

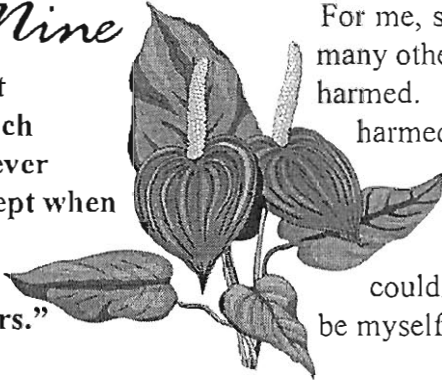


BALANCE



Step Nine

“Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”



For me, step nine guided me in taking back myself. I had lost myself to so many others. My feelings about myself centered around the people that I had harmed. My feelings/self esteem also centered around the people who had harmed me. I couldn't let go of either group. Yes, it was a group. It wasn't one or two people. There were many. Those people who were living in my head rent free, controlled where I went, what I did, how I acted. I couldn't go certain places because *they* would be there. I couldn't do certain things as I tried to avoid dealing with *them*. I couldn't be myself, I had to act because of my fear of *them*.

It now feels like a boundary issue for me. As I made my amends, I also included setting good boundaries with them and myself. When I was avoiding the confrontation/amends process, I also had no boundaries. It feels so freeing, so clean after we complete a step nine by making an amends.

My step nine will never be complete. There will always be people that I need to make amends to. I am human. I will continue to make mistakes and I will continue to make amends.

As I deal with those who have harmed me, I must be ready to forgive. I experienced a forgiveness retreat. I learned a lot about forgiveness. I learned that forgiving too soon without really working through and feeling the feelings, doesn't work. I can only forgive when I am ready. Forgiveness does happen when I felt the feelings, honestly talked about the feelings, turned it over to my Higher Power and “let go” of my pride. At the forgiveness retreat I started the process of forgiving a sibling. Three years later I finished the process with that sibling. Making my amends and working this step is not an easy or soft way. It was a long painful process. I can look back today and tell you it was worth every moment of the feeling process. I must always remember forgiveness does not give a person the right to go on treating me poorly. Now that I have my new tool of boundaries, I don't need to allow that to happen.

I must add that making amends doesn't get any easier. Each time I have an amends to deal with, I do feel the uneasiness, the fear. I'm still human. I will continue my recovery. I will feel the feelings. I will enjoy and appreciate every part of my journey.

~Ila

I spoke of this a bit in step nine. I am human. I will continue to make mistakes. I will continue to have amends to make. It seems so much easier now that I can take a daily inventory and clean up my part in any shame or regrets that I presently have floating around in my brain.

The difficult part was that first set of amends that I had to make. Those amends went back so many years. The accumulation of amends covered all those years that I had lived without my tools of recovery. The tools I so badly needed to reverse the negative lifestyle of denial that was my life. I now know I gave up all my power by not facing and discussing my negative behaviors.

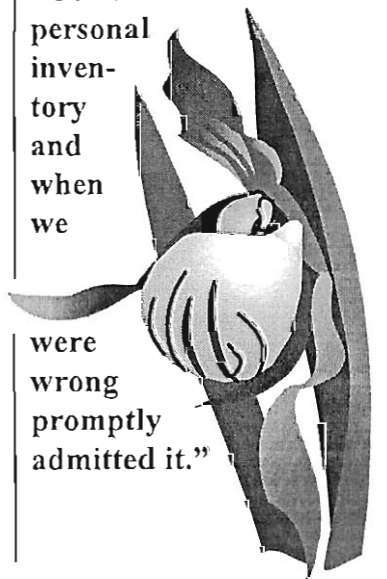
Now with step ten I can own my power. This step is my tool to stay focused on my behavior and on my recovery. As I keep my focus, it is one of my best tools for nurturing myself. I like the feeling I give myself when I own my mistakes each day and promptly admit it.

Step ten is my daily reminder, that I am a valuable person, that I have values and that I value others, their worth and their feelings. It's a beautiful recovery tool. ~Ila

Step Ten

“Continued to take personal inventory and when we

were wrong promptly admitted it.”



Reflections on Chicago ...

Hello Everyone - I have had several requests to write about my experiences at the Gathering of NSO COSA in Chicago a couple weeks ago. Actually, I intended to do this immediately following my return, but I was overwhelmed on numerous fronts. Have spent the last two weeks getting caught up and putting out some business and personal "fires".

Onward..... I smiled at myself as I sat on the plane...winging my way to Chicago. I was reading "Hannibal", Thomas Harris' sequel to "Silence of the Lambs" which is about as far removed from recovery as a book can be! However, recovery has taught me that there is life beyond recovery and recreational reading is good for the soul. Piglet was safely tucked in the suitcase. He was very apprehensive about his first plane trip, but I assured him that he would be in good company since I knew Ruth (founder of Group Co-Anon and a dear recovery friend) was bringing Cinnamon, a Boyd's Bear who wears a very lovely mauve hat with flowers. It was a clear and sunny Thursday and to say that I was excited about attending the Gathering would be a gross understatement. I had taken Wednesday off from work to get ready for the trip (okay.....so maybe a tad of perfectionistic tendencies was at work!) and finish my presentation. I had been asked to speak at the Sunday morning session.

This was Diana's debut at speaking at a NSO function. Actually, this trip involved a lot of firsts for Diana. Upon my arrival at Midway Airport, I had several choices of transportation to get me to the Conference Center in Lisle. I chose to pamper myself and engaged a limo. Let me tell you.....that is the ONLY way to travel in the traffic of a big city like Chicago. Besides, I deserved to sit back, relax, enjoy the major change of scenery from Florida and leave the driving to someone else. Hard to believe that in less than three hours, I had transitioned from hot, humid Florida to even hotter and more humid Chicago! The Conference Center was massive and lovely. I had a few hours to kill before dinner was served. I ironed a few "suitcase wrinkles" out of my clothes (.goes along with those "image projection" things associated with being an independent codependent!!!) I did some exploring and lounged in my room. I had chosen a single room since I enjoy fleeting moments of solitude.

Dinner time arrived and I had barely entered the cafeteria when I spotted Ruth. It was a wonderful reunion since last I saw her around the holiday season of 1998. I was introduced to her roommate and we began to dine and chat. Then....one of the many reasons I attended the Gathering occurred.

I knew what she looked like since I had read....and re-read....and reread her book, but I would have known her without the picture on the cover. This lady literally emanates peace and serenity. Not having the advantage of a picture of me, I introduced myself. "Ila.....I'm Diana." For

those of you who know her by way of an email connection, you know about her awesome cyber hugs. Well....her "in person hugs" are even better!!! <smile> We chatted and chatted.....and chatted some more. I was introduced to other members of the Board and delegates.

Time for the pre-business business meeting arrived too soon because I could have sat all night and hung on each and every word that left Ila's mouth!! The meeting was my first exposure to the inner workings of COSA. I was impressed by the outgoing Chairperson. Like Ila....she radiates peace and serenity and I immediately knew she had "stuff" I wanted! Friday daytime hours were taken up with the Business meeting. Now....this was an interesting and educational experience. I had been "warned" about the potential for dissention when you put a group of control-oriented individuals in the same room. Actually, except for a couple of issues, I thought the meeting went smoothly and I again, must compliment the outgoing Chairperson. Even in the day long business meeting, I got to put my recovery tools to work. An issue came up for a vote which was rather unpopular with the majority of Board members and delegates. However, Diana and four or five others took an opposing stand. About three years ago, I would have sided with the majority just to side with the majority for fear of being seen as "different" or alienating too many people. Not this time!! I remained true to my feelings and proudly raised my hand for what I believed in despite what the other guy might have thought of me.

For general information, COSA's National Conference in 2000 will be held in Minnesota. The retreat center looks lovely on video. It is rather rustic and this function will be similar to a "camping out" experience.

The Gathering officially opened on Friday night. I connected with several other long time recovery buddies - Fred and Denise (former administrator of Group Co-Anon) and connected with several other newly found friends. Via my Email Coordinator responsibilities, I had connected a lady in the mid-West with another Cosa in her area. We established a "cyber bond".

I cannot tell you how it felt to hug her in person. The group engaged in some of the classic "getting to know you" exercises that evening. It was easy because each of us knew the others had walked in our shoes....one way or the other. Denise and I stayed in the meeting room until after 11 p.m. We were well acquainted via telephone and the cyber connection, but sharing stories and tears in person is different. I don't think either one of us wanted to Let Go of the other, but the Conference Center staff dropped heavy hints that it was time for us to vacate the premises so that they could prepare for the next day's happenings.

Saturday morning opened with a session entitled "Defining Ourselves". We explored our-

selves, shared what we discovered with others and learned volumes about each other. I should mention that there were 12 Step meetings strewn throughout the agenda and temporary sponsors were made available to anyone who wanted to give their First Step.

Saturday afternoon was a blast! We played indoors and outdoors. Some chose to go ice-skating. Some walked the nature paths around the Conference Center. Diana chose to stay indoors because one of the attendees owns a toy store and brought a wonderful assortment of toys and games with her. We blew bubbles....played jacks....played with Silly Putty.....and indulged our Inner Children with an afternoon of fun. It goes without saying that this was Piglet's favorite part of the Conference. There was a very large bucket of sidewalk chalk that tempted Diana to display her primitive art on the sprawling steps of the Conference Center, but I couldn't find any takers to join me. I didn't want to be the only one trying to explain what I was doing to the nice policeman who would certainly be summoned to investigate the lady in the Winnie the Pooh shirt....sitting on the steps of the VERY large Conference Center....drawing unintelligible figures with pastel sidewalk chalks!!!

The banquet Saturday evening was lovely. More interaction with fellow Cosas which I have decided I can never get enough of! A member shared her story with the group and there was not a dry eye in the room. I am continually awed at the courage of these women and men. And they give me Hope.

Sunday morning opened with a lovely meditation session lead by the outgoing Chair. The sunlight streamed through the windows of the meeting room and I could feel the melancholia of closing hanging in the air. I had practiced my presentation over and over and knew the words well. I was filled with fear of breaking down. Diana stills harbors tremendous apprehension about crying in public. But I knew my words came from my heart and what ever was going to happen.....would happen. Sure enough, about a third of the way through, the tears started tumbling down my face. At one point, I had to pause because I was so choked up I couldn't continue. I could see the boxes of Kleenex being passed around the room, so my words must have touched some of the others also. In spite of all my apprehensions, I am so glad that shared this part of my story with my COSA brothers and sisters who were at the Gathering. Could you hear one of Diana's layers dropping to the floor? <smile>

I proudly declare that parts of that presentation may be published in COSA's newsletter, "Balance" at some point in the future and some part of it may also be "published" on the NSO web site.

One of the most difficult parts followed the presentations - closing of the Gathering. As we

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Gentle as a dove, wise as a serpent

My darling You. Today you asked me to tell you about sex. I wasn't sure what to say. I know that you know about penises and vaginas and sperm and eggs, and where babies come from. I just did not know how to tell you what I am going to tell you now. It's about loving. About loving yourself. And being your funny, serious, silly, playful, thoughtful self. It's about listening to yourself, believing that what you feel and think is right. It's about not letting anybody make you feel bad about yourself. It's about touching: good and bad touching.

I know that you are learning about that at school. But what does it mean? It is kind of hard to explain, but let me try. Someday soon, you will fall in love. In fact, you will fall in and out of love as often as you go shopping. This is life. Everybody goes through it. I did. Your dad did. Granny did.

Grandpa did. Everybody does. You will want to touch that person, and they will want to touch you. You will hold hands, even sneak a kiss or two.

I want you to know that you have the power to say no to any touching that does not feel right to you. Say it with me: "I have the power to say no to any touching that does not feel right to me. Even, especially, most importantly, when it is the one I love and want to touch."

But that's not all. Sometimes another person will touch

you in a way that does not feel right. Someone you respect and love. Like your mother, or father, or brother, or uncle, or grandfather, or teacher or minister, or camp counselor. Do you get the idea? Someone who you have to listen to. Someone with authority. Someone whom everybody in the world listens to. Someone whom everybody in the world loves. You may wake up in the middle of the night and find that someone is in your room touching you. Touching you differently from tucking you in again or giving you one last kiss for the night. Do not be afraid to listen when your stomach tells you that this is wrong. It is wrong now and will forever stay wrong! Closing your eyes and ignoring it will not make it go away. Not now. Not ever. It is not your fault they are there. It is somebody else's fault - NOT YOURS. Not now. Not ever.

Now what? Shouting anything that comes into your head. Open your eyes and yell your head off. Shout, "What are you doing?" Shout, "Get out of here!" Then run, run, run away, away, away. But it could happen anywhere and with anyone. Do the same thing. Open your eyes and yell your head off. Shout, "Hey, you there! What are you doing?" Shout, "I mean you! Get out of here!"

Do not be afraid. You are right. They are wrong. You -- YOU are right. They are totally,

without a doubt, wrong.

Say it with me: "I am right. They are wrong. I am right. They are wrong. I am right. They are wrong."

The other person needs special help. They need help from a special doctor.

Come tell me. Talk to me. I will always believe you. I will always love you. You know why I always tell you that there are no secrets in this house? Well, this is the secret I was talking about. The *one* secret that always needs to be told. You may feel embarrassed, or that you caused it. Please, please, please do not ever feel that way. Come and let's talk about it. Or if your friend has a secret like this, come and let's talk about it. Let's talk and talk and talk. Let's talk until the cows come home, or until the hind leg of a donkey falls off.

I did not tell you this to frighten you. Do not be afraid. Good touching is a wonderful

part of love and life. I know you will keep being your beautiful self. I told you because it is on my heart ... the heart I share with you. This is about being as gentle as a dove and as wise as a serpent. This is about secrets ... the secret that should never, ever be kept. The secret that when it is shared makes you feel good about yourself again and get help for the other person .. that other person who kept that secret when they were little, and who did not have anybody to talk to; nobody to believe them or believe in them. This will help them start to be able to feel good about themselves -- maybe for the first time. And you can be a part of a good thing, a great thing -- the greatest thing -- by letting that secret out into the beautiful sun.

Will you be a dove with me? Will you be a serpent with me? Let's be gentle. Let's be wise. My beautiful, lovely, funny, adorable You. My only You. I love you. ~A.B.

Reflections on Chicago

(Continued from page 2)

formed a circle and sang "Amazing Grace", the tears flowed yet again. These were bittersweet tears - tears of joy and tears of sadness that I had to leave this place that literally brimmed with love and acceptance. I would hug and cry....get myself composed....then the tears would start all over again when another hug was exchanged.

The flight home was uneventful. As I gazed out the window of the airplane, I reflected on the gifts I was bringing back with me and the volumes of things I had learned. I affirmed that COSA and recovery will always be a part of my life. I was reminded how grateful I am for all of my dear, dear recovery friends. I learned (again) that I am lovable just exactly the way I am....warts and all!! I was reminded that service work is part of my recovery. I learned (again) that these conferences and retreats are like six months worth of face-to-face meetings. I learned about some of the "inner workings" of COSA as an organization. I was reminded that I am not terminally unique and that I am never, never alone. I learned that there are no "gurus of recovery".... merely those who are a little further along on the path. I was reminded of how awesome unconditional love and acceptance feels. I know that I will get back ten fold what I give to others. I am sure there are more memories but they escape me for now. And I must get this message off since it has sat in bits and pieces in my email box for over a week now. My co wants me to go back over it...checking for grammatical and spelling errors, but I refuse to give in to those perfectionist tendencies!! Like I would ask you to accept Diana as a person, I ask you to accept this writing as it is! <smile>

Love and hugs to all,
~Diana

Dear COSAS

Thank You all very, very much. Our Fountain Valley Wednesday Night meeting grows and shrinks, but last week we had sixteen wonderful women. A couple of years ago, some nights we had two. I am a very different woman than I was three and a half years ago and I wouldn't have made the progress as a person if it weren't for our program. The *Balance* is a wonderful connection.

Thank You Again,
Jan

P.S. We were the only meeting in our part of California and now one of our members has started an additional Saturday meeting. We are growing and spreading the word.

The ripple effect of service work

My name is Diana, and I am a grateful recovering co-sex addict.

I had to laugh at myself right after receiving Burnet's message asking me to make this presentation. I had this huge flood of fright-filled thoughts. There must be a bunch of other people who are much more qualified to talk about service than I am ... how will I measure up to some of the others I have heard present? Oh my gosh -- there will be people out there in the audience who actually KNOW me and know part of my story. Nothing unusual .. just another "lack of self-esteem" flash. Since recovery, they are fewer and farther between, but they still sneak into my thought patterns occasionally!!

I got another chuckle when I decided I needed to research the definition of "service." I strolled into the room where I keep all my books. You know the place. It resembles the self-help section of Barnes and Noble or Borders!! As I gazed at the shelves, I saw the progression that got me to where I am today. On the first shelf, when my husband and I were apparently working on intimacy issues: *1001 Ways to Be Romantic*, *Romantic Interludes* and *Sexual Nutrition*. Obviously, we moved into more serious space on the second shelf where the dust is collecting on Masters and Johnson's *Sex and Human Loving*, *The Ultimate Sex Book* and *Dr. Ruth's Guide for Married Lovers*. I do remember that transition into raw, unadulterated sex after the intimacy stuff didn't work! Then comes two of my favorites: *Surviving Infidelity* and *After the Affair* which indicates that neither the sex NOR the intimacy stuff made a difference. Then comes *Psychology of Women* which Diana only skimmed because the concept that any of this had even an inkling to do with me was totally and completely adverse to me. At the end of that shelf appears every book SARK has ever written. *Bodacious Book of Succulence* is there along with *Succulent Wild Woman* and *Living Juicy*. Okay, so maybe I wasn't "there" yet, but at least I had a smidgen of self focus! The next three shelves (...and these are LONG shelves) are taken up by books and workbooks by Patrick Carnes, John Bradshaw, Melodie Beatty, Doug Weiss and any other literature with the mention of sexual addiction or co-addiction in it. You may have noted a rise in Barnes and Noble stock prices, and at about this time, you may have also heard a resounding thud. That thud, on the last weekend in April 1997, was Diana hitting bottom.

Strangely enough, I turned to a resource that was foreign to me -- the Internet. Again, I hit and bookmarked every site that made even a casual reference to sexual addiction and/or coaddiction. I would not be truthful if I stood here and said that my motives were pure. My life was in chaos. I was on the brink of insanity. I searched and searched ... like the crazy person I was. Problem was that I was searching for a cure for HIM and his stuff. I stumbled upon a discussion group for friends and family of sex addicts. I joined. It was my first connection with anyone "like me." I remember opening my email that first day after joining. The tears fell onto the keyboard as I read the first message. It could have been me who wrote those words except that writer was in something called "recovery." I honestly believe that it was at this point that the first of my layers hit the floor as I realized that I owned a part of what was going on in the relationship. I recall feeling like a balloon that someone had deflated. There were about fifty members in this discussion group which, as someone with no local face-to-face group, become my lifeline. It was there I met Ruth and dear Ila and Fred and my sponsor and Gloria and soooo many others who are the tiles in my mosaic of recovery.

And, it was in this group that my recovery began AND my service work began. I will always remember how scary it was that night that I composed and reread and reread ... and reread ... my first post to that group. After all, anything less than perfect was not acceptable! I read what everybody else was posting ... just to make sure that I knew how to do it correctly. I think it laid in my out box for a few days until I got the nerve to hit the send button. Then, to say that I anxiously awaited for someone to respond to that first message would be a gross understatement. I remember that it was a couple days before someone responded. I nearly unsubscribed in the interim. I was certain I had done it wrong or had offended someone. Eventually, a response or two arrived, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Anyway, those feelings of fear and uncertainty and apprehension stayed with me. So, after some months, I became the unofficial welcoming committee and was the

first to greet the newcomers. And I grew to love the newcomers. They reminded me of that chaos-filled place I had recently begun to move out of. They reminded me to be grateful for my new-found recovery. They reminded me of what awaited me if I moved off the path I was then stumbling down.

In about five months, I decided it was time to get myself a sponsor. I had learned that the Steps were something other than those things that got me from the front door to the sidewalk. There was a special someone in the discussion group whose Experience, Strength and Hope touched me deeply. If it is possible to "hang on" someone's words in an email message, I did so. I had been working independently in one of Dr. Weiss's workbooks, but the time had come to tell my story and SOMEONE was gonna have to listen! I just couldn't get up the courage to ask this particular person if she would be my sponsor, so I prayed about it ... Let It Go .. and put out a general request to the group. As always, when I Turn It Over to someone who is much more qualified to run my life than I am, this turned out exactly the way it was supposed to. Out of the hundred or so members in the group, the one person who I so wanted to be my sponsor was the first to respond (Thank You, Higher Power!) And for the first time in my life I began to disclose details of my life that no other human had ever heard before. It had to be done in installments because the pain seemed to be more than any human could endure. Good thing the keyboard was plastic else the keys would have rusted in place due to all the tears I shed. But the gifts I received in return were priceless. From my sponsor I received acceptance and unconditional love. In spite of my multitudes of sins, she loved me just the way I was. What a joyous gift this was!! I learned that I was a spiritual being having a human experience. I learned that I was going to be okay in spite of all my warts. I learned that pain was inevitable, but misery is optional. My list of things to be grateful for was growing by leaps and bounds.

At about this same time, I decided I had come to that place where I needed face-to-face contact. I sent my check and order form for literature to NSO COSA; got a post office box; got a pager and lined up a place to meet ... and I waited. I sent out letters to local therapists who specialized in working with addiction and codependency. I sent flyers to other 12 Step groups in the area ... and I waited. A friend set up a beautiful web site on the Internet for COSA of Brevard ... and I waited. I was being shown another example of life is by His timetable ... not mine! I met face-to-face with one lady. We shared a cup of coffee and bits and pieces of our stories. But apparently she wasn't ready yet because I never heard from her again. I had to Let Go of my self doubts that I had said or done something "wrong" that frightened her away.

I continued to be a very active participant in the email support group. In January of 1998, I began to work the Steps via an on-line step study group, using Patrick Carnes' *A Gentle Path Through the Twelve Steps*. As an aside, I have, on more than one occasion, taken exception to the word "gentle" in that title! Shortly before I attended a retreat in Atlanta, a member of the email discussion group I belonged to asked me to be her sponsor. After my jaw bounced off the floor, there was this rush of emotions ... mostly self doubts about my ability to be anyone's sponsor. I turned to my sponsor and a couple other members of my recovery circle, asking them if they thought I was ready to be a sponsor. They replied in the affirmative and told me to stand by for a major growing experience. And it was. As was my relationship with my next sponsoree ... and the next ... and the next. I was awestruck at the depth of the bond that could be struck between myself and a wonderful lady in Guatemala with just a cyber connection between us. I came to appreciate the joy of sharing my Experience, Strength and Hope and getting the same in return. I saw myself in their stories. I could relate to their pain and anguish. They were, and are, as individual as their names and geographic locations. But none of us are terminally unique. We share that thing called Willingness. And, as we are told, that is all it takes to continue along the path of this journey of a lifetime.

My trips to that place called Obsessionville were fewer and farther between. I had developed that precious commodity called trust between myself and my sponsor and my ever-growing circle of recovery friends and my sponsorees. Diana never thought she would see the day when she could trust

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another woman, and here I am ... with a myriad of female friends with whom I know I can trust my deepest and darkest secrets. Tell me that recovery isn't awesome!!

I had discovered and taken a long look at my God-shaped hole. I realized I was living in a spiritual vacuum. As I worked Steps Two and Three. I hungered for a connection with my Higher Power. I was again shown where I was supposed to be. It is there that I am reminded each Sunday that my God only loves me.

I had grown to understand the concept of accountability. I didn't like it one bit, but I finally figured out what it was all about. I've decided it is one of the strongest deterrents to be acting out. I HATE having to report to my sponsor that I have slipped despite the fact that my disclosures are answered with only unconditional love and acceptance. And I dread even the thought of having to claw my way out of that Pit of Codependency (refer to nails). Being the "hurry up and get it done" person that I am, I have struggled to let the process work for me rather than working the process myself. I am reminded of the importance of the journey ... NOT the destination. There is no graduation from this program -- caps and gowns are not needed.

The email support group had grown to numbers above 250 members. I stand here ... proud ... that I was once a member. And I want to tell you, Ruth, how grateful I am -- as are the hundreds of others whose lives have been dramatically changed by this support group. Speaking of awesome service records ... hats off to you, dear Ruth. Last I heard, the membership number for the group

was 350+.

But the time had come for Diana to move on. With Higher Power at work again, at about the time I left the email discussion group, Ruth became a little overwhelmed with the traffic off the NSO web site. She asked me to lend a hand in answering the inquiries. So, again, Diana was in a position to reach out to her beloved newcomers. And what a joy it is to connect them with a COSA group in their area, or someone like them who is Living in the Moment ... taking it One Day At A Time ... and focusing on self. I receive tenfold what I give out.

Then Ruth put her Letting Go skills to work once again, and I became the Email Coordinator for NSO COSA. This is merely a fancy way of saying that I answer all the inquiries that come into the NSO web site. I spend an hour or so each day sending out information about COSA; reading registration forms, and ultimately connecting individuals with COSA groups in their areas whenever possible. At some point, the time will come for Diana to move on from this position, but for now, I am exactly where I am supposed to be. This connection with those new to recovery keeps me centered. I am reminded daily of where I used to be, and I cherish those reminders.

John Bradshaw says, "...Service also means caring for others and giving back what you've received. The Twelfth Step urges us to carry our spiritual awakening to others who suffer the 'toxic shame' of a dysfunctional background. All of us who have come out of hiding need to bring the light to others. Carrying the message is done by modeling, not by moralizing. It is done by those who

'walk the walk as they talk the talk.' This means that there are no gurus. There are only those who have walked a little further down the path.

"Service and love for others flow directly from service and love for ourselves. I love the motto of the Dominican priests: "To hand on to others what you yourself have contemplated." We truly cannot give what we haven't got. We cannot teach our children self-valuing if we continue to be shame-based.

"Service is a true mark and fruit of spiritual growth."

Patrick Carnes writes that "sharing your recovery with others is like making a ripple on a lake. Maybe one of the people you touch, who touches another, will make a difference in someone's sobriety.

"Helping others is a significant part of the program, and there are many ways the program gets passed on. When you live the program and share it with others, you are carrying the message, especially when you sponsor new members. In practicing the Twelfth Steps you will find that:

•By witnessing to others, your appreciation of the program and the program's impact on your life deepens.

•By hearing the stories of new members, you are reminded of where you were when you started.

•By modeling to others, you become aware that you need to practice what you preach.

•By giving to others, you develop bonds with new people who really need you.

•By helping others, you give what you have received.

•By supporting new beginnings, you revitalize your own efforts."

Examples of how we all can be

of service:

•Informing other sexual codependents of meeting times and locations.

•Listening to others.

•Starting a new meeting.

•Preparing chairs, literature and/or refreshments for a meeting.

•Chairing a meeting.

•Greeting a newcomer.

•Cleaning up after a meeting.

•Helping with special events.

•Updating meeting or membership lists.

•Spreading the message of recovery to those who still suffer.

•Offering financial support through the Seventh Tradition.

•Assisting with our newsletter, *Balance* (thank you Ila, we love you!!!)

•Writing articles for *Balance*.

•Improving the communication channels between local and national levels.

•Committee work.

•Practicing and upholding the Traditions.

•Sponsorship.

I feel compelled to add a word of caution. Just as it is possible to become "addicted" to recovery, it is possible to become addicted to service work. Being overly involved can result in a shift from self focus which can threaten our sobriety. On several occasions, I have felt myself getting lost in my service work. I could feel the scales losing their balance. I had to remind myself that service work is only one facet of my recovery. I was also reminded that as a codependent, I will seek out escape mechanisms which keep me from dealing with my own issues. Balance, balance, balance. Balance in my life is

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This time is different

He is doing it again. Channel surfing, the comments about seduction, other women's looks, and getting overly physical with me.

He has started to stay up later than I do, saying he wants to check out the scores of whatever sport is in season right now. His mood is quick to turn from levity to anger. He has that look again. I know it and I can feel it down to my bones. But this time something is different.

I don't have that matching, re-

ciprocal look anymore. That reflection that used to seem to fit so neatly with him. I don't have it anymore. I do know where it is. That angry, that accusatory, rule making, threatening, end-of-the-rope persona I used to carry. It is actually right here; ready to rear it's ugly head -- and would -- if I sank back into my sickness. But this time is different.

I have slogans: "I didn't cause it. I can't cure it and I can't change it." and "we are only as sick as our se-

crets," and "what can I do to take care of myself right now?" It isn't really my voice that recites these slogans in my head just yet.

Actually, if I was totally honest, it is my sponsor's voice in my head that I hear. This time is different.

I haven't become so overwhelmed emotionally and shaming to him. I haven't even threatened to leave again. I actually don't feel much frustration or even anger. I now know that I have allies. I have a primary respon-

sibility to myself and my children; which I now attend to, not as my weapon, but as my priority.

This time is different because I know that whatever comes of this, I have a higher power, that has a plan for me, is watching out for me, and that I am going to learn so incredibly much from what ever it is/ It will be worth the process.

Okay, to be brutally honest, I'm scared. But I now know that I will survive.

~Karen

the key!

I mentioned that I have gotten back tenfold what I gave to others. I received the following message a few weeks ago, and this message is an example of the gifts of service work.

"It is Sunday, August 1, at 4:40 p.m. The NSO/CoSA gathering is over now, and I am the last one here. I'm not sure if I came to this gathering expecting anything specific. I do know I came with a bit of raw courage. I am new to this recovery 'thing' and so it took raw courage just to come. It took courage to ride in to Chicago alone on my self-scheduled free day (Friday). I took courage to tell a part of my story.

"It is courage born of desperation. Knowing I must do whatever it takes to work my program as best I can. Knowing that this family disease must, I hope, stop with me. And it seems my Higher Power was asking me to take a leap of faith. This leap called 'The Gathering.' And so I did.

"And what did I come away with?

"I think the full impact of the last three days will take a while to show, a while to surface. Right now, I am exhausted and a little bit numb. Here's what I do know:

"I know I have a new best friend, even though she lives in CT and I in NE. The wonders of cyber space will keep us connected. But even if cyber space did not exist, I know we would still stay connected. I think we really have no choice. Our Higher Power connected us at that lonely train station headed toward Chicago -- but that is a whole other story. And what your Higher Power brings together, let no man rent asunder (or something like that).

"I know that my connection to the Divine Diana, my initial CoSA contact and my lifeline for those first 'dark pit' weeks of discovery, grew deeper, fuller and stronger. If that could ever be risked imagined! And this tie will also transcend time and distance.

"I know also that my connection to CoSA was solidified this weekend, far more than I could ever have imagined. In this space, with these people, I felt more able to be vulnerable and more able to be me than

I have ever felt in my lifetime. I risked everything here this weekend. I risked being me this weekend. I was loved, accepted and nurtured here this weekend.

"I have no idea where my life is going from here. I have no idea what God has planned. But I know I must trust Him. He has wrought wondrous and miraculous things for me in these last few months. These months filled with pain and agony of a depth and power I could never have imagined. But He has been there holding my hand. He has thrown people and things in my path to guide me and to lift me up in my 'dark night of the soul' times. And every time that I feel I can't possibly take any more pain, another person or event crosses my path, and I am able to continue on my journey.

"I have a lot farther on my journey to go, and I know it won't be easy. Oh, how I know! And I would be remiss if I were to say I was not scared, because I am terrified. But if I can just keep remembering that God is there to guide me and pick me up when I can no longer even crawl, that He is there to hold me, to love me, to cherish me, I can make it through this, no matter what happens.

"And in those times when I forget that God is there, I know that there will always be a CoSa sister or brother nearby to remind me, to whisper kind words through the phone or to wiz heartfelt messages through cyber space. I am not alone.

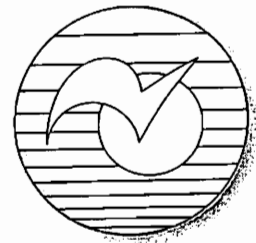
-Teri"

I believe it is no coincidence that the first official meeting of COSA of Brevard was held this past Tuesday, July 27th. Yes, the waiting paid off, and my patience has been rewarded. There are only two of us, but we are both optimistic that growth is inevitable. And it seems that we have the "glue" to keep the group together and going in the meantime.

So, where is Diana today? She has entered year three of her recovery, and she loves it just as much as she did at the first baby step. COSA of Brevard is a reality. I have three sponsorees who I love with all my heart. I have an awesome sponsor who has given me more unconditional love

and acceptance than I could envision any human being able to. I just finished Step Four and am determined to see it through to Step Twelve. I have a totally awesome circle of recovery friends. I gleefully perform my duties as Email Coordinator for NSO COSA. Ahhhh ... life IS good.

As I stand here before you Today, I can say with all honesty that I would not be here if it were not for the service work I have been blessed to have been allowed to do. Service has kept me honest and Willing. Service has afforded me the opportunity to expand my circle of recovery friends. Service reminds me of the impact the Program has on my life. Service allows me to give to others what has been given to me. I AM one of those ripples on the lake. I challenge you to join me there.



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