



# *Balance*

*Newsletter of the National Service Organization of COSA*

August–November 2003

## **Board News: Puget Sound Retreat and Dallas 2004 Convention**

During the second weekend in September most of the NSO Board members journeyed (at their own expense) to the shores of Puget Sound in Washington State to participate in the second face-to-face meeting of the 2003-2004 Board of the National Service Organization of COSA. We found ourselves immersed in board business and recovery experiences.

The retreat camp is nestled among large trees and beautiful foliage. It seemed a perfect spot for rest, recovery, and rejuvenation. The meeting of the board members was set to coincide with the Annual Puget Sound Retreat. This is a joint COSA/SAA retreat which has been held yearly for the last several years.

The Board participated in some special sessions in addition to meeting together during meal times. We also attended many recovery sessions and workshops. The rapport we developed and the work we did while having recovery fun was inordinately beneficial.

In addition to regular business items, some of the items we discussed were the new Yahoo Group Message Board, and the 2004 Convention. The Chair and the Vice-Chair volunteered to travel to Dallas to help establish a 2004 convention committee there.

During the last few days of September we travelled to Dallas. We were elated to find so many

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recovering COSA members willing to take on the challenging job of helping put together the 2004 "Deep in the Heart of Recovery" convention. We were immensely impressed with the level of recovery, the obvious camaraderie and the sense of psychological safety abounding in these meetings. These COSA groups truly are "Deep in the Heart of Recovery."

We urge you to start making your plans now to travel to Dallas, Texas, on Memorial Day weekend in May 2004. We feel certain you also will find yourself "Deep in the Heart of Recovery" at the 2004 Dallas convention. See you there!

— JoAn D, Chair  
— Gayle J, Vice Chair

**WELCOME NEW GROUPS**

Tucson AZ Sunday Night Group  
 Tucson AZ Freedom to Fly  
 Tucson AZ One Thousand Cranes  
 Greenland NH  
 Fort Worth TX  
 Kirkwood MO  
 Scottsdale AZ  
 Apple Valley MN  
 Meridian ID  
 Manchester, England  
 Barrie, Ontario  
 Chandler AZ  
 Vista CA  
 Santa Ana CA  
 Owatonna MN

**TRADITION SEVEN**

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

**Group Donations**

Minnetonka MN 60.00  
 Houston TX Thurs Noon 33.00  
 St. Paul MN Thurs PM 50.00  
 Long Beach CA Tues@TLC noon 8.65  
 Monroe LA 5.00  
 St. Paul MN 14.00  
 Cincinnati OH 30.00  
 Mesa AZ Sun PM 10.56  
 Costa Mesa CA Wed PM 30.00  
 Mendota Heights MN East Side 10.60  
 Dallas TX 74.00  
 Plymouth MI 27.00  
 St. Paul MN Thurs 5:45 90.00  
 Eau Claire WI Desert Flowers 30.00  
 Houston TX Sunday PM 48.00  
 Granite Bay CA Fri PM 25.00  
 South Bend IN 50.00  
 Des Moines IA Thurs PM 25.00  
 Virginia Beach VA 30.00  
 Phoenix AZ 8.00

Phoenix AZ 7.00  
 Minnetonka MN Sunday 30.00  
 St. Paul MN Thurs 5:45 55.00  
 Dallas TX 75.00  
 Indianapolis IN Wed PM 13.00  
 Tyler TX 50.00  
 Cary NC 5.00  
 River Rouge LA 100.00  
 Minneapolis MN Stone Soup 7.15  
 Houston TX Tues Noon 20.00  
 Houston TX Sunday 6 PM 32.00  
 Tucson AZ 50.00  
 Santa Margarita CA 20.00  
 Kirkwood MO 50.00  
 Granite Bay CA Fri PM 50.00  
 Long Beach CA Tues 42.50  
 Cosa Mesa CA Wed PM Women 30.00  
 St. Paul MN Gratitude Group 185.00  
 St. Louis MO Sat AM 25.00

**Individual Donations**

Santa Rosa CA 10.00  
 St. Paul MN 50.00  
 Tucson AZ 100.00  
 Northville MI 45.00  
 Dayton OH 0.80  
 Grand Blanc MI 25.00  
 Oxford MI 45.00  
 Dallas TX 1.00  
 Laguna Woods CA 16.15  
 Monroe LA 6.15  
 Oxford MI 50.00  
 Monroe LA 3.75  
 Bethlehem PA 10.00  
 Grand Blanc MI 50.00  
 Linton IN 8.55  
 Oxford MI 50.00  
 Richmond IN 10.00  
 Fairfax VA 21.10  
 Price UT 38.00  
 Oxford MI 50.00  
 Northville MI 45.00  
 Boulder CO 20.00

**Bank Balance on 10/31/2003: \$12,341.90**

## 2003/04 Board Members

JoAn D, Tacoma WA, chair  
 Gayle J, Houston TX, vice chair  
 Mavis H, Reading PA, secretary  
 Burnet O, Houston TX, treasurer  
 Christi G, Apple Valley MN  
 Bonnie C, Ann Arbor MI  
 Jennie E, Cincinnati OH  
 Sally B, Houston TX  
 Ila D, Birch Run MI  
 Britt E, Seattle WA  
 \*Donna J, New Lothrop MI  
 \*Shannon T, Lakewood WA

\*new members, added at Puget Sound meeting

*We apologize for the hiatus in Balance production. As an amends, we have made this issue the thickest ever, chock full of great stuff! We hope that you will find a little insight and joy here.*

— Maria, Burnet & Judi

### How to Contact NSO COSA

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 Minneapolis, MN 55414

1-763-537-6904

hopenserenity@yahoo.com  
<http://www.cosa-recovery.org>

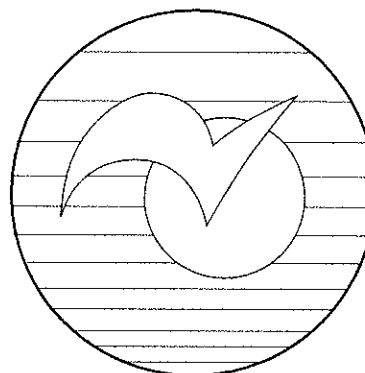
[http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/COSA\\_12\\_STEP/](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/COSA_12_STEP/)

*Balance, the national newsletter of COSA, is published every other month whenever possible. While this is an official publication of NSO-COSA, it is not "approved literature" in the sense that it has not gone through the official NSO approval process. Any opinions expressed herein belong to the author, not NSO as a whole. The authors hold the copyright to their work; NSO-COSA holds the copyright to the newsletter.*

Editor — Maria L  
 Production — Burnet O  
 Distribution — Judi K

## We Need YOU

Sit down now and write something. Please. It doesn't have to be long. It doesn't have to be pretty 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. Or sponsee. Now. Then email it to [balance\\_editor@yahoo.com](mailto:balance_editor@yahoo.com).



### eBalance Available for Groups

Each registered COSA Group currently receives a free Balance subscription. Please consider receiving your Group's Balance via email, as a PDF file, rather than via snail mail.

If a group decides that it is willing to help us out in this way, then please send email from the email account where you wish the Balance to be sent saying "Yes, email our Balance," or something to that effect. Send this email to [info@cosa-recovery.org](mailto:info@cosa-recovery.org), clearly identify your group and include a telephone number to call if there are questions.

PDF files can be opened using a free program called Adobe Acrobat Reader which can be downloaded from [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com).

## God's Plan

My son was born on October 23, 2002. He is beautiful, full of wonders. I love him and it is already hard to imagine ever not knowing him.

I think back to when I found out I was pregnant and being pregnant seemed, for a few weeks, a crisis in our lives. The pregnancy was unplanned and unexpected on a conscious level. Though it seems in hindsight to be part of a perfect plan, at the time it was a shock and it threw my partner and I into a tizzy. So many things were supposed to happen first: x more years of solid recovery, x much money saved, x much career development, x much feeling ready to be parents, and at least a little more time just enjoying our sobriety and new happiness as a couple. Our immediate feeling was, we don't want this now. We wanted to turn back the clock without consequences, and we felt powerless. Thank God we were both firmly rooted in our respective recovery programs and it was indeed second nature to turn to these resources for help.

The first gift of recovery I experienced was the ability to focus on myself, my feelings and needs. What a confusing and overwhelming mixture of feelings — shock, grief, amazement and joy. I called my sponsor and she listened while I poured out my heart. I felt such grief about screwing up, I said, about my irresponsibility in a matter of such importance to me. Becoming pregnant was supposed to be an absolutely right, joyful event and I had done it absolutely wrong. I had betrayed myself and felt such self recrimination, shame and fear. I felt grief and utter agony over the possibility of an abortion. It was horrendously incompatible with my belief in the sacredness of life, and terrifying to think of in karmic terms. Moreover, I had always strongly desired to conceive a child with my partner, and this life conceived in the spirit of love was precious to me, outside of any moral context. But we had to be ready, individually and together, and that seemed impossible. I felt stuck, doomed, and I hated myself.

I was not in good shape, but it was something of a miracle to be in touch with all my feelings and allow them to be. I didn't have to rationalize, minimize or amputate any of them, and I felt the need and willingness to share them. I had asked for help. I did still feel a lot of shame but it didn't shut me down, and I had the blessing of the safest, most appropriate place to go. My sponsor listened with love and compassion and gave me the help I asked for. She told me I was beating up on myself pretty badly and I needed to find compassion and love for myself in order to move forward. "I'm giving you 24 hours!" she said. When I asked how in the world I was supposed to do that authentically in 24 hours she said, "If I was in the same situation, would you feel compassion and love for me?" "Of course I would!" I said. And I knew that I could give that to myself.

I had a good start, but I didn't have peace, nor did I expect any so soon. In spite of my turmoil I had trust enough in the process, gained in the past year of recovery, to believe that I would be at peace with my decision in the end. My feelings said, "I am never going to have peace!" but I knew otherwise, which is a great gift of the program. After owning my irresponsibility about birth control (not taking care of myself) and my behaviour (crazy, magical thinking—"this can't happen to me") I had a lot of accepting to do. I accepted that I was human being who made mistakes (not a human mistake!) and I accepted that I was pregnant. The only way to become unpregnant was to deliver a baby or have an abortion, either decision having huge consequences. It was time to let go and let God.

I began to sift through my feelings with a huge helping of COSA meetings, my individual, group and couples therapies, reaching out to other COSA members and long hours of meditation with my Higher Power. What beliefs and fears were clouding my path? What old messages were tying me down? What would bring me the most joy and growth? What was my truth in the present? Being able to share at meetings

without fear of judgement or criticism (as our opening statement promises) was in hindsight perhaps the most invaluable tool of all. Actually I was very afraid of judgement and criticism, especially when sharing about abortion. I knew in theory that I had the freedom in recovery to say whatever I needed but I truly needed courage to walk through the fear and God gave it to me. I grew strong in spirit from these experiences. I was supported and validated wherever I was, by God and by my COSA groups, and I was offered the understanding and experiences of other women who had gone before me, down a similar path. It reminded me too that I can share absolutely anything at a meeting, that just because I haven't heard anyone else sharing about it doesn't mean that I'm alone.

While I worked through my feelings, my partner was working through his with his program. During this time we were careful about keeping good boundaries and good communication. We checked in with each along the way regularly and it was very difficult at times. I remember one night in particular he was feeling negative and confused and could only find reasons why not to have a baby. I on the other hand was becoming clearer about my feelings on abortion. I had challenged old beliefs and feelings about it, and they stood, for the most part. I felt strongly that an abortion would be an act of violation against myself and the life within me and that I would mourn deeply the loss of this life, ready for parenthood or no. Well, he shared first that evening and you can imagine where my old COSA self was headed. My old self was tempted to swallow my truth and meet him with glum silence, burning with rejection, resentment (he doesn't love me!) and feeling panic that we didn't feel the same way. My old self was tempted to lash out, judge and attack him for being stuck in his fear, for being a coward. My COSA-in-recovery self took a deep breath and stepped forward. I made a choice to not take his feelings personally (though I shared my feelings about his feelings!), and I stated my truth through tears. I let things be where they were—imperfect unresolved, and

uncomfortable. I didn't have to fix anything or create a crisis. It hurt and it wasn't easy but I felt stronger and I was proud of myself for keeping my heart open and my head high.

One day after a few weeks we checked in, and we were at the same place. We wanted to have a baby! We wanted to feel the joy that had been bubbling and insisting on being felt even from the very beginning, and we wanted it enough to face up to any fears and difficulties that the decision implied. For us that involved challenges with our families of origin and challenges around letting go of our comfort zones, allowing uncertainty and change. Before we were really smoothly on our way though, I had one last COSA seizure. Our past was marked by broken trust and unkept promises, lack of commitment. This gigantic commitment was triggering feelings of insecurity, suspicion, doubt, and a feeling that I needed to protect myself. This came up in a couples' therapy session (the grace of God!) when our therapist confronted me on some ambivalence she sensed in me. It didn't take long for me to recognize my feelings and get clear that neither of us were making this commitment in our addictions, that this commitment was indeed an outgrowth of recovery. Our present reality spoke of honesty, consistency and trust. With gratitude and joy I let go of the old pain and began to relish the present.

What an amazing pregnancy I had, and what a birth, and now, new parenthood! Those are other stories, all experienced in the loving arms of recovery. Making the decision to have our child within recovery increased my already considerable trust and faith in the program, and my trust and faith in God's plan. It's good to revisit this, remember the pain, and not take the healing and the gifts for granted. With work, we are perfectly ready for this new life as a family (in that imperfect way), and I have deep gratitude.

— Maria L

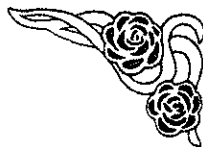


## from the COSA Online Discussion Group

### *One Year to Live Fantasy*

From: Kathy

Date: Mon Oct 6, 2003 6:49 am



If I only had one year to live...

I certainly wouldn't spend one more day in this cold, distant, passionless, sexually anorexic, relationship that's called a marriage.

I would separate from my husband, although I'd still want to be friends, and I'd live my life to the fullest. I'd go out and dance, and eat great food, flirt a little and maybe even find romance.

I remember those days. I remember the kisses. It's been so long since I've been kissed, really kissed, I would go out and get kissed.

If I only had one year to live...I would spend time each day, real time, quality time, with my kids. Right now I am there in body, but not there in spirit. I am too busy thinking and obsessing about what my husband has done and what he could be doing.

If I only had one year to live...I would call my friends and tell them how great they are, and listen, really listen, to what they say. Right now, as I listen, I am thinking about my life, my marriage, my husband, and am not fully present with them either.

If I only had one year to live...I would live my life fully and with joy. I'd see the beauty, I'd smell the flowers, I'd notice the clouds in the sky. Right now, life is a blur of pain and fear and those things aren't even fathomable.

If I only had a year to live...I would wake each day with a smile and find joy wherever I could. Right now, I relate to misery and am drawn to it's false comfort.

If I only had one year to live...I would live my life for me, do the things that bring me pleasure and make me happy. I would no longer live my life for others, to make them happy, especially the man who has brought me such pain and grief and keeps me locked in constant emotional turmoil. I'd set myself free and enjoy each day!

From: Lisa L

Date: Mon Oct 6, 2003 10:18 pm



Not sure how to answer my one year to live--my first inclination is to move to a beautiful serene nature spot to live my final year, but then I jump back to missing my family, so I think I'd vacation often to my serene spot (Hawaii for me) while spending time with friends and family, doing all the things I've put off for when I had more money, more time, better health, etc. I'd retreat with my husband, enjoying the recovery we've found and strengthening this relationship. I'd hug my neices and nephews and let them know how precious they are. And at the end of that year, I'd prepare myself for the sorrow of leaving my loved ones behind, and prepare for the joy of being reunited with those who I have loved who have gone before me. Before my father died 17 years ago, he always said "It's thy will be done, not my will". I hope to embrace the truth of that when my time comes.

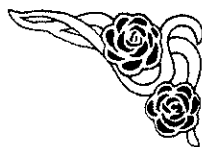
About 4 years ago, I had a great model for this. My very good friend was diagnosed with lymphoma, AIDS-related. He lived life to the fullest, bought what he wanted, spent enormous amounts of time with friends and family whenever he wasn't hospitalized, and NEVER, NOT ever, complained about being cheated, or life ending. He never uttered a word of regrets, but boosted all those around him. He showed me true love and compassion and I did the same for him in return. He didn't let pride or shame stop him from seeing friends, or them visiting him in the hospital. He worked when he could, and balanced it with fun. He went peacefully after some rodeo committee friends had left after presenting him with an honorary trail boss plaque. He closed his eyes for a nap, and drifted off. I hope to die gracefully like he did, never complaining about what I'd miss, but rejoicing in what I've had.

For now, with an serious upcoming surgery, I choose to think about the wonders of my life

should anything happen, and to make sure my affairs are in order in case something does. My family and friends know I love them, but I will continue to show them so.

From: Genevieve

Date: Tue Oct 7, 2003 4:47 am



I would be more loving, tolerant and accepting of my SAH. I would put more energy into my service work and church activities and spiritual growth. I would stop regretting the past, especially in regard to how I raised my son, and I would let go of him and his angry 23-year-old self and his newborn baby -- but I would keep my heart open to him if he ever was ready to forgive. And I would not, in that one year, ever gossip or talk about somebody who wasn't there to defend himself or herself (including myself!). And, I would strive to "Let Go and Let God."

From: Julie

Date: Tue Oct 7, 2003 9:35 am



I would want to stop being afraid to love and live. Tell people how I feel. Make time to see all the people that have touched my life.

Take my mother to Spain for a month. Take each of my daughters away alone to the place they want to see the most.

Eat what I want, say the things to people that I have always wanted to say and held back. Let my house get dirty and be okay with it.

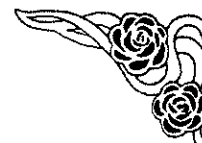
And yes ... before I die I would love to fall in love. Just once, I would love to feel special. Like a beautiful sexy woman. I would surrender the fear of being scorched to my very soul again and let someone close enough to love me, and I would love them back.

Most of all I would want to leave this world having loved. Loved well. Not just romantic love but friendship love and loyal love. I would want to know that I cared enough for the people I loved

to be honest and to take risks. I hope that I could love them enough to let them be who they are. My dream is that I can be loved enough to be who I am. I have more of that now in my life than I ever have.

From: Nitawin

Date: Tue Oct 7, 2003 11:24 am



If I only had one year left I would find my husband and let him know that even though he made the choices he made, that I love him and know that he is a valuable, beautiful human being in spite of the sickness he is living with.

If I only had one year to live I would spend time showing my boys all the beautiful places there are that no one really pays attention to because they're not "tourist traps"... Bear Butte, the Black Hills, the Badlands, the Forest Preserve in Rosebud, Eagle Butte, Green Grass....

If I only had one year to live I would want to spend it with my husband and my boys having BBQs, laughing and joking, and playing basketball out front.

If I only had one year to live I would want to dance at every pow wow, go to as many ceremonies as I could, and spend as much time as I could singing with my husband and hearing his laugh.

If I only had one year left to live I would bravely tell my family that I am still in love with my husband and want to work on our relationship, knowing that I now have many more tools than I did when all the crap hit the fan. Even if people who love me would be angry or worried, I now know that recovery and healing is possible. I would want that for myself, and for our relationship. For as it stands today, I know that I have not done everything I could to heal myself in this relationship. Rather I just pushed it all away out of fear, pain, sadness, and hurt, even though I love my husband and know his many beautiful traits and qualities. I threw the baby out with the bath water because I did not understand what I was being confronted with

at the time. I now know that he has a sickness, and that he's not a bad person.

If I only had a year to live then I would focus on the things in my life that are the most precious to me: My boys, my husband, my Mom, my Grandma, my brothers and sister, my nieces and nephews. Hopefully I would be able to show them all how much they mean to me and how much I love them.

This is my truth.

From: Julie

Date: Thu Oct 9, 2003 10:06 am



You know, I forgot to say I would dance. I would slow dance and fast dance. I would listen to music and I would dance freely without limits. I wouldn't care what anyone thinks, I would dance.

From: Burnet O

Date: Thu Nov 20, 2003 3:06 am  
A Retrospective



This wonderful exercise is from Patrick Carne's book *A Gentle Path through the Twelve Steps*. I dug out what I had written about it back in 1997, expecting to find that it has all come true – which it pretty much has. However, there were a couple of surprises which show me how far I've come. In my fantasy I could not decide whether or when to quit my job – not only was I still fearing financial insecurity, I was also fearful that I wouldn't have anything to do! My sponsor used to call me a "human doing"; I'm glad I've learned just to be. Oddly and sadly, I decided not to tell anyone my "news" because I feared they either wouldn't care or would care "too much."

### Giving Advice

One of the topics which has come up on the COSA 12 Step web site has been about giving advice. Some say we should give it, others say we shouldn't, others say that they want it and that's why they're here.

My experience in 12 Step groups to which I have belonged is that advice-giving is discouraged for several reasons.

1. None of us is truly in a position to advise another because we have not experienced what they have experienced or are experiencing. We don't truly know for sure what they should do because we haven't been in their situation. Hence, we can only offer our own experience---what we have done in a similar situation.
2. One of the major parts of my co-addiction is to be controlling – to my SA, my children, to just anyone with whom I came in contact. Therefore, I have to be very careful when I launch into giving advice. Often for me it is just another way of being in control of someone else.
3. When we come to these groups we truly do feel lost and helpless. I remember that I wanted nothing more than for someone to tell me what to do to fix this problem and make it go away. Instead, what I found was a group of people who lovingly showed me that I had my own HP and that I needed to look to my HP for direction in my own life. I learned that the direction that my HP may give to me might be totally different than the direction another person's HP gave to them. I believe that when a newcomer comes to us asking for advice and we launch into telling them how to "fix their problem" rather than pointing them to their own HP, then we seriously hinder their recovery.

To me recovery has been about finding my HP and learning to rely on him to guide me along with the loving support of members from 12 Step groups. There have been times in my own recovery when I totally rejected the ESH of another member thinking that there was no way that it applied to me, only to later find that it was exactly what I needed to know and practice. However, what has truly made it *recovery* for me was that I was allowed to learn and experience things in my own way and at my own time, with the guidance of my HP.

— Sondra



## I Need It All to Continue My Journey

In Michigan, we experience a week-end retreat twice a year. The Spring Retreat usually occurs in April, with the Fall one happening in September or October.

Retreats felt important to us as we read Patrick Carne's words, from his book *A Gentle Path Through The Twelve Steps*:

Most groups also have a social life outside the meetings. Before or after meetings, people meet for coffee or food. Sometimes breakfasts or lunches where people gather as sort of a 'second' group meeting for extra support. Some groups have retreats together to intensify work on the program. While these are not part of the meeting, they are essential to program life. To regard them as an option for which one does not have time is to miss out on an important part of developing a program for oneself: building a support network.

Our retreats have been happening for many years. Each one seems to take us to a deeper level than the one before. Each time I am sure the one I just finished was the best. I learned the most about myself. I peeled off more of the onion than ever before. Then the next retreat finds me leaving with the same profound newness.

Our most recent retreat centered around the topic of "Codependency". I don't believe any of realized the depth and seriousness of the disease. Our entire week-end was spent examining our five Core Symptoms of Codependency.

Our groups experience other sharings that build strength and recovery for us. Many of us meet at the restaurant after the meeting where we practice healthy recovery interactions. Taking our recovery out of the support group surroundings and into the real world has been valuable for me.

Another special time that deepened our spiritual journey was a Medallion Dinner Meeting. At that meeting we presented each person with their current medallion. We shared our insights,

love and growth that we felt for that person and each other. It was a tear-filled and recovery-filled evening.

Recovery is the most important part of my journey. My groups, my step work, my sponsor, the retreats and the social events are all an integral part of my recovery.

For me, I know my recovery would not be as solid and positive as it is today if I was not participating in all parts. Yes, all parts are essential to my program life. To regard them as an option for which one does not have time is not an option for me. The entire experience, support group, phone, sponsor, steps, traditions, literature, tapes, retreats, conferences, after-group sharings, special dinners – these are the core that gives me a beautiful and solid recovery.

I hope each of you expand your recovery world. I'm sure you will love the results.

— Ila D

PS: The next retreat in Michigan will be April 16,17,18, 2004. The topic will be "Family Of Origin". There are people from other states who attend. If you would like more information on the April retreat, contact Ila at [arnoldila@juno.com](mailto:arnoldila@juno.com)

## Recovery Brings Gain with Pain

Before recovery I was in an incredible amount of pain. I worked very hard to sweep everything under the rug. Things wouldn't stay there for long though. Whether it was my stuff or someone else's it kept coming out. Trying to hide from the truth brought me pain with no gain.

God, through this program, has helped me to embrace the truth instead of hiding from it. What a difference this has made in my life. I still have some real incredible pain in my life. The difference is there has always been a gift somewhere in that pain that I have received.

Pain with gain!

— Donna J

## Credo for Doing Service Work

With God's help, I shall proceed in my service duties with gentleness, kindness, understanding, and **much** forgiveness for myself and others.

I will remember that performing this service work will give me practice in dealing with people who are at various levels of recovery.

I will remember that I am not supposed to take anything personally. Each person's feelings and choices are about them, not me.

I will remember that I can choose my own energy and not allow myself to be affected by another person's negative energy.

I will remember that I can take care of myself with other people, no matter what they choose to do or what kind of energy they project.

I will remember that I can choose to act appropriately and deal later with my internal little kid's fear and my rebellious inner teenager's retaliatory schemes.

I will remember that I can choose to perceive other's unresolved issues and oppositional tactics as mere nuisances rather than major problems.

I will remember that I can "do it differently" and act with reasonable adult choices, rather than projecting my old dysfunctional patterns on unfolding situations.

With God's help I will remember the above resolves.

— *Anonymous*

## Independence Day

When I woke up on July 4th my first thought was, "It's Independence Day, My Independence Day!" and that is how I celebrated. All those fireworks are for me, a celebration of the profound growth I have made in recovery this past year.

Like those fireworks, it has sometimes felt like a volatile process. There were times I felt like I might just explode or be ripped to pieces by all the pain (especially when I think where I was two years earlier on Discovery Day). However, my biggest fear back then was not exploding but imploding. I knew that if I didn't make some changes, that if I didn't choose for me, I would be choosing to implode, to wither and die on the inside, which would eventually suck all the outside to death along with it.

My story is not so unlike what happened in our country that we are also celebrating today. Back in the 1700s a tyrant was ruling the land, making unreasonable, hurtful demands of the people, enforcing rules they could not/would not live by, exacting payment of goods that they needed for their own survival. My tyrant was sex addiction and its hold on my husband of 26 years. It was ruling both our lives (even before I knew what "it" was) and the payment it was exacting was our Good, which I definitely needed for survival.

The people in the 1700s were pissed and sick and tired of living under rule that was so oppressive. They decided to do something. They couldn't change Britain (like us – they had tried) so they decided to change what they could – their own land. They thought long and hard about what they needed and wanted and sent a notice, a Declaration of Independence, to the British claiming their rights as a nation, claiming their rights to self governance and self determination. In essence they told the British, "You may choose to live this way, we do not."

My story is similar. I was sick and tired of living under a dysfunctional set of rules that robbed me of my self, of my rights to truly be who I was, of self-determination. I had been working and trying to get out from under those rules for years, ever since I had left my FOO (those in the New World had tried to leave their FOO rules behind when they left Europe years earlier too). I had tried everything I could to change

the “fatherland” (my SAH), so that we could remain intact. I was afraid to get on that big boat and sail away across the sea of change by myself, that scary sea of the unknown (as scary to me as it was to travel the actual seas in the 1700s). But, I could not change the “fatherland”; SAH wasn’t willing or ready to change. Those dysfunctional rules and his addiction were still serving him well (not really but, like the British in 1776, it was all he knew, what was comfortable and there were some powerful addictive forces keeping the status quo). I decided I was powerless to change him and that my life had become unmanageable. So, I chose to do what those early Americans did, to change what I could – my own territory, myself. I began writing my own Declaration of Independence, which I called the 12 Steps. Also, like my earlier counterparts, I had to set some boundaries with the fatherland (that I was not willing to live with a sex addict who was not actively working a program of recovery, that I was not willing to be treated the way I had been). The results were the same in the end; I had to ask him to leave. Luckily, in my case that didn’t involve an armed struggle and the only loss of life was my old dysfunctional one, some fantasies and rules that weren’t serving me well anyway.

So, like my country, it’s been an ongoing process learning to live by this new Declaration, my 12 Steps (actually I think I’m probably doing lots better than my country does most of the time – I have fewer slips and I remember to look at and work the document/program). I sure am a lot more free, happy, and independent today than I was a year ago when I asked SAH to leave.

Two years ago I was a devastated woman. My self-esteem and confidence were so low and I was so unhappy. I felt like such a victim, was unhappy, and depressed most of the time. I hated going to bed by myself at night so some nights I just didn’t go to sleep or I waited till I was dog-tired in the wee hours of the morning. Also, I didn’t go to bed because I didn’t like waking up to myself and my world in the morning. I

didn’t trust the new day (or myself) to bring me anything but unhappiness. I was still busy doing and taking care of everyone else.

Nowadays, I’m grateful for the day I walked in on him. That was the best present God ever gave me, even though it hurt like hell at the time to open it (HP knows about some things we don’t). I am grateful for happiness, my life, my children, for flowers, my friends, my dogs, for my cute little red car, my house that is mid-remodel, for being able to pay most of my bills, for the sunny days, for my recovery, my recovery friends (including you), and a million other things. I wake up happy and grateful in the mornings. I go to bed at night loving my bed and loving to sleep there by myself – actually I don’t feel alone there any more; I feel cradled in HP’s arms while I sleep. The other night as I was getting in bed I actually said very happily and honestly, “I just love myself”. Man, is that a switch from where I was a year or two ago. It felt so good I said it several times. I am good to myself these days. If I am tired, I take a nap mid-day. If I don’t get everything on my “to-do” list done it’s OK because I did my best and tomorrow is another day. My life isn’t perfect and that’s OK, it’s getting better. I still have some problems but that’s OK too. I take myself to the movies I want to see even if no one else wants to see them, and I enjoy myself. I don’t worry about being there alone or what anyone else thinks. I say no to people when I need to and yes when I want to.

So, that morning I woke up knowing it’s MY Independence Day and those fireworks are for me. They’re for each of you too, my dear COSA friends – either a celebration of what we’ve each done already to change our lives or a promise of what is to come if you make your own Declaration of Independence (whatever that is for you) and work on your own recovery. I read “The Promises” to myself while I watched the fireworks because they are coming true for me – and I am celebrating that!

— Sue S

## Finding a Sponsor

Finding a sponsor was hard. I only did it because I was desperate and “they” said that’s what I should do. I don’t like to ask for help; I thought I was self-sufficient and didn’t need other people. Especially other women. I didn’t trust them. I thought I had nothing in common with them. Other women were either the competition or the condemning judges.

Once I made up my mind to get a sponsor things really got hard. First I looked for someone in authority who could assign me a sponsor. Because then it wouldn’t be my fault if it didn’t work out and I wouldn’t have to risk rejection. I wasn’t thrilled to learn that I had to do my own work. Of course I had to choose the perfect one. That took a long time. Especially since I was working three programs and thought I needed three perfect sponsors. The only advice anyone would give me was “Look for someone who has what you want.” My first choice was a dramatic and eloquent woman who had people’s attention. She rejected me. My second choice was a woman who had my husband’s attention. This was pre-COSA. She actually worked out well for me. Until I realized what I was doing. I chose my first COSA sponsor because she shared with wisdom. And she was still with her SAH who was in recovery. Exactly what I wanted. She saved my life many times, and I will always adore her. She’s no longer with her husband.

In addition to saving my life, she accepted me with all my secret warts. She helped me see the lies I tell myself. She held me accountable and confronted me with wisdom and compassion. She taught me that there are always more than two choices. That people are multi-faceted, not all good or all bad. That I could stop choosing victimhood. She modelled boundary-setting by not taking phone calls after 9 PM. She pushed me to do my step work and never gave up on me. She listened to me and laughed with me. She still loved me after listening to my fifth step. I thank God for putting her in my life at that point in time. I’ve had a total of six spon-

sors in three programs. I’ve learned that I’m better off with one sponsor so that I won’t sponsor-shop a problem (pick the person who’ll tell me what I want to hear). Now I do all my work in COSA with my COSA sponsor. The worst mistake I’ve made (with sponsors) was going too long without one when I was between sponsors.

What I’ve learned is that God’s in charge of this process. I no longer need to analyze or agonise over finding a sponsor. All that I need to do is suit up and show up with the right attitude. The right attitude for me is one of openness, willingness and humility. A couple of my best sponsors (including my current one) have been very much younger than I, and it was hard to ask them. Like if I’m so old I should be wise or something. If I can just open my eyes and heart, God provides.

— Burnet O



## Long Distance Sponsors Still Needed

Many of you may have seen the pleas for Temporary Long Distance Sponsors. This is a part of COSA service work that I think most of us assume is “getting done” by “someone.” It is, but by far too few. There simply are more newcomers looking for support than there are volunteers for this valuable form of service. We are in DESPERATE need of people willing to give in this way.

Please, consider becoming a Temporary/Long Distance Sponsor. You can receive support from other Long Distance Sponsors who have done this before – there’s even a new online discussion group, set up specifically for these valuable volunteers, so that you can *get* support, while you *give* it.

If you’d like to help support those without a meeting in their area by becoming a Temporary Long Distance Sponsor, contact NSO-COSA (see the box on page 3) and ask to be connected to the COSA Connections Coordinator (CCC) in your area.

— Christi G.