



Beating Binge Eating: a Life-Changing Journey

By Lynn K

I remember first feeling out of control with my eating in my early 20s while in an abusive relationship. Taunted by my abuser and bullied into what felt like endless wagers around my losing weight, my self-esteem took a beating that didn't leave a physical mark. Getting out, I was determined to never be a victim again. The world and its opportunities were mine for the taking, why was I now struggling to get the food under control? I thought that once I was out of the relationship and the trauma, through willpower, I could take back control over my portions as I had enjoyed earlier. I longed to regain my figure, but my compulsion grew along with my obsession with the scale and body image.

Over the course of the next twelve years, vain attempts to control my eating were characterized by countless diets, over-exercising to “work off” the weight, and attempting to eat things that I now call my “alcoholic” foods like a normal eater -- only to binge again.

In 2003, I was desperately unhappy. My husband told me he bet there was a 12-step program for people who had problems with food; I was skeptical (and irritated he would suggest it) but found a meeting at Overeaters Anonymous (OA) and, to my surprise, felt at home. For the first time, I heard admitting my powerlessness over food was instrumental to my recovery. I didn't have to rely on my own (unreliable) willpower, and I didn't have to do it alone. I got a sponsor, attended meetings, and worked OA's 12 Steps. I lost excess weight and began maintaining a healthy body size. Soon after, I took the opportunity to be of service to the fellowship, which had given me an even better life than the one I came in with. Service has been an instrumental part of my OA journey; I can't imagine my life without it.

On Easter Sunday, 2004, my mother suffered a devastating allergic reaction while undergoing a medical procedure. In what seemed like an instant, she went from being the active, loving (and sometimes frustrating) matriarch of our family, into a fragile patient. She was first in and then out of a coma, then locked into a persistent vegetative state. Her condition was terminal. Our family was rocked to its core.

What I found in OA during that time was unending support and unconditional love; people were willing to let me talk through what I was experiencing -- without judgment. Most importantly, the 12 Steps offered a tangible way to process what was happening and to focus my energy on being part of the solution -- or at least not part of the problem. I was able to look past how the situation impacted me and be of service to my family and others. Attitudes about my priorities were tested along the way. Sure, it was easy to say family came first, but what would I do when doctors called for a meeting? It would mean my job had to wait. I had to trust that doing the right thing was the right thing to do based on principles, regardless of the outcome or what others might think of me for doing so.

In the midst of all of this, I was grateful I had no desire to stuff my feelings down with food -- something that, even today, I look at as a miracle. Second helpings for me have always been a gateway to binge eating, and therefore, as part of my abstinence, I do not partake in second helpings. One night after a hospital visit, my family sat down for dinner, for which my sister had made a family favorite -- with enough for leftovers. I found myself

absent-mindedly wandering over to the stove for what could have been another serving and potentially a binge. To some, it may seem trivial, but to the compulsive eater, it was a potential, eventual death sentence. I literally dropped the serving spoon back into the pot as if it had burned me. This is the sanity referred to in Step II: the awareness that this second helping was not only not necessary but had the potential to put me right back into the binge, diverting focus off everything important and positive in my life and onto satisfying a craving. A craving that would kick off an unceasing chase for ease and comfort through excess food, which I had arrested through the 12-step program of recovery.

The 12 Steps helped me accept and grieve my mother's passing -- they were needed to process the trauma of her accident, which has enabled my healing. I attribute the way of life I found in OA to the underlying principles found in the steps of OA -- and people I met in the fellowship who were modeling the principles in their own lives.

Several years ago, I found myself feeling "stuck" through crippling anxiety attacks that manifested in my work life. I knew the answers and what I was "sup-

posed to do," but seemingly didn't have the power to act. With an open mind, I was open and willing to work with two wonderful therapists who assisted me in diagnosing PTSD and processing my traumatic experiences. The experience was transformative. I remain willing to do whatever is needed and am open to other modalities to help me access the power of the Steps and deepen my relationship with my higher power. I consider it a privilege to walk the road of recovery from compulsive eating with other trauma survivors. Today, I need not focus as much on why I am a compulsive eater but on what I am willing to do today to recover. In the fellowship, we focus our work on the Steps. I am neither a counselor nor a therapist, but I am willing to share my own trauma-informed experience as part of my service to others.

I am grateful to the fellowship and OA members throughout California and Region 2, having met so many wonderful people through working the steps and doing service at all levels; I have friends all over the world in OA. I hope that my commitment to applying my God-given gifts and talents to this wonderful organization never wavers.

