

The Sanctuary

JINGLE JANGLING TOWARD RECOVERY

ONE TURKEY BIRD & Elf AT A TIME

Huh??????? HUM HUM ☺

Greater Dayton Area Intergroup of Overeaters Anonymous
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FROM THE EDITOR

Well, Holiday Cheer to all of you. It hardly seems that we should be here again. But the days are just like the Steps, and the hits they just keep on come'n.

The convention is over and I am glad. I think it was a fantastic opportunity for me to recover. I learned a lot during the year and a half of planning. I'd like to thank everyone who worked on the convention. There were so many people who made the weekend a success.

I usually write an article, but you all filled her up, and there is no room at the Inn. Geeze. Where does this come from?

This will be the last issue of the year. You will see us in January. If anyone would like to work on the paper, please feel free to give Judy or myself a call and let us know. I am glad to see article submissions up. That is so terrific.

I've had a lot of change in my life in the last couple of months, and I am working on my issues of anger around them. The one thing that I can say is that I am glad that I have this program to get me through. And, of course, you!!

When in doubt, don't pout! Call your sponsor or hit a meeting this season." HAPPY HOLIDAYS, Claudia

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Gifts

As this year is coming to an end, I want to take the time to reflect for a moment on one of the gifts that I've received this year.

I was going to write and say, "Oh man! I have anger issues over some things I can't change in my life." However, just at the moment of writing that, I came to realize that the situation has been far more of a blessing than I can ever imagine. Why? Well, because it is teaching me that I can make it through the tough times and still remain sober from medicating one day at a time. And I can still have a sense of humor about it. Heck, I just ate with Judy and told her all my problems and burst out laughing. Gee, they sound silly when you go over them with someone. Why? Because I'm learning that when I focus on the problem it gets larger, and when I focus on the solution it becomes larger. Now, I want to turn the defects over, knowing God can do what I cannot. Claudia

MEN'S OA RETREAT

"MY LORD GOD, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does, in fact, please you. And I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my fears alone."
THOMAS MERTON (FR. LOUIS MERTON) - Thoughts in Solitude.

From Friday, August 31 to September 2, five of us OA men traveled to the Great Abbey of Gethsemani, near Bardstown, KY, to conduct the first ever OA Men's retreat there. I have gone to Gethsemani since April 1991, when my AA friend, Jim D., ever consummate, literate reader that he is, suggested we go to the place where Thomas Merton lived.

Having both been raised Catholic, and having still attended Catholic services into our twenties, we both knew the name Thomas Merton. Among Catholics who read about prayer, meditation, the spiritual life (which, as we know, is not a theory), Thomas Merton is quite a cutting figure.

A rake of some degree prior to his entrance into the Cistercian Order of Trappists, at Gethsemani, Merton set the world on fire with his autobiography, **THE SEVEN STORY MOUNTAIN**. Born in France, associated with Quakers, raised in England, educated there and in

America, then to Columbia University, familiar at an intimate level with the underpinnings of Marxism, Merton somehow found himself traveling to the Abbey of Gethsemani in the days before America's entrance into WW II.

Something deep called to him while he was there. He entered the Monastery in 1940 and never left, even though fame, a literary career, prominence in the dialogue between Christians and Buddhists, an anti-war voice, and finally, love itself, called him to depart. He died during a Buddhist/Christian Conference in Bangkok, Thailand, having met the Dalai Lama of Tibet only a few days earlier.

I have been to Gethsemani over twenty times, and have stayed in Merton's Hermitage retreat house three times. This time, I found myself not overly awed at the place. I sat in the garden and drank coffee or iced tea, gazing at the flowers, listening to the incessant chirp of crickets and cicadas, the bells which toll relentlessly, day in, day out, week in, week out, year in, year out, at the quarter hour. On and on, the bells at Gethsemani chime, as do the bells at every monastery steeple throughout the world which follows the Order of St. Benedict.

At Gethsemani, this means that the brothers and retreatants, if they like, rise and sing the Psalms, the Hours of The Office, six times a day. The first is at 3:30 AM and the last is at 7:30 PM.

This time I did not set foot in the chapel. I have participated in retreats in many different ways. This time, I spent reading history and sociological texts in my room, sleeping, and sitting and walking, do some meditation as I did so.

We elected to have initially three OA meetings—one at 8:15 PM on Friday, another at 10 AM on

Saturday, and then the last at 8:00 PM on Saturday. One of our retreatants suggested an early morning meeting at 9:15 Sunday, which four of us did. By then our fifth member had departed for Louisville and friends.

I have no idea what the other retreatants got out of this. I know that we discussed, at deep length: The Spiritual Life is Not a Theory; Plan of Eating; Portion Sizes; Methods for Eating; Diets and Calorie Counting; sneaking food; the dreaded Ten PM Eating Monster; Kellogg's Boxed Cereal that one finds in large institutions (the small four ounce size, or whatever other ridiculous size those boxes are). I know that I asked the group and God, as I understand God, to help me stay away from the Fudge and Fruit Cake (they are both heavily laced with Kentucky Bourbon), and also asked God to keep my mind free from impurities, and to please help me eat just one box of cereal, rather than two.

Frankly, I do believe that OA is not a diet and calories club. I, therefore, have stumbled and stalled and gone back over some of the same ground, so far as food plan goes, more than once. But, I believe that God is and has shown me, for instance, that I cannot eat sugar-free ice cream because it leaves me feeling slightly sick to my stomach. Even though I know this is the case, however, I have come back to that place more than once.

God Bless OA that it says I can do that. That I am not required to turn myself in to some internal Gestapo force that will spank me, tell me to sit down and NOT speak in meetings again for a year, or participate in strange rituals that accompany my progress, or lack thereof, in OA. OA, after all, is not the Masons or Moose. We are a Twelve Step Group, and as

such, there are no ritualistic formats written into "the Program" that are passed down, verbally, secretively, from member to another.

No, I prefer the sharing we had at Gethsemani. Freely you have received, so freely you shall give. Sharing "experience, strength and hope" with one another over how certain foods consistently kick our butts. How styles of eating can do us in. The ups and downs of wheat, white flour, sugar and sugar free, donuts and Twinkies, fudge and Pringles. We were able to mention these and other food freely, and frankly, without fear that we would be told ... Oh, God, now I may have a hard time going home without a relapse because you mentioned TWINKIES!!

Thank God these guys were all strong enough to laugh, rather than exclaim in horror, when we discussed these and other foods. Heads nodded, smiles appeared, or knowing looks, like infantrymen who have crossed a dreaded field of fire, and somehow escaped with only a slight graze of the temple. But, of course, we know that the carcasses of other OAers are also out there on that dreaded field of fire, shot down by relapses. We discussed our relapses, whether on food or emotional or spiritual.

Gethsemani is a free place to have a retreat. You check in on arrival, get assigned a room, told when the food is served, when the Hours of Office are held, and that is it. Were it not for our own internal OA schedule, there is NO OTHER Scheduled Retreat. It is a "roll-your-own" retreat. Write, walk, sleep, bathe, jump into one of the ponds, go into town and play golf, hit McDonalds or Long John Silvers if the food does not turn you on (there are definite strictures against pigging out there—but more informal

than formal). Read spiritual literature. Do a Fourth Step, or even a Fifth. Introspect, pray, meditate.

I finally walked. Saturday night, the moon was nearly full. I went out on the backside of the Monastery, and walked along a road. Initially, I saw the fleeting shadows of deer across my path. Two of the very worst nights I ever spent in Vietnam were under a full moon. I had been in New Mexico just two months ago, and there were bear and mountain lions to contend with while walking at night. I doubted bear were at Gethsemani, but mountain lions? Yes, possible. Wolves? Possible. Coyotes? Very likely.

My fears were activated. I was so frightened I clapped my hands every twenty or thirty yards. I am normally NOT that afraid of walking. The sight of a mountain lion—all six feet of it—in New Mexico made me more afraid. I am sure there are some kinds of cats in those Kentucky hills. I was frightened, and it took me all of my prayer to quell the impulse to return the way I came.

I knew the route was probably a mile or less—three quarters of a mile, perhaps. And that it would be illuminated most of the way—save for a few areas where trees overarched the trail—or near some rocky shelves beside a large bean field. I told myself this was NOT Vietnam, and said my prayer: What was, as it Was: What is as it Is. Meaning: Jerry, this is NOT Vietnam. So, while there may be mountain lions out prowling, there are not VC and mines and booby traps and ambushes waiting to happen.

It was nearly ten PM when I returned. Two of the retreatants were engaged in a lively spiritual debate. I went to bed. Later that day, before "dinner" (a.k.a., lunch), I traversed the same route. This time, in the light, I stopped beside a pond

and found a wing feather from my spirit animal—a Red-Tipped Hawk. A large one, if the feather was an indicator of its size. The feather was a good ten inches long, so the hawk was more than likely at least a foot and a half tall.

I got out of the retreat that I have some distance between God as I understand God, and where I have been previously. I felt the Hawk Feather was a positive sign that I should keep walking, and walking in the woods, to find God at a deeper level. I felt that I have been willing to go to Louisiana, and work at a place called Angola State Penitentiary, where there are more lifers than any other prison in the United States—most of them African-Americans—but who want to stay sober. Or learn how to stay sober. Not that I want to go to Louisiana. But that I promised God I would be willing to do so, if God wanted. To go to Louisiana, therefore, would be a complete "God thing" cause I want to be leaving for New Mexico in the spring, not Louisiana.

But gosh, what is this that I have been offering rides to an African-American man who has 52 years of continuous sobriety, and is from—oops—Nagadotches, Louisiana, and tells me all kinds of stories about Louisiana in the twenties, thirties and forties. Who has told me about how African-Americans were treated there, and later, in the Army, during WW II—an Army that was not integrated. A south that was harsh and ugly. A man who has 52 years of sobriety. I am only 54 years old! A wonderful man to transport. A wonderful man to listen to. And to be getting closer to him, for whatever reason, feels like some kind of spiritual journey in and of itself.

I got in touch with the sense of loss and sadness I have over a woman, African-American, I loved,

who is no longer here. A woman I cherished for her crystalline intelligence, beauty, sensuality, and terms of endearment. I realized that I have felt love and loss one time too many. I am not sure I want to go on with trying love. I find some protection in being alone, with my feelings more compartmentalized than perhaps are good. I find the nightmares of incest by my mother dogging me—perhaps a clue to my own Fibromyalgia—and how it has left me so very very hyper-vigilant throughout my life. Left me so very wary of relaxing—letting my guard down, particularly with women. These things have, of course, had their effects on me so far as drinking, drugging, relating to women, and eating are concerned.

I am not sure I want to unravel any further the layers of memory of these incestuous events. I have made peace with my mother. I love her—can say that honestly—and am just very very uneasy about opening up that can of worms. I want to leave, but there is ennui there—it has been there ever since I left home. I knew I needed to leave home—but there was that flushing feeling in my stomach that made me want to vomit—that I knew was the reaction to leaving. I wanted to stay and, as my sisters have done, live there in that small Indiana town where I grew up. But my instincts said, “get away from here! Get away from this woman who needs to control so much! Get away while you can!”

On the way to meet these guys, before we left for the Abbey, I felt a deep depression. It was palpable, like a true dark cloud moving INTO my body and mind—THROUGH me. The deep ambivalence of leaving/staying, remaining open/shutting down, vulnerable/protected, loving/giving up on love, being

optimistic/pessimistic, being happy/sad, aware/unaware. All choices.

All the positives, by the way, are, in my humble opinion, necessary to LIVE recovery, versus talking about it. I just got 19 years in AA and have 6.5 in OA. I LOVE recovery and, frankly, think I live it, too. I think I walk the walk. Going to places like Gethsemani help anyone walk the walk, rather than talk the talk.

I got closer to four other OA men. Whether I am here next year, I hope some of them will pick up the baton and coordinate another OA retreat at Gethsemani for Men. Eventually, we will all be gone from the landscape of this planet and this life. We will either stay or go in OA. A retreat of this nature, frankly, makes it MORE likely that I will stay than leave. I felt a deep love and care for these four other guys.

For those of you who opted out of the retreat, talk with those other guys who went. Ask them about it. Sign up for next year. Take a leap of faith and jump into the spiritual life in a new way. The Spiritual Life, after all, is NOT a theory. WE HAVE TO LIVE IT!

Jerry E. 9-3-01

The Spiritual Life is not a theory, we have to live it

This past weekend's OA Men's retreat at Gethsemani has given me a glimpse of how far I have progressed in 16+ years of 12 step, but really just what a short distance I have come.

On the way home from this most spiritual place I was remembering the first 12 step conference I was ever on 15+ years ago. It went from Friday night through Sunday morning with almost non-stop activity, meetings, leads, planned social events, more meetings, more leads. Well you get the picture, total

frenetic activity, subconsciously geared to wear you out as opposed to relax and refresh you.

Then I went to my first conference in the mountains where there were four leads, one meeting and a group of good old timers sitting around a two sided fireplace in a big rustic lodge just talking program and recovery informally (by the way the best conferences I have ever attended, but not for an OA who doesn't have a strong eating plan).

Now, I go to a retreat where there is little planned activity, one in which you plot your own progress. What a difference from then until now.

Yet I still find myself drawn to others. Can the few meetings last two hours instead of one, will one of the other retreatants and I get in a drawn out discussion, or can one of the monks and I get into a discussion on who and what is God? (By the way the first two pretty much happened while the last one didn't.) But all in all I enjoyed the solitude and quietness.

On Saturday I was reading from a Christian daily meditation book I had brought along and Saturday's reading related to the Garden of Gethsemane. A little later I was reading something else and I received some answers to a crisis I have been going through in my life. These are what I have heard called God incidences.

Yet one of the most insightful comments anyone shared was the fact that we didn't come to a place like Gethsemani to escape it all, but rather to equip us for day to day life or as the Big Book so succinctly puts it, "one of the purposes of this book is to return us to the main stream of daily living." And while it would be easy to be potentially attracted to what many of us would see as a simple lifestyle as it exists in a monastery, the vast majority of us

have been called to live and work in the material world. And this is good, because there are many other suffering compulsive eaters out there who need our recovery to give them hope.

And as I said at the beginning I have really come only a short distance. I have so much further to go on this spiritual journey. So as I continue to work the steps, talk to my sponsor, go to meetings, read spiritual material and attempt to not compulsively eat for just today, I am encouraged and invigorated to know that there are others just like myself who continue to trudge this road.

So whether you are feeling discouraged as you have picked up this Sanctuary or you are already filled with the "sunlight of the spirit," I urge you to trudge on. It is not the mountaintop experiences that keep us going but truly the day-to-day living. And as an old-timer friend of mine in another 12-step program used to say (amended a bit for OA), "The person with the most abstinence is the one that got up the earliest today, for this is truly a one day at a time program."

The Jewish people end each Passover Seder with "Next year in Jerusalem". I will end with "next year at Gethsemani."

Bill Gaffney

DREAMS COME TRUE FOR THOSE WHO WORK WHILE THEY DREAM

My life today is a good example of the above saying. I truly have a life beyond my wildest dreams as a result of this program and working the steps, including putting the food down.

From my marriage, to my job, to my relationships with people, one day at a time, life continues to unfold. I find myself able to accomplish things I never thought possible or available for me. All this

because I was willing to trust in a power greater than myself to restore me to sanity, to allow me to live sanely and serenely in a world doing everything to throw me off center, to have me be what they say is ok, rather than what my HP wants for me.

Trust God, keep rowing, and tie up your horse when you stop for a break. In other words, trust your HP with blind faith—do your footwork with your eyes wide open. Miracles will happen.

Becky C.

CONVENTION MUSINGS

I experienced God working through me. I chose to share my room with someone. I have to tell you that I do the things I do because I know that I am supposed to. If I listened to my ego, it would never have happened. My ego said, "You don't know this person. You don't know what they might do or not do. You don't know what their habits are. You don't know....." Of course, it was all negative.

My ego never seems to say positive things like, "I bet this will be a good experience for you" or "I know you have some concerns, but God will take care of you and God needs you to do this to help someone else."

I didn't get to go to many workshops, but when I did I thoroughly enjoyed them. And I made a point of doing things besides going to the workshops. I did service work: assisting people with directions and information, offering a hug or a smile, I took time out to rest (I've never done that at a convention before because I was afraid I'd miss something.) And I reached out to meet people I didn't know.

In the past I have had a great deal of difficulty reaching out to new people. God seemed to prompt me

to do it this time. I got mixed responses and that was O.K. Everything and everyone doesn't have to be perfectly the way I think it should anymore. Some experiences made me feel grateful for my progress in recovery as in, "I'm grateful that's not my story or my path" and as in, "I'm really grateful I met this person—they are an enhancement to my recovery."

I got to see people make mistakes and other people forgive them, right there on the spot. I got to see people be patient with very difficult situations. I'm afraid if it were me in those situations that I would not have been so patient, kind, or forgiving.

God knew these were things I needed to see. Abstinence is nothing if I'm not better able to deal with the difficult situations in my life. So I was inspired by other people's recovery and how they continue to strive to be happy, joyous, and free recovering compulsive overeaters.

I have heard folks say that they felt they were coming home when they arrived in OA. I had so much self-hatred related to being fat that I didn't really want to be a member of this club. I'm finally beginning to appreciate the hard work people do to recover from compulsive overeating.

I had fun. I danced my butt off Saturday night. I gave and received compliments. I swam in the hotel pool! I accepted that my body is where it is and some people may think I should never go in public in a bathing suit, but my recovery says be happy and swimming makes me happy. I ordered room service. I've never done that before. And I ordered a set of tapes of the whole convention.

I look forward to my drive back and forth to Greenville while I listen to all the marvelous speakers who

shared their experience, strength, and hope with us that weekend.

The convention next year is in Wisconsin. I'm going. I've traveled extensively over the United States, but I've never been to Wisconsin. Let me know if you want to go too, and we can build our excitement all year long until that weekend arrives.

I may even take a road trip once or twice in the next year to where the convention is going to be. I hope some other happy, joyous and free compulsive overeaters will join me.

Nora D.

Greenville (and Dayton) OH

I was very impressed with the Region 5 Convention this year. All of the speakers that I heard were inspiring, and some were quite humorous. Some of the gems I picked up are as follows:

DENIAL: Don't Even No I Am Lying (ok, it doesn't totally work)

RELAPSE: I learned that others who struggled around with a slip or two told themselves they could hurry up and fix it so no one would ever know. They wanted to look good instead of be good. Why tell someone else and blow their cover? I learned this is a part of the sick thinking that I can identify totally with when a slip has occurred.

SPONSORS: I learned that we are not someone else's Higher Power, or their counselor, or mother, or best friend, but are there to share our experience, strength and hope and to help them to work the steps. (We could become best friends, but it's not necessary.) We don't have to have all of the answers. I also learned that if we are personally in a bad place time-wise or stress-wise, we can recommend the sponsoree

find a co-sponsor or make some outreach calls on days that we are overwhelmed. This sounds like a flexible and practical approach to real life problems.

DINNER: The room was pretty and the food was great. There was plenty of room between tables so you didn't feel like a sardine in a can. OOOPS! Don't binge!!

PRIZES: The special prizes were nicely made up and wrapped to make you want to win all of them.

ENTERTAINMENT: Some wonderful poems were read and we got to see Paula do a dance to the music of the "Our Father".

TAPES: I fortunately bought some tapes the first night. The next day they were all packed up since many of them were AA tapes. I don't know too much about the Traditions, etc., but I was personally mighty disappointed that I couldn't buy a bunch of tapes about recovery the 12-step way. Guess I'll have to trek to more meetings and get my recovery "live".

The Dayton Convention was well worth all the work that was put into it. We had a nice crowd at the Monday noon meeting, and everyone was pretty revved up from all the new things they had learned. It was a real shot in the arm!

Judy V.

My experience at the Convention was mixed. I would have been much happier if there were meetings going on—regular OA meetings—that would have given me more of a chance to just do meetings with people from the Region. I am always interested in how meetings "work" in other places, and having other folks

from these various states in the meetings might have given me more of an idea how that happens.

The meal was fun ... we all had a good time at my table, which had several of the Conference leaders there. Those were people who spent a lot of time over the last year working on getting this Conference up and running.

Having done some logistical type work like this at my former job, I know there are lots and lots of questions, contacts, decisions to be made, talked about, calls back and forth ... lots of that. I commend our Dayton community in particular, for all the hard work they did to make this Convention run so well.

I was elated when I could attend. I had tried to work out a month or two in advance whether I would be able to attend. I work alternating weekends, three to eleven thirty. As such, sleep becomes a primary concern for me because I am also in school all day Monday. So, with my Fibromyalgia, I generally hang pretty low on these weekends. Because of some scheduling changes, it suddenly appeared I would be able to attend.

However, with my income reduced through retirement, I wasn't sure I could still come up with the dough. My home group, the Springfield "Honesty Group" (10:30 AM, Mondays, Springfield Al-Anon Club), had sufficient money to "buy" a ticket for one lucky soul. A drawing was held and I won!! Eureka!! Then, while at the Conference, I got a free dinner ticket.

When the delivery of the meal appeared to lag, we began cracking that this was the wrong crowd to delay getting our food. I personally had visions of 200 ravenous overeaters storming the kitchen, taking food straight out of ovens,

bibs soiled with gravy, and green beans strewn from Fairborn to Milwaukee after complete chaos broke out. Hee hee.

Really, everyone behaved quite well. I gotta admit, though, that I had a hamburger on the way home. These Conference meals ... well, I am working towards an ideal of portion size ... but the food was very good.

The dance was fun! So many dancing overeaters. Being a Deadhead/Bay Area Band fan, the actual content of the music was o.k. I would have preferred some Grateful Dead and Airplane thrown in there, but I have gotten accustomed to expecting any of that music from DJ's who perform at functions like this as a pipedream.

All in all, this was a good Conference. The mini-leads I heard, as well as the panels on Sponsorship and the Fourth Step, were very good. I will, hopefully, be in the desert Southwest by the time Milwaukee has their Region V Conference. Or, maybe somewhere else entirely. But, Dayton's OA Intergroup has plenty to be proud of for this effort. Kudos to all those I know who worked so diligently on this program!!

Thanks for the work, thanks for the free ticket, thanks for the free meal, and thanks for helping me be abstinent and in recovery on compulsive overeating, body image and weight "control."

Jerry E.

EARLY BIRD MEETING

For all you early birds, there is a new meeting every Wednesday morning from 6:30 a.m. till 7:15 a.m. at St. Mark's on Woodman. Please come on over and help support your OA fellows and start the day off with some quality recovery.

