

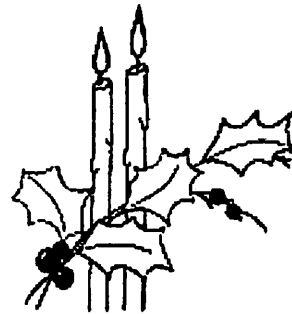
Balance

Newsletter of the National Service Organization of COSA

November–December 2002

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Step Eleven

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power as we understand this Power, praying only for the knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us and the courage to carry it out.

Prayer is about asking for guidance and expressing gratitude, while meditation is about learning to be open and receive guidance from our Higher Power.

Other ways to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power include:

- * attending COSA meetings regularly
- * practicing the principles of the 12 Steps in our lives
- * reading the COSA 12 Steps Prayer daily
- * developing a practice of morning and evening meditation
- * saying the first three steps every day

— from the *COSA Resource Guide*

Step Twelve

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we carried this message to others and practiced these principles in all areas of our lives.

Now is the time to integrate the 12 Steps into our lives. Sponsoring other COSAs and guiding them through their 12 Step writing is a powerful contribution and service. Being open to our Higher Power's guidance on a regular basis allows us to share with others who are in pain and looking to heal in their lives.

Chairing meetings, leading meetings and doing service work in the organization are also powerful ways to share our recovery and be of service to others.

— from the *COSA Resource Guide*



WELCOME NEW GROUPS

Corvallis, OR
Eureka, CA
Chicago, IL

Tradition Seven

"Every COSA group ought to be fully self-supporting declining outside contributions"

Humoldt SK., Canada. individual..\$5.00
Issaquah, WA..individual..\$11.80
Minnetonka, MN Group...\$20.00
Northville, MI. Individual...\$45.00
Costa Mesa, CA. Group...\$27.00
St. Louis Park, MN. Individual..\$5.00
Omaha, NE Group....\$40.00
Pensacola, FL. Group..\$15.00
Houston, TX. Sun.P.M. Group...\$60.00
Northborough, MA individual..\$3.00
Brighton, MI..Group...\$100.00
Des Moines, IA. Thurs Grp..\$18.00
St. Paul, MN. Thurs Grp...\$60.00
Granite Bay, CA FRI. Grp...\$50.00
Waynesville, OH..individual..\$10.00

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Clip art this month is from www.barrysclipart.com

2003 COSA National Convention

COSA's next national gathering will be held Memorial Day weekend in Portland, Oregon. Plan to join us May 23rd-26th for an awesome time of sharing and fellowship. Meet COSAs from all over the country; see old friends and make some new ones. You can look forward to meetings, speakers, workshops and some silly fun!

Do you have experience, strength and hope to share with your COSA brothers and sisters? We are in need of workshop presenters for the convention. Contact Simone at sammymac@earthlink.net or 503-525-9566.

Look for convention registration forms in the next Balance.

Editorial Expansion

Congratulations to our editor Maria L. on the birth of her first baby! Brandon Christopher Lin-Shaw arrived on October 23, weighing in at 7.5 pounds, 19" tall.

The Balance Needs YOU

Please, sit down now and write something. It doesn't have to be long. It doesn't have to be perfect or even dazzling. Think of the last insight you had and write about it. Or remember the last time you felt really good about your sharing in a meeting, write it down and share it with the rest of us. Write about what you've gotten out of service work. Or what you learned from your first sponsor. Just do it. Now. Then email it to me (I can read just about anything). Or draw something. It would be wonderful to have some small sketches. Or a cartoon! Perhaps you already HAVE something to share. Go for it!

— Burnet O. (burneto@earthlink.net)

Still Removing Codependent Cobwebs from My Head

Even though I have been in recovery for about fourteen years, I am truly amazed at how easily I can be triggered/hooked/enmeshed again. I feel a need to share how easily I slip back into old behaviors.

My husband passed away eight months ago. There was a time I believed that he was the only problem in my life. If he didn't act the

"... a lady appeared at my door. She said she had dated my husband when she was sixteen or seventeen."

way he did, I'd be just fine! Of course, I wasn't in recovery long before I realize he was one of my symptoms. He didn't cause my disease of codependency.

Recently a lady appeared at my door. She said she had dated my husband when she was sixteen or seventeen. My husband was sixty when he passed away. She introduced herself by saying she was "putting the pieces of her childhood together."

"Putting the pieces of her childhood together" — that was the first codependent trigger. I love my recovery process. I will go to any length to assist others in their process. I almost went too far thinking that I could help her.

She told about what a wonderful man my husband had been. However, what I heard was "the two of them were meant for each other." I felt sad that I hadn't known that same wonderful man. Then I remembered ... I had known that man ... that was how he groomed me. He was attentive, kind, loving, generous, caring ... (you know the traits, most addicts have them). Yes, I did remember those qualities that attracted me to him. That ⇒

changed after we were married. The chase was over.

Then I fell into another of my codependent traps. His life would have been wonderful with her. I am the one who made his life miserable. He would not have had sexual problems or any problems if he had just stayed with her. His painful life was all my fault. Again, such faulty thinking. I wasn't even his first wife. I didn't split him and his girlfriend! As a codependent I went there for one whole day! I feel ridiculous when I say it or write it.

She asked some very personal and sexual questions. I mean really personal! The topics she was talking about did not feel healthy. It didn't feel like a person putting their childhood together. It felt like unhealthy addiction. I then asked her to leave. I didn't tell her not to come back, just hoped she wouldn't. When I reviewed my process, it was easy to observe that just "hoping" she wouldn't come back was not a clear or healthy boundary for me.

The next morning she called me. Her opening words were, "Thank you for being so kind to me. I can't recall anyone who ever treated me as kindly and wonderfully as you did." Another trigger — my thoughts ran "Oh my goodness, that poor thing ... if no one has ever treated her any better than I did ... oh, I can just listen ... she must be so lonely ... so mistreated." Yes — a reminder that I am still a codependent!

Now that I have my program back, I can recall my husband and many others triggering me back into caring for them. It only cost someone a simple, short phrase of praise and kindness to hook me back in.

A few days later she appeared again. She wanted articles of his clothing. I asked her to leave. She said she wouldn't be back. I said, "good." That still wasn't good or clear boundary setting from me. ⇒

She then chose my mother-in-law to prey upon, asking for pictures, clothing, key chains. Mother-in-law loves to talk. She told her many things. Soon girlfriend was driving in and out of my children's homes. Next, she was begging my children for things. Girlfriend was spending endless hours at husband's grave.

She appeared at my door again — wanting things, pictures, anything. This time I told her to leave.

I was visibly and physically shaken by her presence. At last, I was at my bottom. I knew something was terribly wrong. I couldn't figure it out. I started journaling. When I write, I see so clearly.

After about 20 minutes of writing, then another 20 minutes talking to a very solid support group person, I knew what I was doing. I was utilizing every bit of energy I had within me to stay one step ahead of an addict. I was feeling exactly the same way I had felt with my husband before we found recovery and faced our addictions. Nothing had changed. Even though my husband was dead, I had found a new addict whom I easily gave my life to.

I cannot stress enough how much it felt the same. It was no different from when I was attempting to control everything my husband had been doing.

With clarity, I was able to write a very clear letter. At last I was listing clear, strong boundaries. She was not to contact me in any way. She was not to contact my children. If she did, I would contact the police. I sent the letter certified mail. I have not heard from her since.

I have my life back. I lost it for six weeks as I played the cat and mouse game of addict/codependent. I am so very grateful for recovery. I am grateful that it took just six weeks this time. Before recovery, I was lost in my ⇒

codependent behavior for years. I didn't know recovery and clear boundaries could give me my life.

Life is good today. I miss my husband. I still question why there were so many years of the painful, addictive life and just a few short years of a peace-filled recovering life with him. Yet, I am grateful for the good years.



— *Ila D.*

An Awakening

After two years of COSA recovery and three years since I started working on my survival and recovery of my sexuality from horrific childhood sexual abuse, I recently had a huge awakening as to how much my codependence/co-addiction had affected my husband's and my life. I am just starting to learn what feels good to me and what I might want in terms of sexual intimacy with my husband.

In recent months we have had many disagreements about our sex life. You know, the same old arguments. He wants more and I'm just figuring out what I want. I have felt the pressure growing, and the phone line between my sponsor and me has been on fire with the number of calls I have made looking for support for my boundaries and expressions of my sexuality. The other day, the subject again came up. We were discussing our sex life and what we each desired. He told me he missed my passion that I used to have ten years ago. As I thought about this, he continued on, describing his memories of times when I shared with him my passion and desires for him and my physical feelings that indicated I wanted ⇒

to have sex. Kerblam — all of a sudden I realized why we were always arguing. In our seventeen years of being together, 99 % of the time my sexuality and desires had always been about what I thought he wanted, not about what I wanted.

I had to face the music of my lies about my sexuality. I had to tell him I had almost always had sex to please him, said things to make him happy and did things because it was what I thought he wanted, not what I wanted or desired. I hardly ever knew what I wanted and if I did figure it out, I certainly wouldn't ask for my needs to be met. At first, he didn't believe me, he thought I was trying to manipulate our relationship. I stood firm and with every ounce of compassion in my body, I apologized for the years of deceit and manipulation regarding our sexual intimacy. Then it hit me. Since my very first boyfriend, I have spent nearly 30 of my 40 years always looking for what I thought others wanted and not for what I might want or desire. Tears started to slide down my face as the overwhelming loss of 30 years of my own sexuality hit me. I let them flow and flow they did. Then, I took time and reflected on this in my journal.

In this recovery, it has been hard to examine my part in our dance of addict/co-addict. It seemed easier to blame him for our problems, if he wouldn't want it so much, if he would just hold me, if he would just listen, if, if, if.... Early on, I learned to take responsibility for my manipulation of our relationship and give up my struggles with wanting to fix things to my Higher Power. This has been a huge awakening that I could not have done without boundaries, honesty and prayer. With this breakthrough, I have reached another level of intimacy with myself. A new door has been opened, and I now truly can move forward to unraveling the complexity of who I may be and am to become sexually.

— Julie M

COSA Sobriety Circles

During December I celebrated the eighth anniversary of attending my first COSA meeting on 12/16/94. That's not a sobriety date. I used to say jokingly that I'd never had a full day of COSA sobriety. Yet I felt sad that my COSA sobriety seemed so fuzzy. My chemical sobriety date is 10/27/95; that feels clear and well-defined; I can pick up a medallion to celebrate my birthday. For a long time, I didn't feel entitled to ask for a medallion in COSA. Eventually I asked for a blank one.

About three years ago, I attended a women's SAA meeting, where I learned about the Three Circles (inner, middle and outer). Once I'd worked out my SAA circles, I decided to try the idea in my COSA program; it brought me clarity about my COSA sobriety.

The circles are about behavior rather than thoughts. Into my inner circle go the things I don't ever want to do, behavior serious enough to cause me to change my sobriety date. The outer circle holds good activities I'd like to do all the time. The middle circle is the gray area: behavior that's neutral or iffy.

My outer circle is huge: going to meetings, sharing in meetings, journaling, taking time each morning for prayer and meditation, working a Tenth Step each evening, making phone calls, spending time with my COSA sisters, hanging out with my grandchildren, getting enough sleep, eating regularly and healthily, going for a walk every day, singing, gardening, looking up at the sky and saying thank you.

My middle circle contains behavior which I consider warning signs: isolating, overcommitting, staying too busy. It also contains behavior I'm unclear about without feedback: shaming and blaming.

My inner circle is small; it contains snooping and raging. Snooping has always been a problem for me; I come from a family in ⇒

which every one snoops and thinks it's fine. I felt totally justified in snooping in my husband's stuff — that seemed like my only hope of finding out what was going on with him! Thanks to recovery and the patient people in it, I've learned about boundaries. I've seen how damaged my own are, and I've worked very hard to develop healthier boundaries, to protect other people from me as well as myself from others. My husband in his recovery has shared with me how badly violated he has felt by my snooping, which helps me remember how harmful it is.

Raging, because it's behavior I've ignored (when I'm the rager), took a little longer to make it to my inner circle. I've had so much shame about my rage that it didn't occur to me to put it anywhere. However, after an especially dangerous incident, I could no longer ignore my rage and its consequences. I had to face it, own it, take it seriously by putting it in my inner circle and do whatever it took to stop behaving that way. My COSA sobriety date is 9/5/00.



The Lantern

I often think of recovery as walking through the dark with a light — not a flashlight that can shine wherever I want, but a lantern. When I hold the lantern up, it casts a glow all around me and I can easily see where my next step is to be. I can see what I need to keep moving, where my foot can go safely. Outside the circle of light, it's very dark. I can't see what lies ahead, but as I take that next step, the light moves with me. The step that was so scary and in the dark is now in the light. All I can do is take one step at a time, trusting that with each step, the following one will be illuminated.

— *Julana W.*

My House, My Soul

My divorce settlement left me as sole owner of the big old house my former husband and I had purchased together during our marriage. For the first time in my life, I was on my own.

In the years we had lived there together, only two of the rooms had been remodeled or even painted. We could not agree on interior renovations, so very little got done.

Once I was by myself I began to change the rooms to suit me. The upstairs bathroom came first, since it seemed like a small job and I'd always hated the color. But I found that it wasn't enough to just repaint it — I had to strip off the old paint first, as it had started to peel.

Other projects followed. Old wallpaper had to be stripped off. Some of it practically slid off the walls, but in other rooms it appeared to have been stuck on with superglue. Gradually the paper was removed and the walls got patched and painted the colors I chose.

I painstakingly removed glue from a hardwood floor where a previous owner had glued on the rug pad. I was even into giving closets a fresh coat of paint.

All of this was very therapeutic! I reflected that in the renovation of my house, I created a symbol for the renovation of my soul. After all, when I work my steps I have to peel off the old layers before applying the new.

Now, seven years later, the neighborhood is deteriorating badly. That familiar gut feeling from my Higher Power is letting me know it's time to move out of the house I love. I wish I didn't have to leave, just like I wished I didn't have to leave him years ago. Even though I don't always feel like it will be OK, I know it will.

— *Rozanne W.*