would have found the courage to actually do it.

About 8 months after joining OA I went to Kenya to volunteer with orphaned children. I was told the food would be austere and basic, nothing fancy and not a lot of it. Of course, I thought – a perfect diet! I may even get typhoid or something and drop a few extra pounds! I spent time with my sponsor before I went planning my plan of action. There were not meetings in the towns I was going to be in, nor did I have access to a phone for international calls or phone meetings. Email was available 2 or 3 times per week. My go-to tools were prayer, literature, writing, and service. I knew my best bet was remembering that a loving Higher Power was running the show and taking care of me. There were many, many challenges, and contrary to my secret-sick-selfish hopes, no shortage of food. The first day I showed up I was convinced no one liked me, I was an outcast, and I'd made a terrible mistake. Instead of picking up the food (I had brought tons with me of course!) I picked up a pen. Reading that journal is hilarious now. Those people I was convinced hated me? They are now some of my best friends. We've met up on different continents and traveled together since. I most certainly suffer from a disease of perception.

Writing was a daily morning activity for me. I made sure I awoke early so I had some time to myself before the day got crazy. I was in a group setting, so I said the 3<sup>rd</sup> step prayer in my head every morning. When doubt, criticism, or food thoughts started to creep in, I tried to get outside myself and be useful. I could hear my sponsor's words "what can you do for someone else?" echoing in my brain. It worked.

I am so grateful for my program overseas. I had the peace of mind, serenity, awareness, and courage that only abstinence can bring. I was able to truly show up, meet people, confront fear, grow as a human, and do things differently. It was a life-changing experience only because I was AWAKE for it and not fogged by food, compulsion, or crippling character defects. I learned what I could do to participate in my program when contact with other compulsive overeaters wasn't a possibility, and I held myself accountable for that. Most importantly, I believed (or acted as if) my program and my Higher Power were completely portable.

~Anonymous

The best thing I've found lately is having the ability to download OA pod casts for the journey. There are a couple of great websites with great OA speakers. Listening for just a few minutes or an hour can be a mini-meeting on the go. Also having downloaded digital versions of the literature has been great. I especially like the "For Today" on a daily basis and having the info in e-versions means no need to bring books along. On the other hand I like the feel of my little travel sized OA 12X12 so that gets packed in the luggage to read when things get a little frazzled while traveling. Visiting the OA website to find meetings in the travel destination is helpful to get a local contact phone number. Often I don't make time to call but just having the information is sometimes all HP needs to work with to keep me focused on recovery. Following a Food Plan and an Action Plan on the go is simplified when I take the time to PLAN before departure. Locating OA meetings and seeing how near or far they will be from my destination helps. Anyway, my trips lately have been less than perfect but I know putting HP/God and OA first makes the re-entry at home a lot easier. No matter how much planning and preparing I do it still remains a One Day at a Time Program. Just for Today. And each abstinent day can start at any hour/minute/moment I choose to surrender and ASK for HELP.

~Anonymous

Traveling away from home can be a difficult time for a compulsive overeater like me. Surprisingly, I am still a compulsive overeater away from home. Because I travel often, I have developed some techniques that help me to stay abstinent and in recovery on the road. Here they are:

1. Before my trip:
  - a. Visit [www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org) and look up meetings where I will be
  - b. Put *all* meetings held in the location on my schedule, *before* any other appointment or activity, so that I that I can fit my life into OA, not try to fit OA into my life
  - c. Call the contact persons listed for the specific meeting to verify the on line info and to let them know that I will be visiting. This way I don't feel like a stranger when I arrive, plus I tell them that I would like outreach calls when in town
  - d. Go to the local intergroup web site for the area that I am visiting and find names of guys to call before I leave for my trip...and I call them!
  - e. If I don't have a car, ask for a ride to the meeting, or take public transportation
  - f. Pack my Big Book and daily meditation books (or have them on your iPhone or Kindle)
2. Planes, trains and automobiles...recovery while in the air, on the train or in the car:
  - a. Planning ahead is the key. I do not leave my food to chance
  - b. I have large blue Trader Joe's insulated cooler bag (fits nicely in overhead bin and if heavy, I have a small fold up wheelie to schlep it through the airport)
    - i. I pack my lunch in large plastic containers
    - ii. I put a few frozen ice packs inside and remove them and put them in my checked luggage at check in, if I am checking a bag
    - iii. If I am not checking a bag, I leave the packs at home and use ice
    - iv. I keep several large zip lock bags in the cooler bag and fill with ice at home, then dump the ice at security and refill on other side of security at a fast food ice machine. This technique keeps the food nice and cold for the entire trip. If ice melts, refill at arriving airport
    - v. I use this technique every day to haul around abstinent food on the trip and I also have a smaller insulated back pack for day trips
    - vi. I drink lots of water on the plane. I get free water in a large cup from a food vendor (Starbucks has nice large plastic cups), carry it on board, and have the flight attendant refill often. I don't pay \$5 for airport water bottles!
3. At destination:
  - a. Request a room with a refrigerator. Hotels will not charge for one if I state that it is for medical purposes
  - b. I pack some of my breakfast food and buy the rest at a store, or buy at hotel
  - c. Plan ahead for meals and go on line to look up restaurant menus
  - d. Go to meetings, make outreach calls to local members
  - e. If meetings are not available, go to telephone meetings found at [www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org).
  - f. Do all of the recovery activities on the road that I do at home; my disease does not go on vacation if I do!

I ask myself, **what am I NOT willing to do to recover while on the road?**

~Anonymous

My last binge was while I was traveling, or at least visiting out of state. I did nothing to prepare for my own abstinence for that trip, even though I certainly knew I was going to go on the trip. On the airplane, they served a white bread sandwich. "I'm doing the best I can, right? There is nothing else, right?" That was the first trip of the mind. Then I went to my aunt's assisted living. Pasta and white bread. "That's all they have. Still doing the best I can, right?" I was feeling like things were slippery, but I just went right ahead and consumed what there was. White bread was not on my plan, and certainly not 2-3 times in one day. The next day we visited friends. More white bread. The following day, back at my aunt's place, a box of cereal fell to the floor, spilling all over the floor. I cleaned it up by eating it all, off the floor.

Lesson learned: My abstinence is soooooo important. I cannot leave it to chance. On the airplane I could have brought my own protein and veggies. Too much trouble? Nothing is too much trouble to keep my abstinence. At my aunt's place, I could just say no to the white bread, bring my own food, or go out later to get what I need. Same thing for the friends' house.

I have 3 trips coming up. I hope I have the foresight to PLAN what I can take with me, and in what airports I can find what I need. Planning is the "rowing" I must do in order to get my ship to the other side, while I am also praying.

~Anonymous

Recently I went back "home" to sit at my uncle's bedside as he was dying. It was a very emotional time, and I did wonder how to carry my program along. In my old hometown I was eating with family, going to my old favorite restaurants, and under a lot of stress. There weren't any meetings while I was there, but I kept sane by writing my sponsor daily, praying more than usual, and calling another OA who was traveling. I also purchased abstinent foods at the store and brought them to the houses where I stayed.

Then came the wildest part: I was sitting with my cousin at the hospital, and my uncle was very close to death, so we had not left his room and so had missed lunch. In came a hospital volunteer with a gift sent by an anonymous giver (later we found out it was from another cousin): a bag of every sweet item (22 in total) the gift shop carried! Sweets are trigger foods for me and I choose not to eat them, one day at a time. It was a vulnerable moment for me, but then my cousin just looked at me and said, "It's like Halloween!" and we both just burst out laughing. I spread it all out on the bed and took a picture to send to my sponsor. We gave a bunch to the staff and took some to our families. I didn't eat any of it. I can't imagine what I would have done in that situation before program. Well, actually, I can.

In any case, I came back from that trip having lost weight; but more importantly, having been truly present for my uncle and our family, and having been of service.

I did a lot of thinking about how powerless I was over all those situations and the (very portable) Twelve Steps helped me through.

Anonymous

A two-month road trip brought me to OA one year ago. I was retired and my husband and I had saved money to buy a 25 foot new-to-us trailer and pull it through the West and Southwest from late March through mid-May. This was our dream vacation, and we were free at last. Free to hit the road and escape obligation. Free to be normal.

The error in my thinking, although I did not realize it at the time, is that I am as a compulsive overeater. I am not normal. However, I had successfully maintained a 45-pound weight loss for five years, ignoring the bingeing and restricting which continued to accompany my new thinner frame. I was cocky and wearing blinders. In my view, God was a distant, mysterious, complicated figure who was far too busy to help me with my silly food problems. Period. End of story.

In the beginning of our trip, I monitored my eating carefully. However, by Week Three, I was buying and bringing my binge foods “home” to our tiny trailer in increasing amounts (read: refined; high in sugar, salt, and fat – one or all three). My lies? I was in control, of course. One bite or sip wouldn’t hurt. I would get back on track once we returned to Alaska. I was not gaining weight. And the reality? I binged most days and into the evenings, waking up the following mornings, ashamed and fogged-out with food hangovers. My tried-and-true antidote, restriction, worked as I compensated by over-exercising and undereating, but by nightfall of that or the next day, I’d be back into the food. I ate in secret, but I also ate defiantly in front of others. And when I returned to Alaska? I couldn’t stop.

Although I didn’t know it yet, my Higher Power was already at work, leading me to OA through loving friends and a health counselor. A month after our return, I attended my first meeting, and I had accepted Step One: *We admitted we were powerless over food – that our lives had become unmanageable.*

Fast forward eight months to early February, 2012. . . . A close family member died suddenly, unexpectedly. Even in my grief and shock, I was consumed by my fear of traveling some 600 miles outside the safety of my newfound OA network of support and love to attend his funeral.

At the same time, however, I knew with certainty that my Higher Power was a prayer away and would not leave me high and dry. I had a food plan, which was working. I had found a sponsor “who had what I wanted” and who explained abstinence as “a newborn baby” whom I must protect at all costs. I pre-planned my trip with her, and we settled on means to survive the obstacles ahead:

- Commit my food to her daily.
- Call, email, or text her as often as I needed.
- Send and receive emails and calls from other OA members.
- Attend a 12 Step meeting in the small town where I was heading.
- Use other tools, such as reading from For Today and Voices of Recovery.
- Write.
- Walk daily.

I followed my plan through my ten days away. In and out of others’ homes and kitchens, I connected with family and friends (some of whom I hadn’t seen in years), crying, laughing, reminiscing, and accepting their love – as I returned their gift.

Some days were easy; others, I prayed only to do the next right thing. As no OA meeting existed in this small town, I found another well-established 12 Step meeting which I attended twice. Members welcomed me with open arms. One night, I received an outreach call from a new OA member back home who needed support. In truth, I needed her as much as she needed me. HP was helping me understand service.

A year ago, I may well have eaten my way through this “pivotal life experience,” in the words of my sponsor. Instead, with the help of OA and my HP, I got to feel the feelings and return home with my integrity intact. I continue to learn.

~~Anonymous

Before leaving for my vacation, I called the OA office in the place where I would be staying. The answering service gave me three names and telephone numbers.

When I got there, I was thrilled that the first person I called was home. My vacation was on the right track. I asked her whether she would be my vacation sponsor, explaining that I wanted to call in my food plan each day, something I hadn't done in a long time, and to be guided with the steps. To my delight, she said she'd love to be my sponsor away from home.

I told her I felt tempted to indulge in extra food while away, but I wanted neither to gain weight nor to lose my vacation to food.

"What do you usually eat at home?" my new sponsor inquired. I told her, and she said, "Why don't you eat that today?"

I did just that. It was fine, and it freed me to play instead of concentrating on meals. I went to two meetings and discovered that only the faces were different from my meeting at home. I felt wanted, and I knew I needed what they had to give me.

It was a special treat to meet my vacation sponsor in person. I'll always be grateful to her for letting me call her every day. She helped me truly enjoy my vacation, from start to finish.

~Lifeline Sampler

Travel is a bonus prize of my recovery. Before program I only dreamed, wished, planned, and promised. Never actually made it very far. Of course travel goes best when I take my program along. And it certainly helps if I am packing a tidy program instead of a tattered one. Getting on a plane won't cure me of me, and I can't magically expect serene abstinence someplace else tomorrow if I don't have it here today. A few other givens for me are that vacations are easier than work or family trips, and traveling abstinely beats traveling crazy any day.

I can't always count on meetings, telephone and Internet when I travel, so I try to be self-supporting and plan ahead. Downloaded speakers and e-Lifeline are easy to take along. I can write and pray pretty much anywhere. Snippets of meditation are golden!

Some of my best vacations have been when I had frequent contact with my sponsor and sponsees, meetings, fabulous speakers to listen to when I hiked, where recovery on the road felt quite like recovery at home. But shaking it up and doing things differently when gone is good for me too. I stretch, grow, find weak spots to mend. Telephone meetings have become a useful new tool. (Most recommend making your 7th tradition contribution locally, so I donated to our summer retreat scholarship fund. I also contribute to the sites where I download speakers, to keep that special service active.) I've found meetings Outside I really enjoy. I'm surprised to be remembered from year to year, and excited to celebrate other people in other places staying abstinent over the long haul.

An attitude of gratitude and service (what I can give instead of get) give me a sense of direction when I'm away. The old ideas of self-reliance and self-willing my way through a tough spot don't work there or here. I sometimes forget to ask for help and count on your reminders that I have a kind and loving God to turn to so. Working the steps on whatever fear, expectation, resentment that I packed along or picked up as a souvenir is imperative. My defects of character aren't pretty in any language. I want to carry a message of recovery!

Vacations are fun these days. My trips to visit family are now measured in weeks instead of days; a true miracle. The desire and the ability to leave the comforts of my home come from knowing I don't do it alone.

~Anonymous

## E-LATED ABOUT E-RESOURCES:

If you're interested in downloading OA speaker and events as mp3 files, please check out the Los Angeles OA Intergroup site: <http://www.oalaig.org/speakers-podcasts/oa-speakers.html>

To try a telephone meeting and connect with OAs across the country, go to the OA website: <http://www.oa.org/membersgroups/find-a-meeting/> Click the Telephone tab, select the time zone you want the meeting start times reflected in. The meeting list can be sorted by day if you like.

## ACRONYMOUS

ACTION = Any Change To Improve Our Natures

PROGRAM = People Relying on God Relaying a Message

SOLUTIONS = Saving Our Lives Using The Inventory Of Needed Steps

SPONSOR = Sober (Sane, Serene) Person Offering Newcomers Suggestions On Recovery

Note – please view this as the lighter side, the brainteaser. Got a favorite to share?

## MEETING SCHEDULE

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### **Anchorage**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Contact (907)</b>
Monday	6:30pm	OAsis Turnagain Arts Bldg. 4105 Turnagain Blvd, #D1(in back)	AA Big Book	MaryJo 227-5078
Tuesday	5:30pm	OAsis Turnagain Arts Bldg. 4105 Turnagain Blvd, #D1 (in back)	OA/HOW	Meg 248-0300
Wednesday	5:30pm	North star Hospital 2530 Debarr Rd. Private dining room, past seating area.	Steps/Trad/Lit	Gail B 332-0049
Thursday	Noon	1st Congregational Church, 2610 E. Northern Lights Blvd	Steps/Stories	Alice 243-3056
Thursday	6:30PM	Lutheran Church of Hope, 1847 W. Northern Lights Blvd	There is a Solution	Carolyn 279-1942
Friday	6:00PM	OAsis Turnagain Arts Bldg. 4105 Turnagain Blvd, #D1(in back)	Step Writing	Jean 345-9805
Saturday	9:00-10:30am	St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Lake Otis & Tudor	AA Big Book	Paula Z 522-9910
Sunday	9:30am	Kaladi Bros 6921 Brayton Dr,	As Bill Sees It. VOR & For Today	Candy 350-5255 Jean 345-9805

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## Mat-Su

Day	Time	Address	Type	Contact (907)
Monday	Noon	Wasilla: Mat-Su Regional Hospital, Matanuska Room ( by cafeteria)	Big Book	Brenda 240-6331
Wednesday	6:00pm	Wasilla: Alano Club Snohomish/Fishhook Rd	Topics	Gail 357-4644
Saturday	9:00am	Wasilla: Mat-Su Regional Hospital, Pioneer Peak Rm, 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor	Varies	Paula 745-8337
Sunday	6:00pm	Palmer: St. Michael's Parish, 432 E Fireweed Ave, downstairs		Randy 745-7485

## Eagle River

Day	Time	Address	Type	Contact (907)
Monday	7:00pm	Holy Spirit Episcopal Church 17545 N. Eagle River Loop Road, in Library		Bev 694-7448

## Homer

Day	Time	Address	Type	Contact (907)
Friday	12:00 noon	Homer United Methodist Church, 770 East End Rd. Knitting Room - upstairs		Angela 299-6404
Sunday	6:00pm	Homer United Methodist Church, 770 East End Rd. Knitting Room - upstairs		Julie 235.6696 Nancy 235.5944

## Juneau

Juneau OA Hotline: (907) 463-1224

Day	Time	Address	Type	Contact (907)
Monday	5:30pm	Northern Lights Church, 400 W. 11th St. Room 8 downstairs		Sara 209-6164
Wednesday	Noon	Unity Center, 119 Seward St. #1		Wendy 364-2240
Saturday	10:00am	Juneau Public Health Center, 3412 Glacier Hwy Downstairs Conference Rm.		Leslie 586-3259

## Ketchikan

Day	Time	Address	Type	Contact (907)
Wednesday	6:00pm	Pioneer Home, 141 Bryant St.		Lesley 225-3278

## Kodiak

Day	Time	Address	Type	Contact (907)
Tuesday	7:00pm	St James the Fisherman Episcopal Church 421 Thorsheim St.		Denise 942-0045

## Unalaska

Day	Time	Address	Type	Contact (907)
Thursday,	5:30pm	Burma Rd Chapel 28 E Broadway, Rm104		Rosie 359-5084
Friday	Noon	Baha'i Center Unalaska 390 Bayview, Rm 104		Rosie 359-5084

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