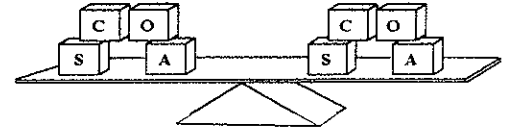


BALANCE

No. 31
JULY 1997

Admit To Ourselves



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ORDER LITERATURE INSERT

STEP SEVEN

STEP SEVEN: *"Humbly asked God to remove all these defects of character."*

As a newcomer to recovery - I found the "steps" to be mysterious. I knew I was supposed to "work" them, but what did that mean? I couldn't possibly let on that I didn't have the faintest idea HOW to "work" them, because that would mean I wasn't in recovery, wouldn't it?

If you have feelings about working (or not working) the steps, or feel "less than" or inadequate because of inexperience with the Twelve Steps, please let us hear from you. Since the BALANCE step articles are usually written by old-timers or experienced "step-workers", we realize there has not been a voice from members who have yet to experience any or all of the steps. Your point of view is important - your experience, strength and hope is needed for those out there who are afraid to start their step work, too. Please write and share with all of us your progress (not perfection) regarding step work.

- the editors

Feelings

I'm feeling very sad tonight, drawing teardrops down the edges of my scratch paper, able to break into tears at the drop of a hat. It was so wonderful to be at the COSA convention this weekend, and now I'm home and feeling restless and out-of-sorts. The convention community was so supportive and safe, and I didn't want to leave, I had so many, many experiences while there; let me share a few of them.

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BALANCE

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It's been my experience ... July is a month of celebration, complete with fireworks, parades, music, picnics, watermelons, and that age old activity of catching fireflies in a mayonnaise jar. Not only is it the anniversary of the United States' birth, promising basic freedoms for everyone, it is the anniversary of my discovering a new way to live free from my disease of codependency. In essence, my re-birth and my quest for personal freedom.

[continued on page 2]

Feelings*[continued from page 2]*

There was a workshop for women about building friendships. We shared what we loved about being a woman as our introduction. (I love my graceful arms, particularly when I'm wearing my favorite beaded bracelet.) Then a handout was passed around with 9 questions on it. For each question we needed to find a different person and share our answer with her. The most powerful insight to come out of it is how we need to celebrate each other's successes and encourage each other. One question was to find someone you might normally be jealous of and tell her why you are jealous. It was a chance to affirm that person and build community. And when I chose a woman who is beautiful and told her so, it was a gift to see her face lit up. It was as if no one had ever told her that before, maybe no one had. I really appreciated the chance to practice building intimacy with others.

Another good workshop was about using the steps. I have worked through steps one through five in various study groups, but I never seem able to move on to step six. The presenter talked about how we can work the steps by looking at a particular situation and asking ourselves which step(s) we need to work around it. I like this approach, because it frees me from the rigid, structured, perfectionistic way that I have tried to do step work in the past. I'm feeling some hope about feeling freer to use the steps in my day-to-day living.

Another gift I received was gaining some clarity about a particular character defect and how it manifests in my life in so many ways. This defect is ego. I see how I try to control a group to do things my way, when I think I'm right. On the flip side I don't trust myself and think that everyone will see how much of a failure I am. I found myself feeling like the center of the universe, with everyone else looking at and focusing on me. It's all simply my ego taking charge, with my focus SO MUCH on me that I don't have room for anyone else. It leads to a lot of unhealthy selfish behavior.

I had written previously about my work around sexual anorexia. This weekend I had a good long talk with someone about clothes, and it has encouraged me to go shopping and allow myself to appear more feminine. Also I had an opportunity to

dance, and received some very positive affirmation about that. And I was able to do one of my therapist's assignments that I had been stuck on, about body image.

I think the best thing about the weekend was learning how to be emotional and social. I could cry and laugh and be mad and whatever, and it was safe to express any of those feelings to almost anyone I happened to be around. And I could be honest, vulnerable and intimate with people in a way that surpasses what I can achieve in everyday life.

It was really hard to come home, but I'm now finishing this post a day later than it was started. The grief is less.

Wishing you more peace that I feel right now,

Ruth B.

It's been my experience...*[cont. from page 1]*

Before recovery, I lived my entire life in someone else's reality. I turned over all decisions to someone else. It really didn't matter who. I was such a prisoner of my own insecurities and fears! I couldn't make a decision, have an opinion or make a choice by myself. Of course, many other people helped convince me of my inability to think for myself. They were the people with perceived power and knowledge over me - parents, teachers, bosses, friends, grocery clerks, telephone solicitors, real estate agents, doctors, husband, minister, children, girl scout leader, car salesman--it seems like everyone knew just the right thing for me to do, think, say, be, believe, and buy. My life was like living in a rabbit cage (one of those cages with wire bars on all 6 sides). I was vulnerable with no place to hide, no way to escape. I was surrounded. I was a victim. I felt helpless. I felt hopeless.

[continued on page 4]

FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

I just have to talk about the Houston Convention. It was wonderful! There was so much going on I found myself wishing I were two people so I wouldn't miss anything! Some of the workshops were fun, some were hard because they stirred up old hurts and emotions, all of them gave me plenty of new ideas for my recovery work. Some of the topics this year were body image, moving on after divorce, connecting honestly woman to woman, using the 12 steps and looking at family patterns.

The keynote speakers were excellent. Before this convention I thought I'd heard just about everything. But I was wrong! Some of the stories of recovery from extreme conditions were truly amazing. If you weren't able to attend the convention, you can order audio tapes of the workshops and keynote speakers through NSO.

The social gatherings were fun, especially the dance and talent show. I spent a lot of time in the hospitality room meeting and talking with others, and eating great food! Thanks to all of you who provided it!

It was neat for me to see COSA alive in Texas and to hear about COSA groups in other areas of the country. I tend to think about COSA as being my own home group or my home state's Intergroup. But it is so much more. I loved seeing the relationships between other COSA groups, individual members, and members with their sponsors. I feel like I'm beginning to understand how real and meaningful COSA recovery is and to see the enormity of COSA's impact across the country.

The convention was a real boost for my recovery. If you've never been to one, consider it for next year and start planning now. The convention committees go to great lengths to provide wonderful food, superb lodging and great programs for very little money. You can't get more for your "recovery dollar" in my opinion. There's nothing quite like a COSA convention! I'll see you there next year.

Barb C. MN

Convention News

"1997 NSO COSA Convention tapes are now available!"

The following is a listing of each tape and a brief description.

Keynote speaker (Friday night) - *COSA/SAA couple share jointly their stories to recovery.* (Lisa Mc., Nan E.)

Courage to recover after pain - *two COSA women share their experience strength and hope* (Sharon G., Jo Katherine D.)

Courage to break the silence - *COSA stories* (Robin R., Marjorie K.)

Courage to be... using the 12 Steps - (Ila D.)

Courage to give it away... so I can keep it - *service work and how it affects my recovery* (Charlotte S.)

Deep in the Heart... woman to woman - *claiming our power [limited audio with hand outs]* (Sally B.)

Courage to follow my spiritual path - (Barb C.)

Keynote speaker (Sunday lunch) - Katy B.

Keynote speaker (Monday brunch) - Robyn M.

Tapes can be ordered through the literature order form inserted in this newsletter. (Please designate tape by name as listed above)

It's been my experience...

[continued. from p. 2]

I had several realizations after working the steps of COSA. I had let myself be used by others. My own thoughts, fears, behaviors, actions, beliefs and feelings were responsible for keeping me trapped and open to outside control by others. After all those years, I realized I HAD THE KEY to the cage door, only I could let myself out! Soon the cage became MY SPACE with an invisible protective shield to keep others out. Only I could unlock the door and permit them to enter my space.

This new found freedom of choice brought with it the need to develop personal responsibility - which meant I could no longer blame others. Personal courage needed to be developed in order to risk being vocal and visible, a success or a failure. Personal wisdom needed to be nurtured in order to make wise and informed decisions for my own best interest. With the help of COSA meetings, a sponsor, my support group of COSA women, and a therapist, I was able to slowly but surely develop the necessary self esteem, self worth and self confidence to make decisions that were right for me. Each day that passes increases the depth and width and breadth of these qualities of freedom of choice. As my fear of personal freedom decreases, what JOY I feel.

Well, I hear a band warming up with a John Phillip Sousa march and the crowds are gathering. I smell the popcorn and I can't keep my feet still or my voice quiet. Cheers for freedom! Three cheers for COSA! Three cheers for ME! Now just where did I put that mayonnaise jar? (With holes in the lid large enough for the fireflies to escape if they want).

Jan W.

Pen Pals are Needed

The communications committee is asking for volunteers who wish to do service work by writing to someone who is in an area without meetings. If you are interested in being a long distance pen pal, please write to:

**NSO-COSA
9337-B Katy Freeway
Houston, Texas 77024**

Please consider this service work. I remember how lonely I felt before I had group support. An occasional letter or card brings so much support and hope to those with no support network. Please announce this need for service work at your meetings.

Thank you, *Kris A. and Dana J.*

Send contributions to support your NSO-COSA to:
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National COSA Phone Line
Phone 612/537-6904

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Many people on the mailing list are in an area where no meetings are available. This newsletter is their only contact with recovering people. Share your story. Share your recovery. Share the tools that work for you. Share your gifts. THE BALANCE NEWSLETTER IS YOUR NEWSLETTER. SHARINGS FROM YOU CONTINUE THE PURPOSE OF THIS NEWSLETTER AS A COMMUNICATION LINK TO STRENGTHEN AND CONNECT COSA SUPPORT GROUPS AND ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO ARE STILL STRUGGLING ALONE. Share with other readers about your new meetings, retreats, social activities, meeting experiences, life experiences.

The address for the E-mail Forum for Friends and Family Members of People Addicted to Sex is: **willing@netpath.net** (this address is for those interested in inquiring or becoming a part of the support group.) This list is closed for the group's safety. It is for people in COSA, S-Anon, Co-SLAA or those with no meeting they can attend.

Ruth B.