

# Society Pages

Convention Dates:  
November 5, 6, 7 2004

the  
newsletter of

**Unity Intergroup**  
- Overeaters Anonymous

## Convention's Coming!

There is a transforming energy that comes from sitting in a room with hundreds of other OA members. When we come together at convention to hear speakers and share our experience, strength, and hope we can see clearly that we are not alone and recovery is within our grasp. Newcomers and old-timers alike can take in the power of the message that together we can do what we could never do alone.

Helping to plan the MN State Convention is a gift to my program. To reach the still suffering compulsive overeater is the primary purpose of our fellowship. I am looking forward to meeting fellow OA members from around the state, region and country and to extending the hand of unity and recovery - also the chance to exchange ideas about working the steps, daily practice, tools and the freedom the OA program offers from the grip of our disease. It is an inspiration to hear from others I wouldn't see or meet anywhere but the convention. It's also a place of fun and laughter in a supportive and affirming environment.

Working with Victoria as co-chair of outreach also strengthens my program. We share a common disease and a common solution, yet each of us works our program differently. This gives me the gift of gaining insight into other ways of working the program and keeping an open mind to all of the ways the twelve steps and twelve traditions can be applied to personal recovery. It is my hope that these messages of recovery will encourage you and everyone who reads them to participate in our upcoming convention!

— Sarah S.,  
Outreach Co-Chair

The voices of recovery in this 'Special Edition' of *Society Pages* speak to our common disease, and help bring the solution alive. These stories are a call to convention, our annual gathering of OA's who have found a way out of the hell of compulsive eating, and those still seeking a way out. Convention is big and rich while still being 'up close and personal' in ways the written word cannot be, and that is its unique power.

While we all share a common solution, there are many ways of working the OA program and convention brims over with them. So it gives me another chance to practice the program principle of open-mindedness. This has been an essential ingredient in my fifteen year OA

friendship with Sarah S., my Co-Chair of Convention Outreach, given the very different ways we work our programs (I work a HOW program, Sarah does not). Our differences have been a source of growth rather than discord. Most important, Sarah's abstinence strengthens mine. I need her.

Convention offers each one of us countless opportunities to take our own personal recoveries to the next level, and the chance to 'pass it on' to a struggling food addict who might need to hear exactly what you, or I, have to share. It's also a chance to ask others about what's working for them. So save the dates!

— Victoria V.,  
Outreach Co-Chair

**Special  
Convention Issue**  
**"There is  
a  
Solution"**

**Sarah S. & Victoria V.**  
**Guest Editors**

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# ... A Turning Point ...

My name is Grace and I am a food addict. I have been, I think, since I was about 8 or 9 but I was very tiny and never gained weight so I continued to eat anything I wanted. When I was 16 or 17 I began to gain weight but it was still manageable, so I ate. My dad was an alcoholic and had an anger problem that came out in physical abuse, so I ate to escape the fear and hurt.

I got married and left home when I was 18 and continued to eat and gain weight. Then I began my dieting roller coaster for 28 more years. I tried everything. I also went to OA and lost the weight but I stopped going and gained it all back plus more. I went to lose weight, not get recovery. Finally after carrying 200 pounds on my 5-foot frame I became desperate. I had high blood pressure, anxiety disorder, swollen ankles, and hated myself. Once again I walked into the doors of OA, this time in Montana. I found a food plan and a sponsor. I began working the steps. Then we moved to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I attend meetings in Sioux Falls still today. It is a wonderful group with recovery there.

I was invited to the 2002 convention in Minneapolis and it hit me like a ton of bricks! Recovery was all around me with excitement and hope on every face. I saw and heard things that changed my life at that convention. I was introduced to the Big Book in a way I had never heard

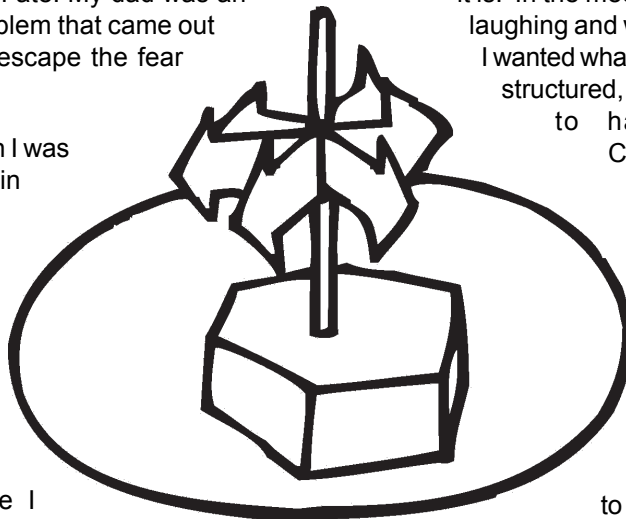
before. It was the text of recovery and didn't mince words. The speakers spoke with such confidence and serenity. They shared that this is a deadly disease and that it will kill me. It made me see the disease for the horror it is. In the meetings I heard people cheering and laughing and when I saw the sponsor line I cried. I wanted what these people had. I needed a more structured, accountable program if I was going to have long term abstinence.

Convention that year was a turning point. I came away with so much. I got the kick in the butt I needed and felt charged beyond explanation. I was so excited that when I got home, I took that excitement to my meetings. I remember someone in the meeting said to those of us that went to the convention, "Something happened to you guys up there." I had changed.

I am so grateful that I went to the convention. I went the next year and had an awesome time. I took part in the program and became more involved renewing old friendships and making new ones. I am so blessed to have gone and I can't wait until this year's convention!

Today I have 23 months of abstinence and am maintaining a 79-pound weight loss. This time I have recovery and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

— Grace L.



**Did you know that our OA State Convention welcomes compulsive eaters from all around the country?**



## Make New Friends, and Keep the Old

Join us for fellowship and social time in the hotel hospitality suite. The exact location will be listed at the convention.

Tea, coffee, pop and water will be available. Thanks to **Northern Serenity OA Intergroup in Duluth** for hosting the hospitality suite - we appreciate your service!



# Reaching Out the Hand of OA to Those Who Still Suffer

Last year at the convention people from all over the United States came together for a weekend of recovery. The record number of attendees demonstrated the need to continue to practice twelve step work by carrying the message that there is a solution and that recovery is possible to the many who still suffer.

Convention offers unique opportunities to reach out to the still suffering over-eater, which is the primary purpose of our fellowship. It would be wonderful if everyone who attended last year's convention would reach out to someone still suffering from our disease and invite him or her to this year's convention. We have learned from the Big Book stories that sharing one's own experience, strength, and hope has more potential impact than anything else we might offer to the still suffering compulsive eater. Your gentle words of encouragement and non-intrusive message can be someone's lifeline to recovery. In recovery we have learned that there is not an easier, softer way. Sharing the truths of the program can touch or change someone's life and is an invaluable service.

Our stories are the same. Both of us came to OA through loved ones who recognized that the disease and tenderly shared the program. We both agree that we are so very grateful to those who were willing to share with us about OA. If they had not, we would not be experiencing three-level recovery today—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

On behalf of the Convention Steering Committee and all the OA fellowship, we invite you to experience a weekend that will help you and those you bring to experience the hope of being happy, joyous and free one day at a time and to deepen your own conviction that *there is a solution!*

In love and service,  
— Barbara TW  
2004 Convention Chair

— Lupe  
Co-Chair

## Interested in service opportunities?

We are in need of over **100 volunteers** to help out in various capacities at the convention.

**Please contact**

**Eileen:** 651-688-9373 or **Sheryl:** 651-786-0461

# An Aversion to Service

Growing up in a large family, I had a tendency to avoid doing work that did not directly benefit my own interests. Whether it was washing the dishes or babysitting a younger sibling, I had no interest in doing work that I wouldn't be compensated for in some form. These same feelings of apathy could be transferred to charity work. While I knew that community service could be very beneficial to those who are less fortunate than I was, I still felt like I was being forced to help others.

When I came to OA, I was very skeptical of the service portion of the program. I did not see how helping others had anything to do with me losing weight, and I quickly felt like I was a child being forced to do work that wouldn't have any effect on me personally.

While I was hesitant to serve others at first, I placed my trust in my higher power, and hoped that serving others would no longer feel like a chore. At first I had mixed feelings about the experience; I knew I was helping others, but I still felt like the service portion of the program was a burden.

After a few weeks I noticed that my energy level was higher, and I was generally in a very good mood. I realized that through serving others, I was giving back to a program that had benefited me in miraculous ways I cannot describe. This felt good.

Through my experience with OA, there have been numerous people who have been willing to help me with every aspect of my life. I was happy to learn that I could help others in the same way I have been helped, and that being of service released me from the bondage of self-absorption. In sharing my personal experiences with others, I could relate to those who are struggling with the program, and offer hope that it does work. In helping out at the meeting I make it possible for others to hear the life-changing message.

Most of us experience doubts when we are trying to make a significant change in lifestyle; helping others find their way through this change is one of the reasons this program works. Hearing words like 'service' used to make me feel trapped into doing something I did not like, but this program has helped me realize that this way of thinking is childish. It kept me trapped in the self-centeredness I long to escape. I now know that if I strive to help others as much as I have been helped, this program can be successful for anybody who has struggled with compulsive overeating.

— Eileen, Co-Chair,  
Convention Volunteers

**"I put my hand in yours and together we can do what we could never do alone."**

**- Rosanne,  
OA Founder**



# Compare, or Identify?

From the story, "A Flower of the South" in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* it reads, "I wish I could tell you how and why AA (or in my case OA) works, but I don't know. I only know it does — if you desire it with your whole heart and without reservation" (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p.384).

When I came to OA I did have a desire. At the time I was binge eating daily until I passed out. It had not always been that way. There were times when I would just binge once in awhile. This seemed normal to me. Didn't everyone eat like this? For years I played games with my overeating, never wanting to stop and look at what I was doing to myself. My life seemed good enough. I was a homeowner, I had a six-figure income, I had friends, and I even went to church on occasion. I was normal — I just had a little problem with food and if I could figure this thing out I would be fine. So I had to try everything. I even tried acupuncture, special herbs, and visualization therapy. I was a wreck on the inside but to friends and family I seemed happy. I worked hard to keep a smile on my face because inside I was crumbling. The more weight I gained the more I crumbled. But how was I going to stop?

Thankfully I met someone who told me about OA. They explained that it was a 12-Step program that focused on emotional, physical, and spiritual recovery. So I went to a meeting. I had no idea that my life was about to change. I had my reservations about this program. Could I really do this? Plus the fact that I only saw one other African-American in the room didn't help. How could I fit in? These people and I have nothing in common. Then I listened to what they had to say about our illness. An ILLNESS! You mean I am sick? I kept going to meetings and I even got a sponsor because these people had something I wanted. Not only did they have weight loss but also looked peaceful—happy. I had been thin before but I was never truly happy with my life. They had what I wanted.

Then came time for the 2003 OA Convention. There was a speaker from Florida, one from California, and many local speakers. The one thing they all had in common was a solution. The solution was in the rooms of OA. I finally understood what the Big Book means when it says, "We are people who normally would not mix. But there exists among us a fellowship, a friendliness,

***"Among them you will make lifelong friends. You will be bound to them with new and wonderful ties, for you will escape disaster together and you will commence shoulder to shoulder your common journey."***

***— Alcoholics Anonymous  
3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., pp.152-153***

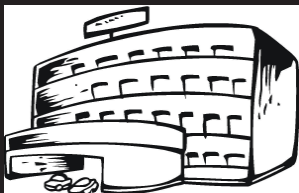
and an understanding which is indescribably wonderful." I felt that connection at convention and even more so now at my meetings. It does not matter what my background, race, sex, religion or financial status is. It never has. My disease is an equal opportunity employer and it will destroy me if I choose to let it. What I heard from those speakers was that recovery is a daily choice, a commitment. The speakers not only shared their pain and struggle but they also shared years and years of recovery. Recovery that happened one day at a time. The convention gave me hope.

**— Tracey A.**

***The convention will be held at the Hilton Minneapolis North.***

**For Hotel Information call:  
763-566-8000 / 800-445-8667**

Hilton Hotel amenities include: swimming pool, whirlpool, sauna and 7 miles of walking trails next to the hotel.



## About Lodging

### **Menus at the convention:**

Menus for planned OA convention meals will be available with the registration form.

For further information about meals at the hotel restaurants call the Minneapolis North Hilton.

If you bring food to the convention please bring a cooler, as there are no refrigerators available. Ice can be obtained at the hotel.

### **Other lodging near by if the Hilton is full:**

#### **AmericInn Lodge & Suites**

within walking distance of the convention

**For Hotel Information call:  
763-566-7500 / 800-634-3444**

#### **Baymont Inns & Suites -**

transportation needed

**For Hotel Information call:  
763-561-8400 / 800-301-0200**

#### **Super 8 Motel**

transportation needed

**For Hotel Information call:  
763-566-9810 / 800-800-8000**

# Finding the Solution Through Stories of Those Who Share My Disease

“Our stories disclose in a general way, what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pg 58). From that first meeting between a newly sober Ebby, telling Bill W. how he had gotten sober, stories have been the foundation stone for all who recover in hundreds of Twelve Step groups and thousands of meetings around the world. For me, personal stories are the power of recovery. Stories are the mirror by which I am shown clearly what food and addiction blurred for so much of my life. Stories are where I could identify with the dark recesses of another addict’s mind which only someone who had lived in those dark recesses could possibly know.

I spent years tortured by an addiction to food. I felt completely alone. When I finally asked for help, I was encouraged to attend an OA meeting. It was at that first

**“I spent years tortured by an addiction to food.”**

meeting where I reached out, that someone extended help by sharing their story with me. In their story I heard familiar pieces of my own story that I could identify with: the insanity that comes from taking that first bite, and the unrelenting obsession and, the inability to stop eating compulsively. The details were irrelevant. What was at the heart of the

story was that I too, was a compulsive overeater. It was by listening to stories that I came to understand what my problem was: *I too was powerless over food, and my life with respect to food was unmanageable.*

I had a desire to stop eating compulsively and was desperate to know how to stop. I didn’t want to be tortured by food anymore. From the depths of despair I needed to be shown a way out. I felt I had been rescued at sea and was now ready to be on land. I needed to be shown a solution. How could my madness be stopped? I could not have one more failed attempt at weight loss; my very sanity and survival were at stake!

Abstinence would be my first step toward freedom. I needed to be told what abstinence was. An OA convention keynote speaker, with over a decade of back to back abstinence and weight maintenance, defined abstinence as something like, “eating food in amounts sufficient to maintain a *healthy* body weight.” Bingo! Overeating, even in small amounts, wasn’t abstinence!

I wanted recovery to be long lasting. I needed to be shown hope that long term abstinence, through all life has to offer, was possible. I needed to be shown how to follow a “design for living that works in rough going” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p 15). It was the stories of people living through the triumphs and trials of life without returning to the comfort food that I needed to hear.

Recovery begins the moment one addict tells another of their own seemingly hopelessness and offers hope that they too can find freedom. From Alcoholics Anonymous, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., p 25:

*There is a solution.* Almost none of us like the self-searching, the leveling of our pride, the confession of shortcoming which the process requires for its successful consummation. We saw that it really worked in others, and we had come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of life as we had been living it. When therefore approached by those in whom the problem had been solved, there was nothing left for us but to pick up the simple kit of spiritual tools laid at our feet.

Please join us at the OA 2004 Convention to hear the richness of our stories and the promise of a new life!

—Kristie M.,  
Co. Chair, Convention Program

**“If I knew what to do to arrest my illness, I wouldn’t be here. Recovery requires a change of ways, a willingness to go to any length. I need to ask directions: How do I stay abstinent? How do I avoid becoming obsessed with diet and weight loss?”**

— OA’s For Today p.188

# Showtime !!



An unforgettable highlight of Convention is an original production which is created around recovery themes and personal experience with compulsive eating, which is presented on Saturday night. "Together we can do what we could not do alone" are true words not only for our recovery but also for the creation of our annual Minnesota State OA Convention musical. If you would like to be involved in any capacity, we would be grateful for your service, whether you enjoy making props, stage managing, operating sound equipment, running a stage crew, acting, singing, dancing, playing an instrument or helping write the script (this can be writing from your own recovery journal, poetry, or part of your story in recovering from this disease that you write and share).



We take tradition eight to heart: Overeaters Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, which means the *only* qualification you need is an interest, a desire, and a passion to help create this year's show. It's an incredible experience and we hope you'll join us! We've been told our last two productions touched people in powerful ways and brought much joy and "been there, done that" laughter to our compulsive overeater audience. It's a chance to make new friends in recovery, and celebrate the freedom recovery brings to enjoy things we never imagined would be possible (like deciding you're *not* too old to dance on stage for the first time in your life no matter what your age!).

**For more information,** please contact Cathy G:  
cathy\_gasiorowicz@jackmorton.com  
home phone: (612) 728-3983

Today is a day to be grateful. I am so aware of the gifts that come with abstinence, the clarity of thinking and of the grace that follows surrender to my Higher Power. The profound nature of the recovery from food addiction that I experience today is unlike anything I have attempted so many times on my own. The very essence of my program, as I practice these principles in all my affairs takes me to a place where love and service are mine both to give and receive. When I began my journey of abstinence almost three years ago, I could not see then the many opportunities God would give me to offer service in this fellowship, and carry the message of our common solution. Thank God my sponsor led the way in a program *based* in service and showed me by example how it could be a joy, honor and privilege to serve in any capacity.

That is what nudged me into becoming a part of the entertainment committee for the 2002 and 2003 State OA Conventions. Little did I know how I would stretch and grow in recovery. Working with a wonderful group of abstinent men and women, we came together to write and produce a show that would hopefully lift and elevate, reveal and educate, our fellow food addicts. The gifts we



## Finding the Freedom to Sing, Dance, and Celebrate

were given, as each show seemed to come together despite obstacles and stumblings were amazing to me. The contributions of writings, ideas, choreography, and songs from the fellowship were inspired and allowed each show to develop a wonderful script. Music and dance came together in a powerful and amazing way. Even though I would be nervous (OK, shaking in my shoes) before each show, I also felt we were carried along by a Power greater than ourselves, so that we might share our experience and strength. To carry a message of hope with humor is a glorious thing.

I have been extraordinarily grateful to the boundless creativity and efforts of each of the cast and crew, especially Cathy G. and Shelley D., whose heartfelt need to carry the joyful news of recovery shines through them. I hope all who may get the nudge to be part of the entertainment this year will heed the call and take the plunge. We need each other.

***"But we aren't a glum lot. If newcomers could see no joy or fun in our existence, they wouldn't want it. We absolutely insist on enjoying life."***

***- Alcoholics Anonymous 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p.132***

— Janice M.P.

# Where Did Convention Come From?



I went to my first OA meeting in October of 1978. My earliest memory of attending the State convention was in 1980. I believe that OA began in Minnesota in 1970 and the first convention was several years after that. The North Star Central Service Office (NSCSO) was organized in 1976 and about 125 people attended the NSCSO organizational meeting. The purpose of NSCSO was to serve all the OA groups in the state of Minnesota. The smaller intergroups began in the mid 1980's. My understanding is that the convention committees functioned independently of any intergroup until Unity Intergroup was formed in 2001. At that time Unity Intergroup decided to include the convention as part of intergroup business.

The convention location has rotated to locations around the Twin Cities and has been held at the Minneapolis Hilton North since convention 2000. Attendance figures have varied throughout the years with last year's convention having a total attendance of 349 people, 26 of whom were from other states. This was the highest attendance in many years and the committee this year hopes to increase that number.

I have attended most of the conventions since 1980 and have always gotten something out of them. We have had a great many speakers over the years. It is a wonderful opportunity to renew your program. Newcomers can begin or reinforce their recovery at the November convention. The theme "There is a solution..." is available to everyone.

— Etta, Chair  
2004 Unity Intergroup

# The Way It Was Convention Reflections of an OA Oldtimer

## **October Snow Blizzard**

One of my fondest memories was making it out of St. Paul to join the folks marooned in a Bloomington hotel by a record Halloween snow fall. A friend and I made it to our Saturday meeting without too much effort, so it was easy to decide that we could get out beyond the airport to join whoever might have arrived early enough or had courage enough to brave the effects of the snow storm.

When we arrived we were greeted by a band of kindred spirits who were enjoying the cozy warmth of the hotel and the immense support of friendly fellow compulsives. It felt special, almost holy. The sharing as usual was spectacular and the effort of trekking through mother nature's brilliant, white dump was richly rewarded.

## **Telling My Story**

The first time I shared my story outside of my home group I remember being particularly nervous, even anxious. Who were these people, and why were they listening so attentively? As my story unraveled I was amazed at the details that emerged. I recalled and spoke of things I had not planned nor even thought of sharing. When it was over I was empty yet full. The audience was so open and non-judging. There was nothing that I would not have shared. The pitches that followed provided deeper insights as my fellow addicts shared their stories. We just kept giving each other permission to dig deeper, and to understand more about our compulsive eating and ourselves.

## **Being Hugged and Affirmed**

As I approach my twentieth year in OA I think one of the greatest gifts is the many wonderful people I have met. AND so many of them find their way to the convention each year. The convention then becomes for me a rite of fall, an annual refreshing of friendships with so many wonderful compatriots I have made in recovery. AND the hugs are just plain wonderful!

## **Meeting a True Variety of Fellow Travelers**

Short, tall, lean and wide. Folks of every skin tone and accent. All of a single mind, wanting to become willing to say yes!! to a program of recovery. There are moments when the program seems simple and uncomplicated, especially when you're sharing with someone who "just gets it!" And then there is amazement when others, in spite of years of effort, find themselves clinging to a simple promise, "Keep coming back, it works."

## **Wanting to Impress only to Get SO MUCH MORE**

I remember a convention when I had been asked to speak AND I was pretty sure I had some important things to say. My ego was pumped for the occasion.

Forget that!! Fortunately it didn't take long to remember that it is our stories shared and not my brilliance delivery that helps me walk the path of recovery.

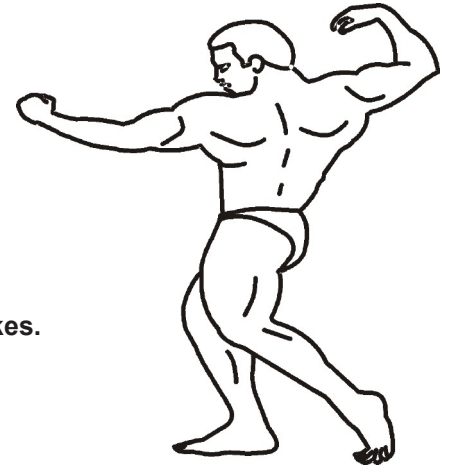
Thanks for this opportunity.

— Peace and Serenity, Charlie G.

**"As I approach my twentieth year in OA I think one of the greatest gifts is the many wonderful people I have met. AND so many of them find their way to the convention each year. "**

# Real Men Don't Overeat

Deep down, like most guys, I considered myself fairly macho:  
Tough, unafraid, authoritative.  
Go out with the guys, have a few beers.  
Watch the Vikings on Sunday.  
Sure, I believed in women's rights and equality.  
But the male ego was near bursting at the seams.  
Real men don't show emotion, don't have problems, don't make mistakes.  
Real men didn't harbor the secret I had, this insane need to eat  
until I felt like I was about to explode.



At least that's what I thought.

## ***I am a man who avoided Overeaters Anonymous until I ran out of options.***

Like most guys, I did not like to admit I was imperfect, and that I had a serious problem with my weight.

It was only after decades of yo-yo dieting that I even dared to show up at a Weight Watchers meeting. Like most such meetings, it was mainly women, and it was a bit uncomfortable being one of a handful of guys in the room.

Once I lost my weight I continued to overeat, in fact, that's when my overeating really took off. Real guys lift weights, so I upped my body building regime along with excessive running to keep off the weight because my eating was out of control.

I hesitated to tell my buddies what I was doing to myself. Real men don't talk about such things.

Heck, how many movies have you seen where some big tough guy, swaggers into a restaurant, and chows down so much food it would make a normal person gasp?

## ***Real men don't overeat.***

What changed my mind were some OA meetings I attended nearly two years ago. There I heard dozens of stories, many of them like mine. I found a handful of other real men who gave wild accounts of overeating, some of

which were more bizarre than my stories. Even in recovery, real men like to compete: Can you top this one?

## ***My wife first encouraged me to go to OA.***

As a man, getting used to being in a room full of recovering overeaters when most of them are women takes some getting used to, to paraphrase something Yogi Berra should have said. I was desperate for some relief from the pain I felt. I needed to escape that nightly nightmare of stuffing myself, and if it took a meeting of mostly women so be it.

I also attended my first Minnesota OA Convention last November and I found it to be a good introduction to the program. Their stories for the most part were my stories.

I believe we need a lot more men in the rooms. According to the American Obesity Association, 67 percent of men in the United States are overweight, compared to 62 percent of women. Women are more obese than us men, but not by much—34 percent of women and 27.7 percent of men.

If it wasn't for the recovery I have experienced in OA, I am pretty sure I'd be one of those 27.7 percent.

— Randy

***"I hesitated to tell my buddies what I was doing to myself. Real men don't talk about such things."***

***"These men had found something brand new in life. Though they knew they must help other compulsive eaters if they would remain abstinent, that motive became secondary. It was transcended by the happiness they found in giving themselves for others."***

—*Alcoholics Anonymous 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p. 15 (adapted for compulsive overeaters).*