

Shame On You...

The Michigan COSA Intergroup recently organized and led an 8-hour "Shame Retreat" open to both COSA and SAA members. The retreat included a story (see page 2), a workshop on the

FOCUS ON: Step Five

"Admitted to God, ourselves and another person the exact nature of our wrongs."

Having made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves, we move on to Step Five, admitting our wrongs to three persons. First, we admit to ourselves the exact nature of those wrongs. Then, we move to share the same information with our Higher Power, whom we have come to believe in and made the decision to trust. And, finally, we admit those wrongs to another person, perhaps a trusted friend in COSA or our sponsor.

The Twelve Steps do not leave us hanging in the balance, carrying the weight of our wrongs. Rather, the Steps call on us to release that information to three sources, so that we will be able to continue our journey toward recovery. Step Five is an important daily step as well. For many of us, admitting a mistake or a wrong was equal to announcing we were a mistake or a total failure. This is not so. Taking a Fifth Step can move us toward greater healing and wholeness in our lives.

characteristics of shame, a guided meditation and a workshop on "Naming Our Shame" which used worksheets entitled "Gently Healing Shame" and "Name It, Claim It, Dump It." During this last workshop, participants could write their shame down and deposit it in a box at the workshop site, symbolizing their letting go process. Participants report that the retreat was a healing experience and a day filled with recovery. We hope more groups around the country will plan day-long activities and retreats that allow for interaction and fellowship with others as we come together to heal the past and build a promising tomorrow.

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STORYTIME

My name is Joann. I am an ACOA, incest survivor and COSA. I was raised in a shame-based home. My shame began around age 5. My parents would come home drunk, and my father would beat my mother in the front yard. The neighbors would watch and cheer my father on because while my father worked, my mother had many different men over. From about age 6 to 10, as my parents alcoholism progressed, I was expected to take care of my younger sisters and keep the house clean. I was expected to do the job of an adult. When my mother would come home and the job wasn't done perfectly, she would beat me. Her rage would come out, and she would tell me that I was dumb, stupid and would never amount to anything. Since we believe everything our parents tell us from a very young age, I thought of myself as stupid and unlovable. At age 11, my parents divorced, and my mother remarried. My stepfather began incesting me, and at age 12 I became pregnant. At 13, I had a baby. I was looked at as a sexually active adolescent. I didn't tell anyone the truth, and no questions were asked. I almost died having this baby. I was in the hospital for six weeks because my kidneys failed. My parents told me throughout my pregnancy, "You made your bed, now lie in it." When the time came to have the baby, neither of my parents were there. I went through two days of labor by

myself. I thought I deserved to go through it alone because I was a bad, unlovable person. Since I was only 13, I had to return to school. When I did, I felt deep shame. I was called a "slut" and "whore." All of my girlfriends had boyfriends, but none were interested in me because I had a baby. I was always a low achiever in school. After failing the 8th grade two times, I dropped out. The incest continued until I was 15, when I met my husband; he was the first person I told about the incest. I then told my mother, and she told me that the incest was all my fault, that I brought it on myself. Shortly afterwards, my husband's mother got custody of me. I put my child up for adoption when she was two. I knew that I would never be able to give her the life she deserved. My family of origin shamed me about this. They told me that I was selfish. Their only concern was that they couldn't see their grandchild. My parents didn't in any way help me support my child. I babysat to provide for her. This is when I detached from my family. When my mother-in-law got custody, she had an ulterior motive in mind. She wanted a live-in maid; I spent the next year trying to repay her for rescuing me from that environment. At 16, my husband and I got an apartment and moved in together. I was told by my mother-in-law that I wasn't good enough for her son. At 17, I became pregnant with our daughter. My mother-

STORYTIME

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Shame Checklist

Taken from Don't Call It Love by Patrick Carnes, Ph.D., pages 102-103.

FAMILY STATEMENT

Performance over person
"You are what you do."

Cannot make mistakes
"Stay within the lines."

Cannot do it right
"You always do that wrong."

Must always do better
"Never give full credit because they will stop trying."

No validation of effort
"Why comment about what is expected?"

Extremem standards of performance
"Anything less than the best, and you have not tried hard enough."

Judgmental emphasis on right/wrong
"I don't want to listen because it's wrong."

No affirmation
"It's dangerous to give compliments."

Scapegoating and blaming
"You caused all this."

Limited expression of care
"They should know that I care because of what I do for them."

YOUR OWN SELF-TALK

Human doing versus human being
"I am what I do."

Perfectionism
"If I blow it, people will not accept me."

Failure prone
"Things never work out for me."

Overachieving
"Have I done enough?"

Self doubt about effort
"Do I have any impact?"

No effort is good enough
"I should try harder."

Categorical black and white thinking
"It should be only one way."

Low self-esteem
"I am basically a bad, unworthy person."

Responsibility for everything
"When things go wrong, it's my fault."

Desperation for approval
"Am I okay?"

storytime, cont.

in-law said I got myself pregnant to keep her son. From then on, I was never accepted by her. I spent the next 17 years being codependent to my husband and his family. I was a really good enabler, caretaker and people-pleaser. No matter what my husband's family inflicted on me and my children, I felt I deserved it and was expected to keep the peace no matter the cost. Being overly responsible is how I managed my shame. I thought if I just worked enough, I would be accepted and loved. I was never unemployed from age 15 to age 33, and during this time my husband was into his sex addiction and couldn't manage to hold a job. He was too depressed. I continued doing what I was really good at: working and taking care of our family. I accepted some sick advice from my husband's family: I was told that it was my obligation as a wife to be supportive of him, and if I was more understanding, he wouldn't be depressed. This was very shameful for me, because I thought his problem was me, that I caused it. This went on

until August, 1991. What brought me to COSA was my husband's molesting our daughter and being removed from our home. As our court case was going on, I began to work on my shame. When the case hit the newspaper, I was permanently laid off from my job. I chose not to move out of town and faced the shame. In my recovery, I work on shame daily. It is helpful for me to give back shame. In the past, I allowed my husband's family to beat me up with shame that didn't belong to me. They told me I overreacted to my daughter's being molested, that he should be allowed to come home and forget about it. To give that shame back, I had to detach from his family. I can now name the shame when my daughter's rage towards her father comes out. I no longer feel this shame because I know it isn't mine. I am learning to unlearn this shame by working the Twelve Steps. I don't expect this to happen overnight; it wasn't learned overnight. The Twelve Steps are the only way I know to live so that I don't go back to living in extremes.

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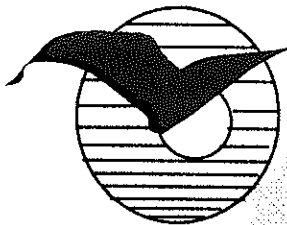
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