

The Westchester

# Serenity Times

Brought to you by Westchester United Intergroup

## Letter from your editor:

Welcome to the *Body Image* edition of the *Serenity Times*. In this issue, local OA members graciously share their experience, strength and hope on recovering from negative body image.

As the weather gets warmer, I can't help but think about my body with greater attention. In the winter, it's easy to bundle up in a huge coat and hide myself, which is what I've done since I was a teenager, but in the spring, there is nowhere to hide. I have to consider wearing shorts, which I didn't do for years before I came into OA, and other more revealing items of clothing. It is always scary at first, but with the help of OA, I've been able to wear things I never imagined - even bathing suits! - without shame.

My body image issues have also come up again, because I've been struggling with relapse over the past few months. When I was abstinent for a year, I got used to fitting into the same jeans day after day. Now I'm again questioning what I can wear each morning. Relapse has also made me question how I define myself on a daily basis. Am I the body with an extra fifteen pounds? Am I the body that was underweight for the past year? I used to believe that thin meant that I was a healthy person with strong self-will; It meant I had my life together. Now I'm questioning whether my body really says anything about who I am as a person. If I'm struggling and have extra weight, does that mean God loves me any less? Am I less worthy of love and acceptance, or in more need of them?

No matter if I'm abstinent or not though, I've kept coming to meetings. Staying connected truly makes each day an opportunity to be back on the path of recovery. God is always available whenever I reach out. The fact that I still have a place to go and people who care, gives me greater solace and gratitude than I ever could have imagined finding in my life.

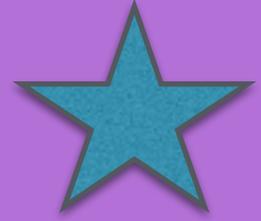
## Letter to My Body

*From the Tuesday Night Pleasantville Body Image Meeting*

To my body,

I am sorry for always abusing you with substances: food, diet coke, cigarettes, booze, drugs. I want us to be friends. I want us to be on the same side. I want to stop declaring war on you. You have carried me well. You were beautiful when I was young and I was too sick to see that. I hated pictures of you. Now, as I get older, I see that those younger years were gifts. You gave me two healthy sons. You got me to 51 years old. That is a beautiful thing. Please know that I will stop the abuse. I will be kind and loving as we move forward.

~ Elena K.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Saturday, April 8:**  
Region 6 Spring Assembly in Albany
- **April 21-23, WUIG**  
Retreat in Holmes, NY
- **Saturday, April 29;**  
10am-3pm: 12 Steps in 5 Hours Workshop in CT
- **May 1 - 6: World Service Business Conference** in New Mexico
- **May 21: Abstinence Made Simple Workshop** at the YWCA, 2-5pm

Register NOW for the October R6 Convention at [oaregion6.org](http://oaregion6.org)

## How to Recover from a Lifelong Struggle with Body Image

Here is the recipe for a life long struggle with body image:

Take a perfectly happy, healthy young girl who loves to play baseball, kickball, swim and climb trees. Engage her in some "harmless teasing" where she is called "fat."

Continue the "teasing" until she cries silently into her pillow each night. Let that set.

Then mix in some teen magazines, television commercials, and movies, where popularity is determined by teenaged girls who attract boys with their perfect hair and very slender bodies.

Let this mixture simmer over time, adding a dose of the first few ingredients again and again until it is well formed.

Next, provide mirrors, as well as the girl's peers (ideally using texting) to reflect back the unacceptability of her body.

An important ingredient here is the introduction of a scale. The scale will monitor the girl's weight against a perfect number determined by "self- help" articles, well-meaning parents and friends. She should look critically into her mirror and berate herself for her looks and her size. She must do this several times a day to achieve desired results.

Introduce her to dieting. Show her how to restrict her food intake with the understanding that she is either "bad" if she isn't on her diet, or "good," when she is.

Add in several compliments and attention whenever she has dieted down to an "acceptable" size. This gives her an illusion of control, thus increasing her notion that this is the way to true happiness and popularity.

A vital component to this recipe, at this point, is the proclivity for an addictive relationship to a food substance such as sugar and/or refined carbohydrates. This increases the level of frustration and self-loathing and the drive to try harder to control this out-of-control situation.

Many times, the effects of this recipe will result in confusion, self- hatred and an inability to determine the true size and healthy weight of the body.

With careful attention to all these details, this recipe can last for a lifetime.

**If however, you find this recipe is producing poor results and has left at the very least, a bitter taste in your mouth, I have an alternate recipe to try:**

**Find a place where people understand this struggle. For me, this has been OA.**

**See if you can muster up a small amount of willingness to attend a meeting.**

**Notice where you identify with at least one thing that someone said.**

**Find someone who has what you want and ask them how they are achieving it.**

**Begin reading OA literature.**

**Keep coming (to meetings)**

**Ask someone to be your sponsor.**

**Begin working the twelve steps of recovery.**

**Keep coming to meetings.**

**Make sure to infuse each of the ingredients of this recipe with a daily dose of compassion, willingness and perseverance.**

**Keep coming (to meetings).**

**With careful attention to all these details, THIS recipe can last for a lifetime.**

**Keep Coming!**

~ By Leigh

## Healing the Distorted Lens

I've always been a compulsive overeater and I was always fixated on my body. From the time I was 3, my mother, a professional dancer, taught me to dance and to be riveted by my appearance. That focus did not serve me well: as a dancer myself, I spent 5-6 hours a day in front of floor to ceiling mirrors, refusing to wear glasses in order to avoid seeing myself clearly.

My negative body image never left despite my weight stabilizing, finding a God of my understanding, and beginning a lifelong journey through the steps.

I tried lots of things to get over myself but never actually tried anything to get rid of my negative body image. I read the Acceptance prayer in the AA Big Book; I recited positive affirmations; I talked about it in therapy. Then in 2012 on my 66th birthday, I started a women focused OA meeting, "Healing the Distorted Lens."

Every week in the body image meeting, I heard women sharing suffering, sorrow, hope and faith on this front. We did step work, tradition work, writing and literature study. A few months into our work together, I was trying on clothes in a dressing room at a local department store and I noticed the absence of any negative self-talk. Hmmm? I changed dressing rooms, thinking the mirror must be off. But it was no different in the new dressing room, or in the next shopping outing.

I attribute this return to sanity to my working the TWELVE STEPS of OA focused on healing the distorted lens:

1. I admitted I was powerless over my negative body image and that my life had become unmanageable obsessing about this.

2. I came to believe that a higher power could restore me to sanity by helping me face everything to recover.

3. I turned my will (to criticize my body) and my life over to the care of GOD, which allows me to be of service to others rather than consumed by self.

4 & 5 Writing the fourth and sharing the fifth step resulted in my changing my food plan, turning to other sources of guidance, even getting a new sponsor after my sponsor of 34 years passed away.

6 & 7 My sixth and seventh step showed me and then allowed me to release the emotional and spiritual havoc I create when I focus on my appearance and not on the spiritual basis for right living that abstinence can afford.

8 & 9 My eighth and ninth steps involved making amends to everyone – living and dead -- who had been hearing of my body-hatred.

My 10th, 11th and 12th steps prepare me daily to 'carry the message' as a person graced with long term abstinence. I carry the message of body acceptance now.

Working the 12 Steps to arrest my negative body image helped to reestablish the severed brain-body connection caused by compulsive eating and replace the distorted lens through which I had been viewing myself and my body.

~Meryl M

*Letter to my body,*

*I'm sorry I did this to you. You took care of me. You allowed me to walk, talk, breathe and have children. I know my mind is messed up. That's the only explanation I can give. I have known depression and been around it my entire life, so my defense was to numb out and not feel anything. I learned not to expect anything good so that I couldn't be disappointed. My depression is safe and comfortable. I know I am not overweight, but when I eat, my mind tells me I am fat and weak. When I look in the mirror, I don't even know if what I see is real.*

*~ Lisa L.*

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10% OA Region 6  
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*For increased security you are encouraged to make online donations to Region 6 via paypal*



**CALL 5 TO STAY ALIVE**  
 OA 's population is shrinking and our meetings are getting smaller. One way to reach out to the struggling compulsive eater is to make phone calls. Go through the WeCARE Books at your meetings and find names of people you haven't seen in a while; CALL THEM. Let them know that they are in your thoughts and that OA welcomes all, regardless of where they are on their road to recovery. This is a simple way to let fellows know that we're here and we care, and it helps your recovery too. If you are interested in working on the 12th Step Within Committee, contact Diana C.

**Perspective from a Male OA Member**

This is a story of how I went from not knowing what the term "body image" means, to understanding that I have been consumed with it daily since my teenage years.

First, I had to look up what body image was. "Oh, it's a women's problem" I thought. I began to notice at OA meetings, and even just walking down the street each day, that there is a voice in my head that observes and judges every person, that says "Oh they should or shouldn't be in OA," or "They are fatter or thinner, more or less attractive than me."

Going to meetings and listening to my fellow sufferers has taught me that my image of myself is different from how I may look to another person, and that how another person looks at me is no indication of how they think of themselves or who they are.

I joined OA to have the hope and courage to change my distorted thinking. Today I have the hope to be open minded about every person I meet and avoid the assumptions and comparisons that crowd my mind. Working the steps and principles can help replace the selfish voice that judges based on prejudice and projects its faults onto others, with a voice that speaks, then stops and waits for a higher power to direct it.

I pray to change so that I look to find the light in each person's face. I pray to change so that I listen and learn from each person instead of judge them. I pray to be shown how to accept myself as I am. I pray to learn to love myself and others equally.

Thank you, body image assignment. You are helping me to accept myself as I am and to accept others as they are.

Anonymous



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Send all submissions to [wuignewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:wuignewsletter@gmail.com)

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