



# BALANCE



September/October 1998

**"Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others"**

## Nine

Ahhhh...ask and ye shall receive. That is exactly what is happening to me. My husband and I are working the steps in a couple workbook. We completed the preparation steps (6&7). Step 7, for us, meant lots of prayer. All through the list-making in Step 8, we continued to pray for the willingness, compassion and strength to complete Step 9.

How can I explain to you how beautifully this program works? Some of the people on that list, I couldn't even figure or visualize how we were going to contact or approach them. Why don't I just trust the process??? I know it works. The people on our couple amends list are appearing at our door step. They are

bringing others with them, people we needed to have on our list but didn't think to place there. They are appearing for various reasons. It just amazes me that after not seeing them or hearing from them for so many years, they appear with no searching or seeking out on our part. Tomorrow, we leave for Alaska. We will be meeting people there who are on our list. I'm excited and fearful as I think of our journey these next few days and weeks. I feel the healing that is about to happen for me and for us.

Today, as we prayed, I said, "Gee, God, I did ask for the preparation, readiness and willingness. Do have to work so fast? Are you really, really sure we are ready for this? You seem to be sending them. I'm sure you know. I will

continue to pray that the butterflies in my stomach begin flying in order."

Yes, the Steps work. We must do the ground work. There are seven steps before we get to the list. The list is a healing process in itself. Step Nine says make direct amends except when to do so would injure them or others.

The amends will set us free. It is me I do the amends for. In our present phase of recovery, it is our coupleship we do the amends for. It doesn't matter if it benefits the other person or not. No, we don't want to injure them or others, yet we can't *make* them be receptive and positive about our process.

I am so grateful for recovery. The freedom creates so much excitement and anticipation for my future.

~Ila. D.

**"Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it"**

## Ten

It takes a long time to clean up the mess from my dysfunctional years. Forty-seven years is a long time to accumulate "stuff." As I clean up my mess, I don't want to create another one. Step 10 gives me a tool to keep my process neater and clearer. For me it is so much easier to clear up a misunderstanding, make an amend for a wrong that I committed *today*. I like the process that Step 10 creates for a smoother, clearer future. My mind will no longer have to be cluttered with all the unfinished business, unless of course I choose not to practice Step 10 each day.

Best of all, this step reminds me that I'm not expected to be perfect just because I'm working the steps, active in meetings, working recovery, whatever the identification we tag ourselves with. Step 10 says "continue to take an inventory." To me that means someone expected us to continue to be imperfect after we completed Step 9. The step doesn't indicate that now that we've completed Step 9 we will never offend anyone again. We don't have to be

perfect. Our program doesn't expect us to be perfect. We simply continue our amends by observing our process.

Again, I can't forget myself here. I continue to abuse myself. I will continue

to make amends to myself. I will nurture myself. Yes, as I take my daily Step 10 inventory, I must look at where I fit into my self care.

~Ila. D.

# Anonymity

I have come to believe that the 12 Steps "qualify" as a form of mysticism -- and that every practitioner of the 12 Steps "qualifies" as a modern "mystic." My reasons for saying this is more inductive than deductive: i.e., every practitioner of the 12 Steps I've seen appears to be on a personal inquest for absolute truth -- which is the definitive identification of a "true" mystic (*a la* Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, originally published 1910). In all cases, the practitioners' (of *either* the 12 Steps or mysticism) greatest efforts ultimately become concentrated upon the search for knowledge and truth of one's Self.

Many of us discover COSA from other 12 Step fellowships (and many of us discover other 12 Step fellowships from

COSA), so I have little temerity in stating that my first experience at attending *any* international convention of 12 Step Practitioners was the combined AA and Alanon convention held at Montreal in 1985. I *could* say that I met one of the founders of one of those organizations -- and it would be absolutely true -- but the truth is, I saw her being driven into the Olympic stadium, and then led to the podium, from my seat in the stands. The point of this little vignette of my life is that, when I returned to my (then) home in Alexandria, Virginia, I learned that "we" had "discussed" Anonymity, and had "concluded" by way of "group conscience" that Spiritual Anonymity, in all cases, was to be preferred over "the

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# Summer recovery requires the courage to change

By Barb C.

I find summer is an exercise in change. All my schedules, habits, and routines are continually adjusted. Every Monday morning I consult my kitchen calendar to check the lineup. It's a lot like dice: What am I going to roll this week? Who goes where, when, and how?

My two boys are involved with a variety of summer programs, camps and sports. I've been attending a lecture series. My husband and I have taken on a number of projects like painting the house, landscaping other areas in our yard, and installing an invisible fence for our new dog.

There are trips and picnics,

summer outings and projects, storms and visitors. Nothing seems very predictable and everything seems loud and fast! My patience level seems to rise and fall with the humidity.

So what's the constant? Where's the life preserver in the rolling waves? Weekly COSA meetings provide the grounding I need. I don't always read a daily meditation first thing in the calm morning. Sometimes I need it more in the hot, hectic afternoon. I try hard to stay present and let expectations and housecleaning go on a long, long vacation.

I also have a built-in

barometer (installed when I was born, but it blew out and COSA helped me get working again). It tells me when I need to take care of myself. Some of the inexpensive things I do for myself are: take a bath by candle light, call a friend, go for a walk, listen to soothing music, read a book, take a nap. For a little money I hire a baby-sitter and meet a friend for lunch or a movie. For a little more money, I get a massage.

By the time you read this, it will be Fall. Then I'll be adjusting to my youngest son starting first grade. Gone all day! I guess change is just the way it is in any season!

## Anonymity

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other kind."

I wasn't sure what "the other kind" meant, exactly, nor did I participate, exactly, in any particular session of that convention that addressed Anonymity. However, I liked the sound of the idea that Spiritual Anonymity was to be preferred over the other kind, and had no problem endorsing that sentiment. In practice, however, I found it a bit difficult, as I really had no common understanding of the term "Spiritual Anonymity" either. Also, I discovered that I needed to change my comfortable ways of participating in the fellowship. For example -- as I was used to "sharing" rather openly (and specifically) my experience, strength, and hope -- it was suggested that I learn how to not identify to the large group specific information relating to myself (such as something I might say to one of the persons I was sponsoring at that time -- or even to say something seemingly innocuous to a significant other, or coworker, or whomever, that might tend to identify that person to the group) -- as this would somehow place personalities above principles, and *violate* the "spirit" of Tradition Twelve.

When I returned home from the NSO Winter Conference, I discovered that my impressions as to "what hap-

pened" in Houston were just as free from a common understanding as they were of "what happened" in Montreal. Bottom line, I have more credibility with myself when I simply go to a COSA meeting and talk about what's going on with *me*, sort of like I doing right now. There are times when I need to hear myself say some things at a COSA meeting (and, I say with all humility -- sometimes I can come out with some really brilliant statements!) -- with the caveat that when remembering (and sometimes repeating) these brilliant statements, that I remind myself that I simply heard someone say it at a meeting.

None of this discussion about Spiritual Anonymity, or the "the other kind," has any value if there are no COSA meetings. In truth, we in Louisville have to ask ourselves why our attendance has dropped so low, in our recent practice -- are we perhaps placing too many personalities above our principles? We all agree that these small meetings have become some of the best meetings we've attended in COSA, and I am grateful that I still have my old phone lists. My impressions as to what happened in Houston can wait.

Somehow, there has *never* been a "gentle" path through the 12 Steps with me.

~Jeremy J.

**What's In Strength**

- Serenity**  
Giving me power, letting go, turning over
- Truth**  
Acceptance, who I am, how I feel
- Experience**  
Learning, living, expressing, where I was, where I am, how I got here
- Newness**  
Doing new work, feeling different, unfamiliar, getting different results
- God**  
Higher Power, love, acceptance
- Trust**  
Knowing self, boundaries, being safe, taking risks
- Hope**  
To have confidence, feeling of self worth, going forward

# Dear Readers...

This year I had the honor and privilege to attend the COSA convention as a delegate. During the business meeting a 1999 deficit budget of \$1,655.00 was presented. It is the wish of all in attendance not to pass on a deficit budget, therefore, we are encouraging individual donations.

Donations will be used for various expenses and goals. One of the goals of 1999 NSO/COSA is to hire a stipend employee to perform various duties that volunteers are now handling. While volunteers are indispensable to our organization, we are hoping to alleviate some of the mundane tasks they perform, allowing them to seek a more creative way to serve in their recovery. Another goal for COSA is to establish our own line of credit. The 1999 COSA convention will be held in Chicago, separate from the SAA convention. In the past, various convention arrangements have been negotiated through NSO/SAA. The 1999 convention will be the first convention that COSA will stand independently from SAA. We will conduct all negotiations for convention arrangements. It's a big step! One of the things essential during negotiations for hotel arrangements is to have a bank account large enough to fund partial payment for hotel expenses. Thus, we will establish our own line of credit. To date, COSA has no credit history. Another goal for 1999 includes increased outreach to nonmembers. Our fifth tradition states, "Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to those who still suffer. One way to incorporate this is through writing new literature and increasing circulation of existing literature. Hopefully COSA will grow as a whole as a result of this endeavor.

The above mentioned goals are just a few of the things COSA is working toward in 1999. They all take money to make happen. We are asking for contributions on a national level. Let's talk about the word "national" for a moment. When I hear "national" I think, "Huge, lots of people, someone else. I am just one person. My contribution won't make a difference, so I'll let the national people "contribute." Let me say it's you who are reading this now, you are the national people. It's going to take a financial commitment from each of us to help make this \$1,655.00 deficit disappear. No matter how small you may think your donation is, it is significant! Just think if you donated the cost of a can of coke per day. That's \$15.00 per month or \$180.00 a year. That's significant! A few members could fund the salary of the stipend employee for a year! You can contribute any way you like, monthly, or in a lump sum on a yearly basis. You may choose to donate through your local group. Just be clear that the money you are donating is to be paid directly to the NSO. Lack of clarity may cause monies donated to be put towards meeting expenses, etc.

The attached sheet is designed to work like your monthly car or mortgage payment book. Just tear off a stub and mail it with your donation. Every month when you sit down to pay bills, remember COSA!

~Mary Ellen H., Houston

# Journal Notes

6/10/98

Today, I felt the loss again. As I typed the articles for the newsletter, these words drilled straight through my heart, "I don't want my kids to remember Memorial Day as the weekend Mommy and Daddy always went away."

As I typed those words, I had to stop. Tears were streaming down my face. The tears turned to sobs. What is going on with me? I heard those words spoken, during the meeting, at the conference. It didn't affect me then. I read them when I received the article for the newsletter. I felt a sadness, but nothing like this. Yes, for me it often takes more than sitting in meetings, using my sense of sound. I also know it oftentimes takes more than my sense of sound and sight (reading). Many times I have to get to this, my journaling, another sense (source) God has given me for processing. Release happens as I write. I now know that release happens as I type something someone else wrote.

As I sit here quietly, I can feel it. All the holiday weekends that we had exciting, "perfect" plans. They never happened. They always blew up. All the scheduling, the anticipation that we never followed through with, because of our silent addiction. I couldn't make eye contact with my children. I didn't want them to see my pain. I'm sure I didn't want to see their pain either. Oh dear, they might have even confronted me, asked me why I put up with the jerk, asked me why I allowed him to destroy all our anticipated good times. I stayed too shut down for them

to ask. Our holidays were gloom. Our faces didn't reflect happiness or love.

God, this is hard. I didn't do much for their memory bank. Well not pleasant memory bank. They have plenty of unpleasant memories. As I typed that sentence, I now realize I'd give *anything* if my children could remember a holiday weekend as the time their parents went away to get better. Our children are very supportive of our recovery schedule today. They send us a strong, clear message that they don't want to interfere with that portion of our time.

I don't care when the conferences are held. That isn't the point of this journaling session. I just realize today that being with my children and unhealthy was far more destructive than if I would have been away from my children working my recovery. I will attend recovery events whenever they are scheduled because they are so important to my recovery. I am just so amazed that one sentence opened the flood gates again.

*P.S. I journaled the above words in June while preparing the July/August newsletter.*

*Today, August 10th, I just completed plans for a camping trip located halfway between children in Michigan and Arkansas. I can hardly wait for the event to happen. I know I have an inner child that still wants to experience events the way I had wanted them as a child. I'm sure each of my children has an inner child with the same need. My desire is that we all experience the child within us together. I really believe it will be healthy this time. The addict in my life is healthy. He won't change our plans at the last minute.*

*Life is wonderful and joyous in recovery. Grief is necessary to locate the path to wonder and joy.*

~Ila D.