



Balance

NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SERVICE ORGANIZATION OF COSA

Spring Issue

March-April 2009

NEW BEGINNINGS IN COSA RECOVERY

What does it mean to start over, to have a new beginning? When I retired from public school teaching, I worked to get a new career. When I almost died from pneumonia, I worked to achieve a new level of health. When my health caused me to resign from the COSA Board, I rested, took care of myself, and now have a new board position. At any point during the day, I can start over in my recovery. I can say the Serenity Prayer and begin again, with a new attitude, a new awareness, a new resolve to change my thinking and my perception. Knowing that I can always begin again gives me hope and a new joy of living. I thank my Higher Power for new beginnings.

~JoAn D.

I felt fearful most of my life. I was insecure and afraid to make decisions, so I continually sought cues from others that would prove that I was o.k. Through my step work and attendance at meetings, I started to see the pattern in my life of focusing on men, whether a particular man, or a persistent longing for a relationship. If I fixated on a man, particularly a man who had an exciting (chaotic or dangerous) life, or a man who needed me, then I didn't have to think too much about myself. I spent a lot of time seeking flirtations and sexual chemistry instead of nurturing (in some cases even identifying) my goals, hobbies and interests, intellectual pursuits, or spiritual growth. Sadly, these efforts had little to do with real relationships, connection or growth. Instead, it became a way of avoiding the tough questions: "Who am I, really, and what do I want to do with my life?"

COSA has helped me realize that I don't have to make choices based on fear and the desperate desire to keep the addict – or anyone – from abandoning me. I'm still in the process of learning to pay closer attention to my own feelings, desires, and choices. It is new for me to make choices based on self-care and self-esteem. It is new for me to learn from the strong women in my life, and to advocate for myself. I am learning to listen to my own internal cues. I am learning to ask myself gently, "Do I approve of myself in this situation?" and if the answer is yes, I can be at peace, regardless of what others think or how they act. This takes a lot of practice for me, but this profound internal change is happening.

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Volume 5, Issue 5

7th Traditions Individuals

Des Moines, IA	\$ 10.00
Houston, TX	\$200.00
Seattle, WA	\$ 30.00
Stockton, NJ	\$ 10.00
West Chester, OH	\$ 5.00
West Orange, NJ	\$ 26.00
Total	\$281.00



Recurring Donations
Total for
12/29/08-2/17/09
\$382

**7th Traditions Groups**

AZ-03	\$ 22.00
CA-15	\$ 75.00
IN-02	\$ 50.00
IN-04	\$136.64
MN-01	\$ 60.00
MN-04	\$ 20.00
MN-06	\$250.00
NM-01	\$ 30.00
TX-06	\$ 40.00
TX-25	\$ 77.60
TX-26	\$123.00
VA-01	\$ 10.00
WA-02	\$101.00
WI-04	\$ 30.00
TOTAL	1,025.24

**Tuesday & Thursday Telemeeting's**

www.cosacall.com

Telephone number:

1-906-481-2100 Passcode: 679461

Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m. Pacific Time
 (8 Mountain, 9 Central, 10 Eastern)

Thursdays at 6:00 p.m. Pacific Time
 (7 Mountain, 8 Central, 9 Eastern)

Welcome NEW COSA Groups!

FL-10

NE-05

NY-08

WA-05

**By the Fellowship, For the Fellowship**

We encourage every group, intergroup and member to submit articles that **share your ESH** (experience, strength, and hope). Also, articles and announcements that **share upcoming COSA events** in your area; such as retreats, workshops, speakers etc. We also would love to hear your ideas for **what you would like to see** in future articles. The Balance is a newsletter for the membership, by the membership.

Please send your articles to: COSACopy@yahoo.com

or by snail mail to the COSA ISO PO Box listed on the envelope below.

Contact the ISO of COSA

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I can honor my feelings, and also be mindful not to rush into hasty dysfunctional reactions aimed at ending discomfort quickly rather than negotiating constructive solutions. COSA has given me a whole new life, a life I had never known how to live.

Old ideas replaced with new ones that have led to new beginnings:

Old idea: If the recovering addict is preoccupied with something else, or is having a difficult mood, that means he doesn't really love me. He could care less. He's going to leave me. I am not attractive enough or good enough.

New idea: If the recovering addict is preoccupied with something else, or is having a difficult mood, I can allow him the space and dignity to work through what he needs to work through. I can check in with him to see if he'd like to talk things over with me or if I can help in some way. If I am feeling insecure or struggling with my own negative thoughts, I can reach out to other COSAs for help and support.

Old idea: If I don't agree with or go along with the addict, he'll get angry (which means I am bad), and he might leave me or act out, or both.

New idea: It is important for me to be honest with my qualifier and myself. Disagreements are part of life; it is an investment in the relationship to share my truth rather than to pretend that everything is o.k. when it's not. If I am feeling particularly timid, intensely angry, or unsure about how to share my truth, I can talk about it with another COSA member first.

Old idea: If I am under stress, feeling insecure, or having big feelings, I should either make a list of all the things I need to do, and work hard to complete all of them, or I should focus on what the recovering addict is doing wrong or how he can save me.

New idea: If I am under stress, feeling insecure, or having big feelings, I can check in with myself (and a COSA sponsor or friend) and identify my feelings and my needs. I can be gentle with myself in the process and explore ways of getting my needs met. Sometimes it's as simple as taking a nap or going for a 20 minute walk. Sometimes it is clearly communicating with or reaching out for love and support from the recovering addict.

Old idea: The recovering addict is responsible for my happiness.

New idea: I am responsible for my choices and my happiness. I have a lot of resources to help me take good care of myself in most any situation.

~Betsy H.



One of my most challenging recovery issues of the last several years is how to handle and understand others' abusive behaviors towards me from a 12 Step perspective. A recovery friend said that you can tell that a codependent is beginning to recover by the fact that she is beginning to recognize the abuse in her life. That has certainly been true for me.

I have a lot of carried shame which means that when others around me are behaving badly, I often feel that it is my fault. What that has looked like is that when I am treated abusively, I have denied that it is happening. I have used the steps compulsively to figure out my part. I am very good at "not taking another person's inventory."

As I have begun to recover, I see that I can hold more of the truth. In fact, that has been the major theme of my recovery: what do I know, how can I trust myself and my Higher Power, and what will I do to care for myself around these issues?

Seeing the whole truth means that I accept all of the truth. It means that I accept what others are doing and their responsibilities for what they are doing. And I see and accept my part of a problem without taking on the other person's part. While I was married, that meant that I learned to tell myself the truth about what my ex-husband was doing. And I learned to let him have the consequences for his actions.

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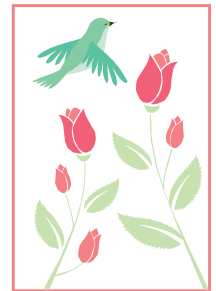
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I began to see more of what was happening in my marriage. As a result, I got clearer about my boundaries and about what supported me. Ultimately, that "rigorous honesty" led me to leave my marriage.

At the same time, I began to learn to accept my ex-husband as he is, without expecting him to change and to stop behaving abusively. The main thing for which I had to make amends to my ex-husband was my demand of him while married that he change and stop behaving abusively. I see now that it was OK for me to ask him to address the problem once or twice, but to do so countless times was me abusing him. I was not loving and accepting him wholeheartedly, and I did not trust his process of recovery and his Higher Power. Of course, I would still have had to leave the marriage as his abuse was harming me. I learned that you can love a person well while refusing further contact with them. This is an ongoing process. I do not have mastery of it.

One thing that helps me to accept my ex-husband is not to take his actions personally. I realized a few months ago that if someone had a heart attack while driving and hit you, you would probably not be angry at that person. Loving an unsober sex addict feels similar to me. It is a good idea to get out of their way, but that doesn't mean that they wanted to hurt you. I don't mean to minimize the harm. I am very often sad beyond words to have lost my ex-husband and my marriage. It helps me to cope with my sad feelings to assume that he probably did not want to hurt me. I suppose my main point here is that the model of rigorous honesty has helped me more than any other recovery ideal. In particular, I have chosen to see the truth about my companions and their actions as well as about myself. Striving to hold the whole truth has been the sharp edge cutting through my confusions.

~D.



My COSA anniversary is the last Sunday in June, and to be quite frank-it is the last place I thought I'd find myself. Prior to recovery, I did not even know what COSA was. The one thing I did know was that if New York City trains were arriving when I need them most-more than my partner was-there was a problem. I found COSA and rather quickly the pain and the shame of my partner's affliction began to ease. I imagined a world of recovery where he and I could grow in the warm hands of recovery; where I could finally find a healthy relationship with another person. This did not happen for us. I became outraged and hurt at the constant relapses and the abuse. I closed my eyes to so much for so long and I no longer could.

I was angry at God. I was angry at myself for being so gullible. I was angry because I put my love for God in my back pocket because my partner was Agnostic. It is true what they say in 12 Step literature. I was amazed before I was half way through. I found that as I worked my way through the steps and deepened my relationship with my Higher Power, my anger lessened and clarity emerged. I still, sometimes, have fights with God. These are mostly surrounding why I do not have my pretty little picture yet, but as I work through this adolescent pang, I realize it is just that. I have been blessed with so much and I am

grateful for it all-the challenges and my cheering sessions! It is consistent work to maintain conscious contact with God and I am grateful for it. I deserve that more than conscious contact with abuse and lies. It is a constant struggle but one well worth the action.

Going to COSA's convention in Seattle has to be one of the most important steps I've made in my recovery.

It gave me strength to know that there are many in the same boat. It gave me hope that we were all for the same common cause-recovery. It provided me with knowledge in how to move forward and it was just a plain old good time! I met many recovery friends there who to this day are there for me if ever I have questions about the steps or just life in general. Having the convention and having my recovery friends are how I've

learned to move past the troubled spots in recovery. I really hope that I get to meet more of you at this year's convention in Oakland, where we can celebrate our differences and our common cause.

The last Sunday in June marks a very important event in New York City for gay rights. I can't always say that I am proud of being gay but I can say that I am proud of who I am and that I am taking steps toward recovery-ONE DAY AT A TIME!

~Brian K.





Last summer, when I shared at a meeting how upset I was about my partner's behavior, someone told me: "Your partner is your bottle." It was a powerful and accurate image of my co-addiction. I kept going back to him, despite the physical and mental health risks I exposed myself to. I couldn't quit him on self-will alone.

I discovered my codependency and joined COSA two years ago. I knew that regardless of what my partner's acting out had been, I had to figure out why I kept finding myself repeatedly in dysfunctional relationships. I knew something was wrong with me.

Initially, I was able to maintain healthy boundaries and to request full disclosure and a full STD panel in writing before I would have sexual contact with my partner again. I also started to clear my behaviors of codependent caretaking with family and friends. Healing was on the way. I took on the 12 Steps as compulsively as I took on anything else in my life. I worked my program for several hours a day: meditation, daily readings, meetings, program calls, step work. Finding a COSA sponsor was challenging. When ready to deliver my first step, serendipity put someone from another 12 Step fellowship on my path. Delivering my first step to her was a transforming experience. My intellectual skills had been my strength all my life. Yet, I fell apart crying and admitted that for the first time in my life, I felt that my analytical brain and all of my professional degrees were of no use in restoring me to sanity; in fact, they may have been getting in the way. Then, something magic happened. She gave me the solution to some riddle in my childhood nightmares, that haunted me for most of my adult life, and that she alone could know. As a scientist and an agnostic, I was humbled by the unlikely odds of such an experience happening. I listed all the eerie synchronicity that happened in my life, and could no longer discard them on the basis of chance alone. I developed a belief in another dimension that our modest human condition cannot perceive and a belief in a Higher Power. I became convinced that everything happens for a reason. I flew on a "high" through my second and third steps.

Finding a therapist who was 12 Step friendly and with good understanding of sexual and co-sexual addiction proved also to be hard. I settled for a very sweet lady with solid research experience in the family dynamics of recovery from alcoholism.

I got stuck in the midst of working my fourth step. By then, I was separated from my partner, as the daily contact with him was very triggering for me. Yet, I was still very much in love and wanted the relationship to continue. As I started to work on my own inventory, a lot of my anger transformed into an overwhelming guilt. As I looked at my resentments, I realized how disproportionate they were to the harm done. I had shut people emotionally out of my life, and I was still holding resentments today for things people had done some forty years ago, even when they had shown their generous and loving best every year after. The more I saw myself as imperfect, the more I was able to forgive my partner for his own shortcomings.

After more than a year abstinence on my part, I resumed sexual contact with my partner, based on the belief that he was now sober. It took a few months before I found out that he took the separation as a free license to drink again and to openly date other women. I still did not give up on the relationship. I fell for the well-placed flattery and "I love you's." I believed, against all reason, that when he told me his relationship with another woman was over, it meant he would tell me if he ever started another one. I clung to the hope that his 12 Step program would "cure" him and that my staying on my side of the street and showing him support would touch his heart. I made a list of my fears: fear of setting healthy sexual boundaries because I feared losing my partner, of losing his family to whom I had grown attached, fear of losing my house, fear of feeling lonely, fear of losing our common friends.

I learned about his new girlfriend by accident through some common friends. He told them that I knew about her, and therefore they did not realize that they were breaking a confidence. He admitted later to dating many "girls."

I stopped sleeping, eating and being able to concentrate at work. I visualized the black and cold place that depressed people see. I fell apart crying in front of my boss and other colleagues. I did not understand how I could work my program so hard, yet I was getting worse. Whatever I did was not working.

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I changed to a new therapist, someone who specialized in sex and co-sex addiction. I found a sponsor within the COSA fellowship this time. Both encouraged me to establish a no-contact period. I knew by then that they were right, and that I had to quit my partner the same way I had quit cigarettes more than a decade before, i.e., cold turkey. In the midst of a major clinical depression and after two years in COSA, I finally found the courage to face my fears and assume the risks of recovery.

I hired a lawyer to cleanly separate our finances, which were still intermingled, and have him remove the rest of his belongings out of my house. I sought medication for my depression. Walking into a psychiatrist's office and asking for anti-depressants was a very humbling experience for me. As a scientist, I had done research on anxiety and depression, yet considered those conditions to be other people's problems.

As I asked for more help, I received it. Family members, friends, neighbors, work-out buddies, and co-workers showed up to support me. I kept the house and played with colors to make it my own. Rather than feeling lonely, I felt more connected with more people. Many of our common friends and many of his family members chose to stay in contact with me. I feel sad about the break-up, as I still relish many good memories, but I no longer fear losing the relationship, nor wish to go back to it.

Looking back, I see a lot of Higher Power in action to provide me with abundant support, when I needed it the most. With the new year, many more friends are getting back in touch with me through Holiday wishes. I have just returned from visiting my family over the Holidays, and I felt more connected to them than ever before. There is an abundance of love to go around in this world if we can take it in.

I have feared resuming my fourth step work for fear of slipping into my depressive state again. I have taken a four month break from formally working my steps now. Still, I can feel that the integration of the principles learned is taking place inside of me in the background, without my help. Changes are taking place. As I am going through everyday life situations, light bulbs are going on in my head. I see more options, I detach more readily, I see more of my part in it, feel guilty, then remind myself that it's okay to be an imperfect human, and feel at peace with myself again. I move from feeling defensive to recognizing some of my own past behaviors in others and feeling more compassionate. It seems as if the steps are working me instead of my working them. I appreciate my new COSA sponsor giving me space and time for getting back on my feet. She suggested that I resume my step work starting with listing the resentments I have against myself.

I had a phase of being sick of hearing myself in my victim role, of feeling vulnerable. I just wanted to be "normal" again whatever that means, to forget about sex addiction and find myself a middle-of-the-road "good guy." But the process is irreversible. I have now looked honestly enough at my past to know that I was never free of anxiety in my past, that my codependence dates from when I was six years old, and that I own a great part of where I am today. I am a COSA with or without a partner.

Dreams are very meaningful to me. I am inclined to believe that some of them are a channel of communication with a Higher Power and I started a dream journal. At the beginning of my depression, I dreamt that I had fallen on the floor, and was trying to crawl out of sight so that people would not see my vulnerabilities. A few nights ago, I dreamt that we had the big earthquake in the Bay Area. I remained calm, dragged myself to safety holding on to the nearest door frame, and practiced meditation breathing until the shake was over. Challenges will continue to happen in my life. It is wise to stand in that door frame when they happen, yet, it is up to me to make the best use of the rest of the time. I am looking forward to more recovery in 2009.

- HMB, California



Step Three: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God."

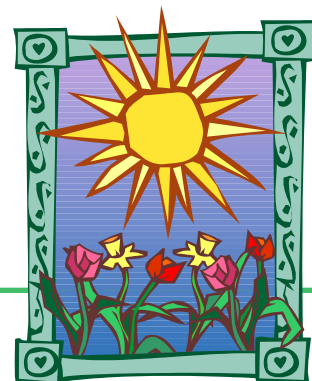
My first experience with the Third Step came weeks before I entered the program. I had just discovered the terrible truth about my addict's acting out; sad and angry beyond any form of the emotions I had previously felt, I ordered him to leave, telling him our relationship was over, whereupon he promptly threatened to kill himself. Ultimately, his parents took him to the local hospital where he was admitted on a three day psychiatric hold. I was 32, a stay-at-home mother of a two-year-old and a breastfeeding infant, and as I lay in bed that night, I had absolutely no idea how I would go on. All I could feel was despair, and the truth weighed down on my chest so heavily that I did not believe I would continue to breathe.

Out of answers, and with the knowledge that my children would be awake in a few hours and in need of my care, I prayed. I had not seriously prayed to a Higher Power since adolescence, believing I was far too intelligent and sophisticated for such business (Oh yes, in my life before recovery I was very arrogant!). But that night I did not know what else to do. So I prayed, "Please [Higher Power], please help me", over and over and over, until a calm I had not known before came to me and I fell asleep. I woke that morning still devastated from disclosure, but with the seeds planted of what has become the greatest gift of my recovery: turning my will and my life over to the Higher Power.

I have formally worked the Third Step since that first time, and I continue to do so on a daily, and sometimes hourly basis. Each time is the same for me; I encounter a problem, I inevitably try to do the Higher Power's job myself, and I quickly become overwhelmed. Each time I am forced to admit that I am not the Higher Power, and in doing so, I am granted the peace of letting go. Whenever I get caught up in my old ways of being (i.e., trying to control outcomes), when I feel myself getting tight inside with that old, familiar mix of nausea and panic, I recite my prayer to myself, and the tension abates. I think of the Third Step as my own personal release valve; allowing the boiling hot steam of my anxiety and pain to escape me safely.

Though physically I weigh the same as I did two years ago when I entered the program, I feel as though my soul has shed Jacob Marley's chains. There was a time when I doubted the promise that I would "not regret the past, nor wish to change it", but that is no longer so. I believe I had to experience the deep pain I did so that I could become open to the wonderful lesson that I cannot do it alone. That is the miracle of the Third Step for me: the Higher Power's help is there for me, all I have to do is ask for it.

~Shea B., Colorado



New Literature!! Now Available.....

COSA Step One
Completely REVISED booklet

Boundaries in Recovery
NEW COSA booklet

Step Four: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

I am always grateful to have the opportunity to share my experience, strength, and hope in reference to my recovery as a codependent to sexual addiction. I have been a codependent to sexual addiction at least since the age of 13. I have chosen at least six sex addicts to be significant men in my life and I have married two of them. The second I married 4 1/2 years into my 12 Step recovery and almost three years into my COSA recovery. I knew full well that God had again placed a man in my life who would give me the opportunity to continue to look at my own relationship to sex. This time I did things differently, however, because I had already worked the 12 Steps with a COSA Step Study Group, as well as in another fellowship with a step study partner.

Steps One through Four I had done three times. The first time I did the fourth step I could not bring myself to do the fifth. Partly because I thought I could never finish the fourth and partly because I did not want to "admit to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs." I was a perfectionist and I was caught between wanting to do it perfectly and not wanting anyone to know about it.

I am grateful that the two different guidelines that I used for working the steps both included looking at my assets. I am glad also that I was encouraged to look at my assets first and to add to them whenever I thought of one. This balanced approach to looking at my imperfections, as well as my assets, helped to get me through. A specific practice that I did was to give myself a written compliment each day during the months that I worked on this step. I recorded the compliments to myself on a list and I did not allow

myself to repeat a compliment within a 30 day time period. The assets and the compliments took the sting out of the imperfections and allowed me to maintain some level of self-love and respect as I did my fourth step inventory.

When I met the man who was to become my second husband, I was far enough along in my disease, and far enough along in getting out of denial about it,

that I could see that I was the common denominator of all of my relationships. Not all men are sex addicts, but all the men that I choose are. This realization did not come, however, until I was sexually assaulted by a man I considered to be a friend and whom I knew to be a womanizer. I then began to ask myself, "What was my part? What was I doing that I needed to stop doing? What was I not doing that I needed to start doing, in relationships with men and in relationship with myself? And what about with my Higher Power? What was his role in my life?" Things needed to be different in my life, in my relationships with men, and in relationship with my Higher Power.

I could not have made the changes necessary to be in a healthy marriage now if I had not summoned up the courage to do the fourth and the fifth steps then. I needed to know more about myself before I could honestly offer that self to another.

~Kari S.



STEP STUDY QUESTIONS~ FOR GROUP DISCUSSION OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

Step Three Questions



1. What do I believe about making decisions?
2. What does it look like when I have made a decision?
3. What does "turn our will and our lives over to the care of God" mean to me?
4. How do I know when I have made a decision to turn my will and life over to the care of my H.P. rather than relying on self will, or impulse, or what I think others would have me do?
5. How am I starting to accept and fulfill the part that says "God as we understood God"?
6. What specific fears do I have regarding taking the third step?
7. Can I recall a time when I was filled with fear and anxiety and the situation turned out okay for me? Write a paragraph about the above situation. How does that affect the decision required of me in Step Three?
8. In what ways might I hide behind the third step?
9. What will it cost me to turn my will and life over to the care of God, as I understand God? What will I gain?

Step Four Questions



1. Be thorough with my 3rd Step.
2. Set aside prayer: "Dear Higher Power, help me set aside everything I think I know about myself to see what will be revealed to me."
3. Read about the 4th Step in recovery books.
4. Make an appointment with myself.
5. Find a quiet place.
6. Start with a list of the people, places and institutions I resent. Who and what do I resent? (a resentment is anger I continue to revisit over and over again).
7. List all of the reasons why I resent each one of these people or things. What is each and every reason, (situation), I resent this person, place or institution?
8. What do I tell myself that perpetuates and justifies this resentment? We focus on our own feelings of resentment, rather than trying to measure and judge the wrongs done to us.
9. Keep adding to the list until it seems complete to me.
10. Write about how these resentments have affected my life. How have they affected my pride, sense of security, finances, etc?
11. What are my worst fears about all these situations? What is my fear about the thing or situation that keeps me stuck?

2009 ISO of COSA International Convention and Annual Meeting

Dear COSA members, Please come and participate in the convention, being held May 21-25, 2009 (Memorial Day weekend) in Oakland, California. It is a great way to boost your recovery, meet other COSA members, and give back what you have gotten. We'll need helping hands at the convention itself ... like with registration, the bookstore, hospitality room, facilities, etc. You can register for the convention and sign up to volunteer at the COSA website:

www.cosa-recovery.org/oakland

User Name: oakland

Password: cali2009

