



Anorexia and Bulimia

I Am a Vomiter

It's not a pretty term. Nor does it leave anything to the imagination, as "compulsive eater" might. But it is what I am, and it feels wonderful to face up to it and be able to talk about it. Someone asked me the other day why I still call myself a vomiter if I have been abstaining for three months. I replied that it was for the same reason I still call myself a compulsive overeater. For me, the two are inseparable: I cannot overeat without making myself throw up.

When did my career as a compulsive overeater begin? I remember distinctly. One evening when I was about 15, I was feeling emotionally overwrought. I don't remember what caused it, but I had stayed up very late watching television. It was then that I went on my first binge. I wanted to throw up, but I couldn't. It wasn't long, however, before I learned to stick my finger down my throat to force vomiting.

My binges have been too numerous to recall. The past seems to fade away into one long struggle with food. Some days stand out, as do some daylong meals and places where I have bought binge food. But mostly I choose to keep my memories hidden from consciousness. I know there is no way I can change my past. All I can do is accept it.

This year was the worst ever. I worked as a cook in a small restaurant for a time. I used to close up alone late at night. Imagine—all the free food I could eat and nobody around to stop me or to watch me throw it up. I always knew God was watching but I shut God out, told God to go away and was resentful because God seemed to frown on what I was doing.

I ate until guilt over what I was doing (stealing) overwhelmed me, or until the dent in the restaurant's supplies began to be noticeable. I paid for some of what I ate, but for the rest I am still paying with guilt.

Even with the stealing, I spent a great deal of money on food. I tried to hide my eating from my mother, with whom I live. But she knew. She heard me going to the bathroom and she knew when I came out at eleven o'clock at night to replenish my supplies. Still, I kept up the deception, hiding junk food under my bed and even a bucket to throw up in.

All the time I was eating, I knew of OA. I was too afraid to reach out and ask for help. Finally, I met an overeater who was a member and she took me to a meeting. I felt so good after that meeting. It was as though a great burden had been lifted from me. I knew others shared my problem and that I didn't have to be alone with it again. Here were people who could help me. Here, I could help myself.

I have been abstaining from compulsive overeating and vomiting for three months. It has been wonderful, easy, hard and almost impossible all at the same time. OA has pulled me through the hardest times. As long as I was willing to use some of the tools of the program when I felt like eating, I made it through. I knew that I could willfully ignore OA at those times and eat anyway. So far, I have chosen not to.

I found serenity, security, happiness and friends where I was only seeking abstinence. Most importantly, I now have a weapon, an effective one, to fight against despair. I only have to use it. It works.

— *Anonymous*

Vomiting: A Deadly Magic

I have no "fat pictures" to pass around at meetings, nor can I report any significant weight loss. I can, however, tell of bizarre eating binges—of stuffing my emotions down my throat by eating so much I could hardly breathe.

So why was I not fat? Because I was a vomiter. I controlled my weight for 15 years by vomiting and taking diet pills.

When I was 17, a friend lost weight with diet pills and I decided to do the same. I lost so much I became too weak to participate in sports. I resumed "normal" eating and you guessed it, I gained weight. Then, during my first year of college, I learned about vomiting. It was disgusting, but it was also magic. I could have my cake and eat it too! I binged and vomited once or twice a week throughout my college years.

When I married and became pregnant, I stopped vomiting for the baby's sake, then started again after I gave birth. I thought I would outgrow the habit, but by the time I was 30, I was vomiting four or five times a week. When I read a magazine article about bingeing and vomiting, I knew I wasn't the only one who did it. I felt my disease would kill me, so I cut the article out and put it with my personal belongings so when I died my family would know what I had gone through to be thin.

I tried to stop many times. I had my ears stapled, and once I put cleaning fluid on my hands to keep them out of my mouth. Nothing helped. By now, gorging and vomiting had become a daily routine, one that was controlling me. The physical consequences were frightening. I was bleeding from the esophagus, I had scar tissue in my throat and I had to have my teeth recapped three times in 10 years. I was often hoarse and had cracks in the corners of my mouth. I had stopped menstruating.

I hit rock bottom about a year ago. I fled to my mother's, 200 miles (322 km) away, desperate for help. But I couldn't tell anyone my secret. Even there, I binged and vomited after everyone had gone to bed, then cried all night. The next day, as the family admired my mother's first great-grandchild, I found myself thinking, "I won't even live to see my children grow up." I cried when I left because I thought I'd never see my mother again.

My husband was at work when I got home, but he had left a message for me on the refrigerator door. It was a magazine article about a model who had died from bingeing and fasting. I knew then that my husband was aware of what I was doing and that he cared about me.

The next morning I called Overeaters Anonymous. (I had tucked the number in my billfold long before.) At my first meeting, I tried not to pay attention to such comments as "You must be a longtimer" or "How much weight did you lose?" I knew that on the inside I was just like the others. I felt out of place and didn't speak to anyone, but one person made me feel I had come home. Knowing I was a newcomer, she hugged me and welcomed me but said nothing about my weight. That convinced me OA was the place to be.

I made a commitment not to binge and vomit anymore, and I kept it. Food to me meant fat and I didn't know how I would handle that. My sponsor asked one thing of me: to call her before I threw up. Wow! That really got to me. Whenever I wanted to vomit after dinner, I thought, "I can't call and tell her that."

For the first month my objective was simply to refrain from vomiting and not gain weight. Was I surprised when I actually lost a couple of pounds!

By the grace of God and this program, I have been abstinent for almost a year. Every morning I thank God for the many miracles in my life. Not only has the compulsion to binge and vomit been taken away, but also my 15-year obsession with diet pills has been removed. When I told my mother about my problem and what OA is doing for me, she broke down and cried. "Thank God, they're saving my daughter," she said.

It's true. OA is saving me. I'm not cured, but I am recovering one day at a time. Thank you, OA, for giving me life.

— Texas USA



Secret Formula

When I came into OA four years ago, I wanted what you people had—but not at the expense of giving up what I had.

What I had was my own secret formula for keeping my weight down while eating uncontrollably. I discovered my “diet trick” when I was 15 and forcing myself to vomit after bingeing. This soon became a ritual. At first, vomiting helped me lose weight but it quickly backfired. I started to eat twice what I would normally eat, then three or four times as much. Losing weight was no longer the issue; I was lucky to be maintaining. Everything was food, from morning till night. I lived to eat.

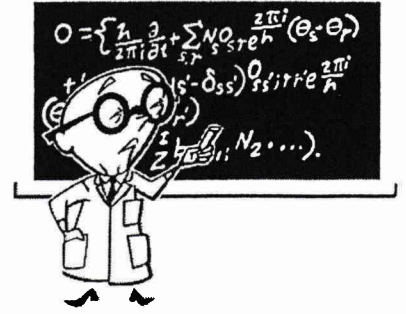
I came into this program desperate, lonely and afraid. I was afraid of myself and of the terrible thing inside me. How could I do this to myself over and over again? I turned away from people for fear they would find out. I became resentful and jealous of their successes, and then blamed myself even more.

Finally, I let go. I decided to take the Steps, walk with God and be guided by a sponsor to work the program as it is written.

Miracles have happened. I stopped overeating and started living. For 15 months I have abstained from both compulsions one day at a time. My Higher Power woke me up after a long sleep and said, “Come with me and I’ll show you how to be happy, feel loved and never be alone again.”

For the gift of life as it was meant to be, instead of the desperate existence through which I was drifting, I am grateful to this program and to all of you.

— *New York USA*



Smoke Signals of the HP Kind

I’m a bulimic, abstinent today by God’s grace. I’m your basic rock-bottom, gutter-style bulimic. And I don’t give up easily.

After I had been in OA three and a half years and was in my third major relapse, I began to think I was one of the “constitutionally incapable” the Big Book talks about, and I despaired of finding a solution to my bingeing and purging problem. I had just come off a coast-to-coast binge. (You don’t want to know how many fast food joints there are between San Francisco and Boston.) It was a dramatic binge of epic proportions, matched in intensity only by the depth of my despair. I surrendered to the fact that this was as good as my life could get. I was just going to have to learn to live with my problem because I had absolutely done my best and still couldn’t stop.

I went to one last OA meeting. There I met the woman who became my sponsor. She took me home after the meeting and prepared my first abstinent meal for me. Miraculously, one day at a time, I have been abstinent ever since.

Getting and remaining abstinent hasn’t been easy, but I am aware that a loving Higher Power cares that I am abstinent. And it’s clear I can’t fulfill God’s plan for me if I’m worshipping the porcelain altar. When I had about five months of abstinence, I had a rough go of things. I moved, had to find and adjust to a new OA group, started a new job, and had to deal with my boyfriend’s decision to end our relationship. Bulimic that I am, I determined that the only way to deal with my pain was to eat. Before I commenced my plan, I half-heartedly called some of my OA friends but couldn’t reach anyone.

I went to the store and bought some food, came home, and put it in the boiler to cook. Then I went to the living room, got down on my knees and prayed: “God, I don’t know who you are or what you are. I don’t know if you can hear me or how you can help, but I need help now! Please help me.”

I got up off my knees and went resolutely into the kitchen still intending to binge. But when I opened the oven door, I found my food on fire! I threw the tray, engulfed in flames, under the water faucet to put out the fire. Then I began to laugh. I dumped the rest of the food down the disposal. Maybe I didn’t need to binge and purge after all. I walked out of the kitchen, free.

That was the “burning bush” that demonstrated to me that the Twelve-Step program works. It really does. I don’t recommend getting so out-of-sorts and being as close to bingeing as I was, but that’s what it took for me to understand the importance of HP in my life and program. As it states in Chapter 3 of the Big Book, “The alcoholic at certain times has no effective mental defense against the first drink. Except in a few rare cases, neither he nor any other human being can provide such a defense. His defense must come from a Higher Power” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th-ed., p. 43).

Today I am entering my fourteenth month of abstinence. Putting down the food was just the first step. The way to live life without excess food lies in working the rest of the Steps as they are described in the Big Book. It’s that simple.

— *Massachusetts USA*

Understanding Heart

I have been recovering in the program of Overeaters Anonymous for more than three years and have been abstinent for 13 months. I'm grateful to the program, and to my sponsor, for the miracle of recovery.

What makes my situation a little unusual is that I'm a recovering anorexic. My sponsor, a recovering compulsive overeater with a strong program and many years in OA, recently told me that Anorexics Anonymous has started in Los Angeles, California. That's wonderful news. I hope it will grow because there certainly is a need.

I was led to OA via an eating disorders treatment center. I thank my HP for that. As an anorexic, I would never have thought to look for help in an OA meeting, but that's where I found it. Fortunately, I was familiar with Twelve-Step programs and knew they worked. At the time, I was in enough pain to be willing to go to any length to find relief and recovery.

I was so incoherent at first that I just kept my mouth closed and opened my ears and my mind. In OA meetings, I heard others talk about the feelings that surround an uncontrollable compulsion. I also heard about powerlessness in connection with food. Most importantly, I heard about the hope of recovery.

I was one of the fortunate anorexics. I knew my disease would kill me, so if I wanted to survive and live a healthy life, I had to actively work a Twelve-Step program. I resolved that somehow I would make OA work for me. That has been the key to my recovery.

I'm grateful to all the compulsive overeaters I've encountered in OA. They welcomed me with open arms and hearts, but they didn't change or dilute the program for me. They didn't coddle me or treat me as if I were different. I was, and am, welcome to attend OA meetings and work the program, but the program isn't going to change to suit my particular abuse of food. That is as it should be.

In Alcoholics Anonymous' early days, AA members realized they couldn't save everyone, so they kept their focus on the alcoholic. The same is true in OA, where the primary purpose is to help other compulsive overeaters. That's a pretty large order; it will keep OA plenty busy.

I hope that with the help of my HP and the loving support of my sponsor, some day I will be able to help start an Anorexics Anonymous meeting in my hometown. In the meantime, I will continue to go to OA to recover.

I have so much gratitude for OA's love and support in my life. I'm especially grateful to my home group for keeping the meeting focused on one thing—recovery.

— *Kansas USA*



No More Secrets

I am a compulsive eater and a bulimarexic. I starve myself, binge, and then induce vomiting. For a long time my life was controlled by that cycle; it was so much a part of my everyday life that it didn't seem abnormal to me. I was able to eat whatever I wanted and still keep my weight down. It was my secret; nobody else knew. That was the best part of all. You couldn't tell by looking at me that anything was wrong. In fact, I hid my feelings so well, I even hid them from myself.

My self-worth depended on how much I weighed. The number on the bathroom scale had the power to make or break a whole day of my life—that's part of the insanity people in this program talk about.



I didn't like myself. Worse, I didn't like who I was becoming. It was as if I led two separate lives. The "good me" tried her best to please everyone by being the perfect daughter, wife, mother and friend. The "bad me" compulsively overate, binged, purged, starved, and, at times, resorted to lying, cheating and sneaking—desperately trying to fill an unfillable need. The scary part was when I decided to stop my destructive behavior and found I could not. I was addicted. I knew I needed help.

I had never heard of OA. But through the help of a caring therapist, and admission to an eating disorders unit, I was introduced to Overeaters Anonymous and its Twelve-Step program of recovery. To be honest, I didn't realize the role OA would play in my life.

I was lucky: I had 30 days of abstinence in a controlled environment. But after my hospital release it was up to me.

Continued recovery through OA was my choice. But I was afraid. I didn't have a lot of weight to lose, and wasn't sure I belonged. What would people think of me? What could I say that anyone would want to hear?

Some of those questions were answered when I attended my first meeting, and other answers came in time. What I remember most in the beginning was the phrase, "Keep coming back; you are not alone." I did keep going to meetings. I found unconditional love and nonjudgemental acceptance. No one expected me to understand and practice the Twelve-Step principles all at once. They told me, "One Step at a time, one day at a time." I knew I could do that.

It's been almost a year since I left the eating disorder unit. I've just come out of a month-long relapse that I'd never anticipated. My self-made "OA crown" fell off and I was reminded that I'm human. The difference between now and a year ago is that now I let people know what's happening as it's happening—not after the fact. No more secrets.

I have a deeper belief in the three levels of recovery: physical, emotional and spiritual. If I slip in any of those areas, my program suffers. So I use the tools and reach out to others. HP's will, not mine—that's where it's at for me.

— *California USA*

A Disease of the Soul



For me, bulimia started with an obsession about weight—the feeling that I was much too fat even though I was in a normal range. I had a very distorted body image. I carried an overwhelming sense of shame; much of that came from child abuse.

Out of that shame, I began to diet, which gave me a sense of control. The dieting led to bingeing, and because I could not bear the idea of being fat (I had a horror of it, really) I did whatever I had to do to get rid of the food. I was as addicted to throwing up as I was to dieting.

The symptoms may be different but the recovery is the same. I had to get rid of that sense of shame through Step Four; I had to connect with a Higher Power, and I had to be abstinent. Compulsive overeating, bulimia and anorexia are like different bacteria. You treat them all with the same antibiotic, which is the Twelve Steps. It's all a disease of the soul.

— *Anonymous*

Honest Emotions



When I think I've heard every program saying, I stumble across a new one: "The truth is always the same, but honesty changes with awareness." This has been true for me as I've progressed through the Steps.

I've always taken this program seriously. It was not obesity, but bulimia that brought me into OA. I was quickly killing myself by bingeing and purging. After a close call with death, I jumped into the program with the utter desperation only the dying have.

I immediately bought a Big Book and OA's "Twelve and Twelve." I was determined to work a Step a day until I was well. I figured it would take two weeks, give or take a day. My sponsor suggested I slow down and make sure I did a thorough job. I gladly obliged her—and commenced to work the Twelve Steps in twelve weeks!

But I was disappointed that after careful and rigorous honesty, I was still fighting tooth and claw to keep from bingeing. The Big Book said my compulsion would be removed, but it was still going strong.

On my sponsor's advice, I started over. Humbled, I became willing to take the Steps slower—a month at a time—so I could be well in a year.

That was in 1985. My abstinence came in 1992. The years in between were painful, frustrating and discouraging. I began to wonder if I were one of those poor unfortunates without the capacity to be honest mentioned in "How It Works" (Chapter 5 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 4th ed.). I did the Fourth and Fifth Steps over and over and was honest to the best of my ability. But I still felt no peace. Then my perception of honesty changed.

Throughout all my Fourth Step inventories, I'd been rigorously honest regarding my actions. I carefully catalogued all the harm I'd caused myself and others. On my sponsor's suggestion, I also made positive inventories where I listed all the things I'd done well. But I never once inventoried how I felt.

Disregarding emotions, I used logic and objectivity to define who and what I was. But eventually I realized I was human and therefore an emotional being. Regardless of whether or not the rage, despair, fear, self-pity and sense of isolation I felt inside were "logical," those feelings were there and had to be acknowledged.

Once again I did a Fourth Step. This time my inventory took the form of an autobiography in which I carefully described not only the events that made up the first 28 years of my life, but also the thoughts, feelings and perceptions that went along with them.

As I read this new inventory aloud to my sponsor, I felt shame. I admitted to the pain I experienced as an abused child, even though I felt I was indulging in self-pity by doing so. I was honest at a deeper level than ever before.

After years in the program, after completing umpteen tear-free Fourth and Fifth Steps, I was surprised at the volume of tears that issued forth when I acknowledged my true feelings instead of those I was "supposed" to feel. I was startled by the rage that surfaced as I finally voiced what my drug-addicted older brother had done to me.

The old internal tapes screamed that I had no right to bring him into this—that blaming him would in no way help my recovery. But my sponsor assured me that admitting hurt and anger is not the same as blaming; I needed to own those feelings.

When I finished I was mentally, physically and emotionally exhausted. I slept for 12 hours. But when I awoke I was abstinent, and the compulsion to overeat was gone. Food, I found, is a terrific rage suppressant; I'd used it to bury mine nearly all my life. No wonder I had to dig seven years to find it!

I no longer regret the years I spent struggling with emotional honesty. The results have made the effort worthwhile. I'm wiser, I have serenity, and I know peace. And for the first time in my life, I'm glad to be alive.

— *New Mexico USA*

Do I Belong?

I am a gratefully recovering anorexic and have been in the OA program for just over two years. I have been abstinent for the same length of time and have gained over 30 pounds (14 kg). I'm grateful for OA because the program has given me back my life. I have found freedom, peace of mind and faith in a Higher Power, which before was impossible.

I am anorexic and a compulsive eater, but I have never binged. As Step One and Tradition Three state, I'm powerless over food, my life is unmanageable, and I have a desire to stop eating compulsively. But I am not a compulsive overeater. I have to translate overeating and bingeing into restricting and starving, but I belong in OA. I share the same feelings and emotions, the powerlessness and insanity over food, with everyone else.

Why then does the Fifth Tradition say, "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers? Why is the compulsive overeater continually referred to in literature? Why are all compulsive overeaters invited to make themselves known at the beginning of meetings?

I have become involved in service in my local area. I've helped start three new weekly meetings, and I share and speak regularly. I sponsor anorexics, bulimics and overeaters. We all belong in OA and can find recovery because we are all compulsive about food. I am very conscious that few anorexics here in Ontario find recovery in OA because they are not overeaters and fear rejection.

This issue is not just a question of semantics to me. If I am feeling down, the word overeater can trigger anger, resentment and anxiety within me. I begin to wonder why I'm here, question my program of recovery and feel like an outsider.

I'm grateful to the members of my home meetings, where the term "compulsive overeater" has naturally become "compulsive eater." This makes me feel truly welcome. We are all compulsive, whether overeating, undereating, bingeing or starving. I do belong.

— Ontario, Canada



It Does Work for Bulimia

I am a 39-year-old woman who suffered for 17 years with bulimia. I tried years of therapies and antidepressants. Nothing helped my desire to stop bingeing and purging. I was desperate, but I had nowhere to go. I spoke to a psychiatrist who suggested that I call Overeaters Anonymous. I believed OA was only for people who were overweight or obese. Thank you, God, the person on the phone told me that people who had any kind of eating

disorder, including bulimia, were in recovery. That's all I needed to hear. This Fellowship welcomes anybody who has a serious problem with food. This program is not just a place for people who need to lose a lot of weight. I had a tremendous head sickness that affected me physically, mentally and emotionally.

I have been doing this program for a year. I have completely recovered from bingeing and purging. By not eating sugar, flour and quantities of food, I am able to stay abstinent. I must also add that thousands of people suffer from bulimia. This program will work if you are willing to work the Twelve Steps.

— Massachusetts USA



Not Just for Teens

When I came to OA on January 18, 1988, I was vomiting eight to ten times most days, weighed under 100 pounds (45 kg) and had been bulimic for 22 years. When I haltingly discussed my problem with my family doctor, he looked perplexed and said, "Bulimia? But you're not a teenager!" I replied, "I was a teenager 22 years ago. It just goes on and on." That is, if one doesn't die first.

At that time my life revolved around food, my body size and the numbers on the scale. I had to create inventive ways to get rid of my husband and children in order to binge on incredible quantities of food. If compulsive overeaters think they consumed a huge amount of food before OA, I would challenge them to imagine the possibilities if they were able to binge, vomit and start over again. I think sometimes members who have a great deal of weight to lose think perhaps it is easier for the person who begins the program at or below a healthy weight. As a recovering bulimic, I had to learn to abstain from a colossal amount of food every day. Because my disease didn't show up on my body as excess pounds, there also didn't seem to be any pressing reason to stop this lifestyle, unless you consider that my life was ruled by insanity and I was literally killing myself.

For years before OA, I knew what I was doing was insane and self-destructive, but I was powerless to stop. I had tried psychiatrists, and even hypnosis, with no success. When a counselor led me to OA, I had become convinced I was going to die of what I then felt was my gluttony, but what I later came to know as my disease.

To my amazement, I became abstinent at my very first meeting. However, I have realized that my early abstinence was about finding support to control my food. I maintained a weight of around 100 pounds (45 kg) for 10 months and then went into relapse. This was not an honest weight for me, and my body couldn't maintain it without rigid dieting. Over the next few years, I experienced varying periods of abstinence from compulsive eating and vomiting, but still retained control at 110 to 115 pounds (50 to 52 kg). During this time, I worked the Steps to the best of my ability, got a sponsor, did two Fourth and Fifth Steps, and despite slips and periods of relapse, continued my journey in the direction of recovery. At no time did my slips remotely resemble the eating festivals I indulged in before OA, nor did they give me happiness or gratification. Thank you for that, OA!

On April 6, 1992, I made a breakthrough when I reached bottom and had to admit it was time to turn my will and my life—which included my body-size and weight—over to my Higher Power. It was time for me to allow my Higher Power to decide what I should weigh. I also realized that my abstinence had to have "no vomiting" as its basis. I must be responsible for the food that goes in my mouth. Gradually, over the past years, my weight has leveled out at 120 pounds (54 kg)—a healthy size 7, as opposed to an emaciated size 3.

The plan of eating that works for me is four meals a day, with the flexibility to eat in between if my work schedule demands too long a stretch between meals. I travel a long distance to attend one meeting per week, which I cannot miss if I am to retain my serenity and my abstinence. Most importantly, I have a wonderful sponsor who loves me enough to tell me if a character defect is rearing its ugly head. Her love, kindness and sanity have gently steered me through the Twelve Steps. She has shown me that the answer to my eating disorder, as well as to all of my life's problems, can be found in the Steps. We have laughed together. We have cried together. And, through it all, we have become dear friends.

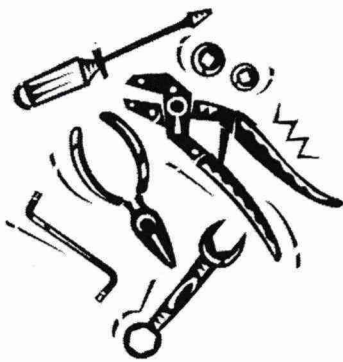
The promises of the program are all coming true for me. I have, for the first time in 44 years, a loving relationship with my family of origin. Because of OA and the Twelve Steps, I have three happy, well-adjusted teenagers. My dear husband, who has stuck with me through the hell of bulimia, is finally able to relax and live for his own needs, instead of perpetually trying to save a wife bent on self-destruction.

Just for today I am abstinent from compulsive overeating and vomiting; I am growing emotionally with the help of my sponsor; I have a belief in and a relationship with my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God. I am grateful to the Fellowship of OA for giving me a life.

— Canada



Get all of the right tools



Tools for Life

I'm writing to let others know the OA program works. I came into OA a wreck—physically, emotionally and spiritually. I was a bulimic who continued to binge and purge despite many promises to myself and others to stop. I beat myself up for it each time. I continued punishing myself the way my father had punished me when I was growing up. Although I knew what I was doing, it wasn't enough to make me stop.

I cried through many OA meetings. I could not believe anyone knew how I felt. For too long I had felt alone and ashamed of not being able to eat normally, of stealing food, of eating out of garbage cans, of being so full I couldn't breathe. I was ashamed of the vomiting, laxatives and overexercise. In OA, I heard my story repeated many times. People there loved me until I could love myself. It took almost a year for me to stop purging and another few months to stop bingeing. I

had to learn to accept my body for what it was, rather than force it to fit a certain ideal. I can't say I am cured, but I am better.

OA taught me how to live. While growing up, I did not receive the tools I needed to live as an adult. By following the Steps and talking with a sponsor and other members, I learned how to handle situations differently. I still make mistakes, but I can follow up appropriately. I don't remember caring about others and wanting to be there for them before I came to OA. I am now a counselor. I came to OA for the food, but I stay for the sanity and serenity.

I am married now and have a wonderful child. I am grateful for having a Higher Power I can turn to, a supportive husband, a sweet and empathetic child, a good sponsor, good friends, loving meetings, a job that supports me, freedom from food obsession and the belief that I won't be given more than I can handle.

Thank you, everyone, for being there until I could be there for myself.

— *Anonymous*

Bright Lights of OA

My anorexic/bulimic mind kept me from Overeaters Anonymous for a long time because I thought it meant "Overweights Anonymous."

As a child, I refused to eat for days at a time—until I found sweets and bingeing. Like many anorexic/bulimic people, I was an overachiever. I debuted in a Broadway show at 21 and traveled with the jet set during my three years in stage and film. Eventually the overwork, overexercise, overeating and starving cut my feet from under me. Injuries prevented me from using exercise to purge, and I turned to vomiting.

An obese friend joined OA, but I didn't think it was for me because I was not overweight. A 5-foot-9-inch (175-cm) man, I weighed 118 pounds (54 kg). Later I went down to 108 (49 kg) and thought, "I'm almost rid of my potbelly." After I binged, I would think, "I'm glad that's over; I'll never do that again," only to find myself rummaging through cupboards at 3 a.m. looking for something to fill that hole inside that told me life was empty and meaningless. I would starve myself for days. This cycle went on endlessly.

One day my OA friend called, and by this time she was healthy. I told her about my secret life. She said I would be welcome at OA meetings. Unlike in my performing career, I was not an immediate success in OA (probably because this program requires humility, a quality unfamiliar to me). People feared for my life.

I finally surrendered to my Higher Power, worked the Steps and started helping others. This gave me a new life. My OA friends have supported me all the way. I have had seven years of healthy eating, normal weight and freedom from bingeing, vomiting, starving and overexercise. The gift of abstinence remained even through five surgeries on tendons that were strained and damaged by muscle wasting (a side effect of being underweight).

Gone are the glittering lights of Broadway and Hollywood, but God's light has replaced them. Today I am back in university and spending my spare time helping sponsees work the Steps. This program has given me a daily reprieve and the absolute certainty that my life is a success if I abstain from compulsive eating today. Thank you, OA, for welcoming all compulsive eaters.

— *Ontario, Canada*



HANG ON...

HELP IS ON THE WAY!

Life's Choices

I've often heard that we can be sure of only two things in life: taxes and death. Just as surely as we are born, we are also going to die. My

compulsive personality also believed: Why should I deny myself the satisfaction of bulimia or overeating? What difference does it make, since I am going to die anyway? I used other clichés, such as "death by chocolate" and "I'd rather live dangerously and die in my prime than live to be old and helpless."

I came to OA believing my life could not be any other way than filled with bingeing, purging and dieting. I just wanted to control it. Then I saw life as people in recovery lived it. Those with abstinence know peace and serenity. They focus on living rather than on defying or rationalizing death.

I will face death like anyone else. However, I can choose how I will live until my Higher Power calls me. By choosing how I will live my remaining days, I may also be choosing how I will die, or at least I am decreasing my chances of dying from complications of bulimia or obesity.

I am grateful to the tools and Steps of the OA program. Before OA I didn't believe I had many choices. Now, through the grace of my Higher Power, I have hope, strength and recovery from this baffling, cunning and deadly disease. I'm learning to believe I have a life worth living.

— *Pennsylvania USA*

It Happened One Summer

My eating problem became apparent when I was a freshman in high school. I started as an anorexic, feeling power in not eating and receiving attention for my weight loss. I was 5 feet 2 inches (158 cm), and my lowest weight was 95 pounds (43 kg).

The summer after my junior year, I began bingeing and vomiting. I felt forced into adulthood. Not only did I start having sex, but I also received my driver's license and found my first job. I didn't have anyone to talk to about the changes affecting me and the frightening thoughts accompanying them, so I sought numbing comfort in food.

Since I could not accept being overweight, I vomited to avoid gaining weight. I started slowly, bingeing and vomiting about once a month, but after many years I was doing it 10 to 12 times a day. That lasted 10 years. At first I thought I could stop anytime I wanted; I just didn't want to. Then the time came when I wanted to and could not.

I had been in counseling since I began vomiting at 16. I thought if I could figure out why I was doing it, I'd stop. I didn't learn until after I had stopped that I needed to quit using food before I could deal with my feelings and issues.

I tried OA when I graduated from college but did not think I had anything in common with "those people" because they were overweight and I wasn't. I went back occasionally for four years but never stayed long enough to find out how it worked. Looking back, I see I wasn't ready.

After I hit the bottom of all bottoms—bankruptcy, repossession of my car and bingeing on mayonnaise because I had no money for other food—I spent time with a recovering alcoholic who shared his AA program with me. I knew if AA worked for him, OA could work for me.

I began going to meetings regularly and after five months committed to stop throwing up. That meant I had to learn to be abstinent if I didn't want to gain weight.

I began following a food plan and found a food sponsor. For seven months I called her every morning. When she couldn't sponsor anymore, I thought I would lose my abstinence, but I didn't. God was gently taking away my crutch. I found another sponsor, but I didn't call in my food every day.

I have been gratefully abstinent for seven years and am married to a wonderful man. I never thought the time would come when I could cook, have food in my house, eat almost anything and have a life. I eat to live now; I don't live to eat. I find too many other wonderful things to do, see and learn.

My life is not always happy. As I write this, I'm struggling to let go of the control I have taken back with my weight. I've lost about 10 pounds (5 kg) in the last two years, and I don't want to gain it back. I know I have to give my weight back to God or I will lose my abstinence. Reading the Big Book helps, as do phone calls, meetings, literature, writing, sponsors and all the other tools—when I use them.

Above all, I am here to perform the role God assigns me. Every time I get back in the driver's seat, I'm headed for trouble, but he is always there to help me when I let him.

— *Wisconsin USA*

