



BALANCE



January 1999



Step One

"We admitted we were powerless over our sexual codependency—that our lives had become unmanageable."

That had to be my first new thought. All of my old unworkable thoughts and methods must be replaced with this new thinking process, the idea that my life is unmanageable. All of my life, I had been sure that if I tried a little harder, did a littler more, took better control of everything, our life would be okay. I believed it was manageable IF I would only do it right. Notice I say our life. I had no "my"

life. I was so enmeshed with everyone that I really believed I controlled our lives.

For me, step one brought freedom. A huge load slid off my shoulders the moment I realized that I didn't have to take care of my husband, my children, my friends, my extended family, my community and on and on. You name them, I felt a need to caretake or hmmm..... control them.

I know the feeling of freedom doesn't happen that way with everyone. For most of us, the thought of being powerless is frightening. We simply believe life cannot go on if we let go. I realize now that I was as far down as I could go. This disease of codependency is as dangerous for us as the addiction for the addict. Codependency is an addiction. My addiction had progressed to the point where I was close to death. It was killing me. I hope the disease doesn't get to that

point for you. This is January, a good time to begin taking your life back. Have a wonderful 1999 and become acquainted with your best friend.....YOU!!!

I've been in recovery for 10 years. One year ago I would have told you that I've taken my life back and would never lose it to anyone again. Today, I can't say that. My husband was diagnosed with a serious illness. I allowed the doctors to take my life and give it to my husband. It took me almost six months to realize how much of me I had lost to them. I am again back to step one, letting go of the need to please doctors, the need to fix my husband. I'm again focusing on getting my life back. I think I'm doing a pretty good job of getting me back again.

Don't ever give up. We can slip back into codependency. It won't kill us UNLESS we stay there.

~Ila D.

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

At first I didn't want to turn my problems over to anyone else. I really believed I had a relationship with my Higher Power and I hadn't felt like that HP had been very dependable. Now I realize I had a relationship with the church. I had a relationship with religion. I didn't

have a spiritual relationship. I now have spirituality in my life everyday all day. It brings so much support and comfort to me to have spirituality that has nothing to do with works or titles.

Then there is that statement in this step that says 'restore us to sanity'. It doesn't say restore us to sanity IF we are one of those that might happen to be insane. This steps includes each of us. If we are reading this newsletter, we qualify as having been insane. The hope and promise is that we can be "restored".

Again, let's all make 1999 be the year that we add even more sanity to our life. We all deserve good in our life. It is okay for us to take

care of us first. I know that's not what I was taught. Many things I was taught were either incorrect or mis-interpreted by me. I will put me first this year. I will, I will, I will. I hope you do the same.

~Ila D.

When you make a decision to put your garbage on the garbage truck and be done with it, DON'T CHASE THE GARBAGE TRUCK!

~Michelle P.



Step Two

Michelle's story

My name is Michelle and I am a recovering addict, alcoholic and codependent of a sex addict. As if that wasn't enough, I am also the adult survivor of sexual abuse and a seriously dysfunctional adoptive family.

I have always known there was something wrong with me and if I could just figure out what it was I could be happy. I never did find what was wrong, but I did find a lot of ways to make it worse.

I was molested at the age of 3 or 4 and regularly thereafter. I decided this was how things were. I was kicked out of school at age 6. I was in second grade. The school said I was disruptive. I went to another school across town. By this time I was in a steady and conscious black out. There was quite a bit of trouble in the new school. In fifth grade I was taken to a doctor at the request of the teacher. I was diagnosed as A.D.D. and was put on medication for this until I was about 10 or 11. This made it even easier to forget.

When I was taken off the medication, I had to find another way to get that same relief. I tried drinking, smoking cigarettes, smoking weed, taking a lot of speed. That was all right for awhile then I got kicked out of middle school and went to a private school. I also got in trouble there and was sent back to public school. I got tossed back and forth from school to school. I was in and out of counseling. None of which helped. It just reinforced the fact that adults couldn't help or be trusted. All they wanted to do is cover up the problem. I became extremely antisocial. I hated everybody and everything. I was always looking for an external cure.

My drinking and drug use got really unmanageable. In high school, I met a boy I

thought could fix everything. I found out that he too only wanted sex.

I got pregnant and had to quit school and get married. I didn't want to marry this man but my parents made me so they didn't have to deal with me anymore. I left him when I was 18.

I then met a guy I thought (at first) was wonderful. He ended up being a sex addict and woman beater. He actually sexually satisfied me so I stayed with him for almost 3 years. During this time, I had lost my son and started topless dancing. I also started taking a lot of pills along with the weed and alcohol. I finally left him and hopped from man to man. I met a motorcycle gang member in the bar where I worked and he kidnapped me after I passed out. I woke up in Louisville, not knowing where or why I was there. He had me working in prostitution and hooked on cocaine. After I became pregnant, he brought me a bus ticket back home. I was of no more use to him since I refused to have an abortion.

I came back and hopped from man to man again. Then I met my second husband. He introduced me to I.V. drugs and crack cocaine. After about 1 year with him, I checked myself into a psychiatric ward and we splint up. About 2 months later he wanted to get back together. When I said, "no, I want a divorce", he went out and killed himself with a shotgun.

Shortly after that I was arrested and put on probation for prescription drug fraud. I was in and out of the drug world for awhile. My life was so unmanageable at this point I couldn't keep up with what was going on. I pretty much stayed high. At 15, I had tried A.A. for my drinking and didn't get it. I tried to quit on methadone and that was all

right except the mental health drugs I was on had no effect. By this time I was declared 100% mentally disabled! That gave me more time to get high and free money to do it. Men came and went. My mom tried to fix me.

I got really hung up on crack and prostitution, still looking for that external fix. I went to jail and found out about N.A. I tried it for awhile but I couldn't stop getting high and it seemed like nobody really cared anyway. By then I had lost my daughter too. I couldn't stand people, especially men. I had quite a few of them running in and out of my life. All I knew was the only thing in my life that hadn't failed me was drugs and alcohol and they were becoming a nuisance.

I got to a desperate point where I couldn't enjoy getting high and I couldn't do anything without being high. I decided I would give this recovery thing one more try. Well, my journey started out with 4 or 5 months of abstinence, a few relapses and in desperation I started going to meetings. I thought I was doing great until I had to surrender control of my recovery! I was the only person I could trust and I didn't want to trust myself. After a year in A.A. & N.A., I couldn't go for-

ward and I refused to go back wards. My life was still extremely unmanageable.

Then the bomb hit! The man that had saved me from myself was a sex addict! Just what I needed, more addiction in my life. We found S.A.A. and C.O.S.A. I now believe if it hadn't been for my addict leading me to COSA, I would have relapsed and died. COSA opened doors for me that I didn't even recognize as doors. I had built this magnificent wall around my feeling with codependency and addiction. Now, aware of this thing that was wrong with me (avoiding feelings), COSA helped me tear down the walls and really learn how to live.

I'm learning how to deal with people and how to deal with me. A.A. & N.A. gave me the willingness to stay sober and COSA gave me the willingness to live again and enjoy living. It has been a long, long journey and it's only beginning. It keeps getting better and better. My life doesn't have to depend on what he's doing or where he's going. I don't have to care what my mom or his mom thinks. All I have to do is care about what I think, where I'm at and how I feel. I realize now that the past can't hurt me anymore unless I choose to let it.

~Michelle P.

Post-holiday backlash

After all this recovery and hard work, how quickly I can slip in to victim.

This holiday, after having contact with spouse's creepy family of origin, I found myself in victim, 12 years old, sucked down into the hole of my history and dissociation, triggered by the sound of a vacuum cleaner.

Oh, the vacuum cleaner, the museum called a home I grew up in.

Where the house was im-

maculate but the secrets were profound.

I took care of myself. I got out of there.

I called my friends in the program.

Three days later...and I still am not in my body.

I broke a glass this mornin' and spilled the contents of a dustpan.

I feel unfocused and foggy. I want my life back.

~Kim S.

My husband finally went to treatment at Del Amo hospital a few months ago. I say finally because after a couple of years of dealing with his sexual addiction 'his way', he finally decided that he couldn't be in charge anymore—it was out of his realm of control. I think I am just beginning to embrace it understanding in my own life.

The hospital held a 'family week' for spouses, and other concerned family members. I did not want to go. I did not have a problem and was not going to go to a place that was either going to try and talk me into supporting this crazy person or look at my pathology for marrying him in the first place!!

I'm new!

I was scared and so very alone. On the flight out I purposely sat next to a woman with a toddler so she would be too distracted to ask me "so...business or pleasure?" The first days of family week were so painful that I went back to the motel and cried myself to sleep. As the week progressed I learned that this was a disease born of shame, victimization and perpetuated by isolation and a repression of that shame. I began to see my husband in a brand new light. I began to see myself for the first time in years! What I saw of myself, scared me. Here I was an educated, professional woman with children and a busy life—yet I was a shell of a person. I had been so separated from the world and myself because of Sexual Addiction (and now I realize co-addiction) that I was just going through the motions of life. I had abandoned most of my close friends and had little intimate contact with my family.

A long time girl friend tried unsuccessfully for years to get me to attend Al-Anon because my father was a recovering Alcoholic with 25 years of sobriety. I told her "I don't have any issues with him...He has been sober for years!" Today I thank God that she never gave up on me. She would still call about once a month and tell me all about what Al-anon was doing for her.

At Del Amo, I met a woman who was an educated, professional woman who, like me married a sex-addict. She told me there were more like us! She gave me hope for a future. In that one week I received a lifetime of hope, caring, understanding and resources! I left feeling like my family, my husband and I had a future! I came home feeling like I had reached the 12th step 'A Spiritual Awakening' without even needing to go through steps 2-11! I think that for the first time in my life I felt Serenity.

Disappointingly, it only lasted for about a week—then the roller coaster started; up and down, down and up. I think at Del Amo's family week, I had gotten rid of a lot of shame I had been carrying around for so long yet then I was an empty vessel.

After a lot of phone calls, I have found great support in COSA. Today I am learning that recovery is daily—sometimes hourly work. Initially I started reading everything I could about codependency and sexual addiction. I was so tense I felt like a walking dysfunction. Then I realized that balance is my key. I am learning to balance problem examination with healing work and self-building work.

Today I am so excited to get up early in the morning, when everyone is still asleep and work on my recovery. I have and am going through the most painful experiences of my life, yet I have so much hope for the future and feel so open to learn from my experiences. I still get angry and feel really sorry for myself but I now have a sponsor to call and share my pain with!

I resisted the label 'Codependent'. I wasn't controlling or

demanding my husband to do it 'my way'. Del Amo helped me to understand that I was codependent because my entire life had become consumed by this addiction. Now I realize I would have been codependent with the garbage man if he would allow it!

When I started receiving the newsletters, I felt so grateful that this resource was available. Upon reading it, I realized I had a long way to go. I was still wondering how I could stop thinking/obsessing about the addict in my life long enough to have time to look at my own issues. I thought that all of

the writer's for this newsletter must have addicts that don't act out anymore so they have the

luxury of thinking about their own journey.

My sponsor has helped enormously. Since she lives so far away, I keep a notebook and jot down things during the week that I want to ask her about, check out with her or things to just vent. I call her once a week. It has been unbelievable to have one person in my life that I can be completely honest with. Maybe that one will turn into two and three and who knows what the possibilities are.

Today I find that less and less of my day is consumed with the addict in my life and more and more is spent in doing recovery work. I have a spiritual recipe that I have made for myself and I am committed to follow that recipe every day.

I find that as I look out into the world, I see with new eyes. As I write this, I can feel flutters in my stomach thinking about all of you 'more evolved' recovering people reading this and thinking "she really has a lot to learn". I know now that I do have a lot to learn—and I can't wait!

—Karen

Letter to the editor

Dear Editor.

The miniature NSO-COSA donation cards enclosed with the August-September issue of Balance was just what I needed to get me out of the thinking stage and into the action stage of my financial support of NSO. Each year that I have been in COSA recovery, I always "planned" to donate to NSO-COSA. However, when I would get around to do it, my "worthy cause" budget was being pulled in many directions and each deserv-ing organization received a smaller amount than my heart desired to give.

I did not want to attach a monthly contribution to COSA along with my "bills" or other "obligations". I cut

them up and added my own address labels in the tiny space allotted. Then I placed them, like a book mark, in my favorite daily meditation book on the last day of each month. This way, I can review the "value" of COSA in my life the previous month and send a check along. My heart "knows" COSA is worth at least \$1.00 a day to me. While this month my check book might not agree with my heart, I know 12 monthly donations of any amount will be larger than my previous once a year lump sum donations have been in the past. Maybe this "system" could work for other members who (like me) have "planned" to donate in the past but never got around to it.

~Janet, Houston, TX.

A spiritual awakening ...

"Ours is a spiritual program as evidenced by the twelve suggested steps of COSA." I'd like to share a spiritual awakening with you. Take what you like and leave the rest.....

After 4 1/2 years of continual pain in my neck, right shoulder and arm, I made the decision a few weeks ago to have a herniated disc removed, which involved a bone transplant to fuse two vertebra together. It was a serious operation, one I had avoided for two years. I was sure the time was right for me now as I made preparations to leave work for six to eight weeks.

I was very grateful for all the recovery work I had done these last 14 years as I prepared for my surgery. I kept asking myself "what do I need to do to take care of myself?" I scheduled two massages to relax my neck muscles as the 3 inch incision was to be to the right of my throat in front of my neck. I made Chiropractic appointments to get aligned for the healing. I asked my COSA group members to call me, pray and think of me. I made sure I attended the Wednesday meeting the night before surgery - I needed all the hugs I could get. I was scared. I called all my family members and asked for their support as well.

Immediately following the surgery, I was to wear a stiff neck "collar" and stay very quiet for the first two weeks. I could not travel in a car other than to get home from the hospital.

I realized that the possibility of awakening from surgery with little or no voice, a major sore throat and the stiff collar on was giving me some anxiety, so I called the surgeon and asked to be fitted for the collar prior to surgery. I wanted to take it home and get use to it before the big day.

The surgery was set for early Thursday morning so the previous Friday I went and picked up my collar. I brought it home, put it on and immediately started to hyperventilate. I had not had a full blown panic attack since the early nineties when I did the majority of healing work around my sexual abuse of childhood and young adulthood. I could not leave that collar on for more than five minutes without shear panic! What was I going to do? How would I ever be ready for Thursday? I asked these questions over and over.

It came to me on the way to church that following Sunday that this panic

was my little girl screaming, crawling out of her skin (our skin) with terror of old body memories of my abuse. Once I realized that, I could begin to comfort her (myself). At first she wanted no part of comfort - she was hysterical. I was feeling all those feelings of being held down, restricted, the inability to breathe and someone doing something to my body that I had no control over. It was terrifying!!

I began to remember my process of healing from years before. I talked about my feelings to my husband and a couple of close friends. I gave her a voice. I didn't minimize what happened. I also received a life giving message at my spiritual center that Sunday.

The message gave five simple things that I could say to find Peace. It was one of those talks that made you feel like it had been written just for you. GOD IS ...EVERYWHERE. I AM a part of God and the entire universe. God is within. THE TRUTH IS... God is bigger than anything I can face. For me, it was God was bigger than neck braces. LET GO ... and trust God. God has a plan. and last THANK YOU GOD. As I repeated those words Peace filled me - transformation occurred. It's why they call it, the Peace that passes all understanding.

I took time the next days to write affirmations about the collar. I envisioned it being a beautiful necklace that had magical powers to heal me. I even glued some old jewelry on it. I created a visual for my hospital room. I took an old folder which would stand up when opened and taped pictures of the outdoors, places I loved and felt Peace in. I taped pictures of my husband and children on it. And one picture of myself that had been taken on a sunny October afternoon while walking in the big woods of Nestrand State Park. I was posed with my head propped up on my hands on a tree limb. It looked like I was holding my head up with my hands and I planned to imagine myself in this "holy" place rather than in a stiff collar.

I also realized that I had chosen to have the surgeon operate on me - tho I had no control of the operation, I chose to have it happen.

I taped my affirmation of my magic necklace to the front of the folder. I taped the pictures inside and wrote GOD IS, I AM, THE TRUTH IS, LET GO and THANK YOU GOD. And I wrote this poem and

taped it to the back of the folder. I received those hugs from my COSA sisters. I let my husband, family and friends love and care for me. I went to surgery as ready as I could be, aware I had healed a part of me even before the surgery began.

STAR CHILD, SPIRIT WOMAN
No longer prisoner of earthly pain
of years gone by —————
Trauma held tight within my
petite frame.

I'm free!
I burst from my body like a
dazzling 4th of July fireworks —
Full of color and energy!

Independently floating in the sky
Hair blowing, arms and legs
playfully enjoying the absence of
gravity.

I Am
Being
The Truth
God is within
My Self is connected to all.

I see the Universe without the
limited vision of my human eyes.
Beyond the faces, God's light
embodied in each soul.

Though I float in the sky,
a child star,
I see the earth filled with stars.

Day or night, makes no difference
For I am a sparkling Spirit Woman,
floating Star Child, Co-creator of Life.

You know me,
You see me -
look in the mirror.
Beyond your inherited features,
Your light glows.

Join me
Let yourself
Be
Free
The Truth
God is within and everywhere.

We remember who we are.
Thank you God.

~Connie W-L~

She

He

He
He was my grandfather.
He raped my mother.
He prostituted my mother
He fathered my brother
He made everybody else look like the crazy one.
He chose the dark side.

She
She is my mother.
She had the one child.
She married an older man.
She had me.
She was widowed.
She couldn't get her life together.
She went away.
She left me with him.
She came back.
She married a pedophile.
She left me with this one too.
She bore a child for him.

They
They drank.
They drank more.
They screwed around.
They fought.
They hit.
They Beat.

She
She knew.

I repressed the memories.
I had infections.
I thought all parents were like that.
I thought it had something to do with me.
I thought it was normal.
I remember the "after" but not the "during".

She
She knew.
She later told me she knew.

I grew.
I grew too large.

He
He was my stepfather.
He started in on my step sister.
He started in on his daughter.
He called me "fat and ugly".
He called her "stupid".
He stared.
He stared at my breasts.
He exhibited himself.
He shamed me for being a woman.

I
I went away.
I went away to school.
I attracted bad men.
I learned to drink.
I learned to do drugs.
I graduated anyway.
I got a job.
I was sexually harassed.
I did a geographic cure.
I attracted bad men.
I attracted bad jobs.
I drank.
I hit bottom.

I went to AA.
I found a spiritual life.
I got sober.
I joined a church.
I got my life together, I thought.
I attracted bad men.

I dumped him.
I met another.
I married him.

He was acting strange.
He was acting out compulsively.
I knew something was wrong.
We saw a therapist.
He said I had to go too.

I went.
I felt safe.
I started remembering.
I was going to kill them.
I went to a support group.
I stayed.
I got a sponsor.
I remembered.
I felt the feelings.
I put the pieces together.
I tried to fix them.
I tried to get them to go to a therapist.
I tried to confront them.
I said goodbye.

I am happy in myself.
I am whole.
I am complete.
I am here.
I survived.
I thrive.
I laugh in great joy.
I am a daughter of God.

~Anonymous

I

They