



# PACE

## The Mid-Hudson Intergroup Newsletter

XXVII—No. 11

December 2006/January 2007

### Inside this issue:

Don't Kiss Your Rattlesnake!	2
The Qualities of my Higher Power	2
Are you up to a Challenge?	2
The Meaning Behind the Holidays	3
Holiday Abstinence	3
Choices	4
Feeding the Spirit & Not the Body	5
Where Have Our Members	5
Staying Abstinent Over the Holidays	6

### 2007 Calendar

#### MHIG meetings New Paltz 1:30pm:

January 13<sup>th</sup>, March 10<sup>th</sup>  
 May 12<sup>th</sup>, July 14<sup>th</sup>,  
 September 8<sup>th</sup>,  
 November 17<sup>th</sup>—IDEA Day  
 (location to be announced)

#### MINITHONS

February 18<sup>th</sup>, Wappingers Falls  
 April 15<sup>th</sup>, Beacon: "Sponsoring Workshop"  
 August 19<sup>th</sup>, Sullivan County (TBA): "Vacation for the Soul"  
 October 21<sup>th</sup>, (location TBA): "Handling Holidays"

### From the Chair

As we approach the end of Fall, I wish you all a peaceful time of year. We have had many local OA events recently, opportunities to share and get support from members from other areas. The minithon in October was a great way to prepare for the holiday season, which can be a challenge for many of us. The Region 6 Convention brought hundreds together from all over the world. IDEA Day in November set the stage for 2007.

I'd like to welcome Julie as our new Vice-

Chairperson. Current positions will continue to be held by current members. We have many new outreach ideas for the area. Thank you to those members who presented suggestions to reach new members and those returning to OA. Their service and enthusiasm is greatly appreciated.

The theme for 2007 is "Reaching out the hand and heart of OA". The website is also an important

vehicle to reach members all over the world.

Thank you to all those who give service to Intergroup. I can't do this alone. It takes effort from many. If you'd like to help and meet members from other areas, just come to a meeting and join the fun. Hope to see you soon.



Love in recovery,  
 Mary Ellen,  
 Chairperson, MHIG



### Enjoying the Holidays and Our Abstinence

Routine keeps my OA program safe. As one of the *For Today* readings says, "Repetition is the only form of permanence that nature can achieve" (p. 204). Repeating safe routines around food choices and behaviors keeps my abstinence on track. However, the holidays disrupt my routine. Although I welcome change as refreshing and reviving in some aspects of my life, a forced change to my abstinence brings fear and uncertainty. I want to enjoy and look

forward to the holidays, so with a little more effort than usual, I find I can not only get through these times, but also enjoy them. OA gives us the tools to go out and enjoy life, not to run away and hide from it.

I plan carefully for the end-of-year events around food and eating. I make a call or write down my strategy:

- \* I will ask, "What will feel good and be safe to eat?"
- \* I will leave a table loaded with food after an appropriate period of time.

\* I will arrive after the food but in time for conversation with friends.

\* I will plan events not associated with food: a walk in the park, a movie or a trip to an art gallery with friends.

Let's enjoy our holidays, our abstinence and all the gifts our Higher Power has to offer over the holiday season.

~ Edited and reprinted from *Today* newsletter, St. Louis Bi-State Area Intergroup, December 2001





## Don't Kiss Your Rattlesnake!

At the beginning of my first holiday season in OA I had six months of abstinence. But when my children baked holiday cookies, I thought, "They'll feel bad if I don't try them." After one taste, I couldn't put down the sugar.

My second holiday season in OA I stayed abstinent until Christmas dinner at a relative's house. I thought, "This desert comes only once a year. I don't have it in my house. Surely it can't hurt to try it." I



came home and ate every sweet in my house and began a two-month relapse. The terror of what I was doing opened me to getting a sponsor who had what I wanted (365 days a year abstinence). With her encouragement and the Steps, tools, and Fellowship, I reclaimed abstinence, one day at a time.

My third holiday season in OA I stayed abstinent. Abstinence was a greater blessing than the pleasure sugar gave me, and I had no hell to pay afterward.

Recently, a local newspaper printed an article about a man who brought home a baby rattlesnake from the desert. To show a friend how tame his pet was, he kissed its snout. The rattlesnake bit him on the lip, and the man nearly died. How, I wondered, could anyone be so naïve? Did he reason that because he took care of this cute little snake it would never act out its nature? Did he think it loved him?

My compulsive eating self is like a rattlesnake. It isn't evil; in its cage it is benign. I can live in peace with it as long as I do not forget it is a dangerous animal, not a pet. However, during the holidays it is easy to forget, to be confused, and to be influenced by friends, thinking I can get away with it. I want to be pals with my compulsive-eating self and I let it out for just one treat. Then I discover my absurd naïveté! I have uncaged a dangerous animal that bites me, and my abstinence dies before my eyes.

During the holidays I often feel the urge to kiss my rattlesnake. Painful emotions like loneliness, grief, alienation and shame hit. The sights and smells of food assault my senses. Pleasure calls, expectations mount, busyness and pressure demand relief, people around me are insane. However, the program shows me alternatives to this insanity. The Steps, tools and Fellowship show me a new way to like myself and cope with life. I can tell someone what I'm feeling, go to more meetings and change my holiday lifestyle. I can work the Steps on a difficult person, place, situation, or emotion. I can discover for myself that "It is an incomparable pleasure to use the power this program gives me to eat moderately even on days when excess is the norm." (For Today, p. 329).

Happy holidays. Don't kiss your rattlesnake!

~ Reprinted from *Lifeline* 2005



## The Qualities of My Higher Power

Loving, with wide open arms and a great big lap.

Gives lots of hugs.

Completely accepts me with all my defects, does not judge me or set any kind of goals or standards for me to live up to.

Wants all good things for me:

Health, serenity, strength, agility, capability (within reason), happiness.

Above all, actually the foundation for all of the above, She wants ABSTINENCE for me.

~ an Anonymous atheist

## Are You Up for a Challenge?

I recently took on a new sponsee. She has been in the program for awhile and I gave her the following assignment:

Make a list of the tools, in the order that you utilize them.

Take the following challenge:

Incorporate the least used tools into your daily recovery routines.

What are the consequences?

~ Anonymous





## The Meaning Behind the Holidays

Holidays used to mean celebrating with food and lots of it! I know there were other aspects to the holidays; but the amount of sugar I ate interfered with enjoying those other aspects. I enjoyed the time with my family, since we sat around and ate. I was glad to see friends as long as I could get to the food, too. I felt drugged after so many special celebrations, because I had so much food in me.

Now I try to focus on the meaning behind the holidays. Why are we celebrating? How can I be present to the people who are part of the celebration? As far as food is concerned, the holidays are just like any other day. What do I need to do today to stay with my food plan and abstinence? Because there is so much access to special foods and so many people around me overeat at these times, I do have to take extra efforts to stay with my recovery. I am



very careful about writing down my food choices for the special dinners. That means I need to find out ahead of time what is being served. If I am contributing something to the meal, I make something special that fits my food plan.

I believe in padding these special events with recovery tools. What do I need to do before, during and after the celebration? I may need to pray, journal, talk with my sponsor and a few other OA people before I leave my house. During the gathering, I watch to see if I start obsessing about food items not on my food plan for the day. I may need to pray the serenity prayer 150 times, go make an OA outreach call, check in with my sponsor, go outside and breathe, talk with someone who understands. When everything is over, I have found that can also be a vulnerable time. I start to let my guard down, thinking I

made it through the hard part. I try to be conscious when I go home not to take the first bite and do what I need to do if I feel shaky. More outreach calls help me after the event. The bottom line for me is that I refuse to take the first compulsive bite no matter what happens, no matter how I feel, no matter WHAT!!!! The first bite is connected to binging for me. I have learned it is much easier to avoid the first bite than to get myself back out of relapse.

I need my Higher Power to do any of this, even to be aware of what I need to do. God is ready and willing to help me be ready, willing and to ask for help. The help is there for dealing with food; the help is also there for dealing with life without excess food. I KNOW my God has helped me many, many, many days with eating only the food on my food plan. I am grateful and I can trust that this same God will help me with the day to day living and with special holiday gatherings. Today let's choose recovery, asking for help, gratitude. It IS worth it!!

~ Reprinted from *Monarch Monthly* December 2000

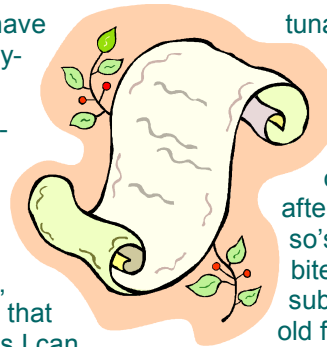


## Holiday Abstinence

When we sent out to write this article, we wanted to do a "hints and tricks" type of list, but we soon realized that we can't trick ourselves into abstinence. So, how do we survive the holidays? The first thing we have to remember is that we WANT to be abstinent. We have so many slogans and tools to use, but if we don't remember what the focus is, they won't do us any good. The second thing we have to remember is that every action we take has a consequence and/or payoff. Is the consequence of having "just a bite" worth the payoff? Before

we can decide that, we have to recognize what the payoff is.

The payoff for me, of taking part in the holiday nibbling is multilayered. First and foremost is the feeling that I'm "normal". Everyone else is doing it, why can't I? Next there's that little part of me that thinks I can get away with it. After all, it's only just a little bite, right? And it only happens once a year, right? Yeah, right. Unfor-



tunately, for me, that one little bite of something I can only get once a year seems to naturally roll into another bite of another little something and after all, I can't hurt So-and-so's feelings by not having a bite of hers, etc . . . The most subtle, insidious payoff is that old familiar feeling I've always gotten from overeating. We all know it; like a relative you love to hate. Like having a cheating lover

(Continued on page 4)





(Continued from page 3)

who swears they'll never do it again, I've finally learned, after I don't know how many lessons that the anticipation of the promise fulfilled is very rarely realized.

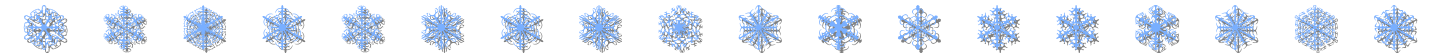
Which brings us to the consequences: Loss of self-respect, weight gain, personality change, a return to food-slavery, inability to concentrate, and ultimately the loss of the wonderful lives we have gained through program. Somehow, "just a little bite" doesn't seem worth it. We can rationalize anything, even that little bite,

even knowing the consequences and that they're not worth it because we fool ourselves into thinking that "that won't happen to me, this time". Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results.

To survive the holidays abstinently, we must be honest with ourselves, about ourselves. We must be willing to say, "No, thank you" to those food items we once looked forward to with enthusiasm. We must be committed to working our program with intention. All this honesty and commitment will do us no good if we walk into a situa-

tion unprepared. For that reason we must have a plan. A plan can include the following: A food plan, scheduled phone calls, a journal nearby to jot down feelings as they occur, a script to follow (i.e.: Oh, that looks lovely, not now, thank you; Thank you for thinking of me, but I don't eat sugar, etc.) more meetings, etc. A plan is essential to our success. "If we fail to plan, we plan to fail". And don't forget: "Nothing, absolutely nothing tastes as good as Abstinence feels."

~ Reprinted from *Palm Beach Connection*, December 2005



## Choices

I have struggled with holiday food traditions. After several years of annual winter mini-relapses, with accompanying weight gains, 10 years ago I let go of family holiday food traditions. It was hard to do. I had to detach from extended-family gatherings. Some family members expressed hostility during gatherings because of my food choices, suggesting that I was mentally ill and immature about my food, faith and lifestyle choices. They pressured me to eat foods that I choose not to eat. (My food plan is not rigid or eccentric.) The final insult to them was for me to maintain a normal weight for several years. Obesity and weight gains and losses identified my family. I felt out of place with them - physically, emotionally and spiritually. I love them, and I miss them. I wish them well, and I wish them recovery, but I do not miss the disease they carry.

How do I adapt my new way of life to include holidays? To gain strength and maintain abstinence, serenity and sanity during holidays, I attend more OA meetings. OA really is my family. There is always a chair for me at any gathering. OA respects my program

and lifestyle choices. I can and do give service. People offer me support, and loving confrontation. I don't always get my way when group decisions are made, but I am allowed to state my opinion. What is best for the group usually prevails. This is better than family.

My holiday meals have special (but abstinent) foods, in normal portions. I buy some traditional holiday goodies for my husband, and we both know they are for him only. Sometimes he takes them to the office, so I don't have to see them.

Some food items I strip of the sugars and other problem substances and use substitutes to turn out a similar product.

Alongside the joy, sharing and celebration of a holiday, there may be poignant feelings of emptiness, disappointment, anger or pain. Last year, I

had many losses with much growth. I experienced the pride and sense of well-being that comes from making wise decisions about relationships and lifestyles; but these same decisions also distanced my family and my spouse. I grieved and wept. I was afraid and angry. I ached and longed. My Higher Power was with me, guiding me through it all. I wanted to "fix it" for my family, as I had tried to do for so many years. The reality is that

I can only work on me. I nearly died before I found recovery. I could not deny my knowledge and experience of recovery to "keep the family together."

I started a tradition of holidays celebrated in recovery. I found that it is not necessary to indulge in food to have a magnificent holiday season. For me, a good holiday, any time of the year, starts with acceptance of my disease, gratitude for OA and willingness to work my program of recovery.

~ Reprinted from *Lifeline*, December 1998





## Feeding the Spirit and not the Body

Why was I eating again? Why couldn't I stop? Wasn't it too soon for me to fall into relapse? Was it the loneliness and stress of the holidays causing my hunger? How do I get it all under control again? These questions began haunting me just about 3 weeks before Christmas. Deep inside I knew the answers before I even recognized the questions were surfacing.

Most importantly, I needed to realize (once again) I'm not in control...I'm out of control. As I sat thinking about these questions one night, I realized I had stopped working my steps, and had stopped focusing on my relationship with my higher power and had started focusing on the emotions flooding in from the holidays and the

stress of not having the money I wanted to have at hand to buy presents for my family.

I have to remind myself each day...I am powerless over food, and the only way I can have any success is to turn my day over to my Higher Power, and to do it several times a day. I had been using one excuse after another to keep distance between myself and my Higher Power.

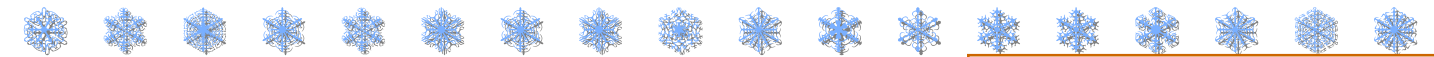
Where was that fear coming from? Then I realized my fear of failure was still alive and well. I see OA friends who succeed daily by turn-

ing their lives and wills over to their HP, but it was fear holding me back. All I have to do is follow the steps, and take baby steps just as I did at the beginning of my program.



Turn it over...one day at a time, one meal at a time, one minute at a time. I now have a new Mantra that I chant almost endlessly throughout the day..."I am powerless" "I am powerless" "I am powerless". I'm replacing my excuses with actions. I'm not going to let this disease win.

~ Reprinted from *The Twelve Stepper*, January 2006



## Where Have Our Members Gone?

Willingness is a personal decision, an individual responsibility.

Where would you be if you went to your first OA meeting and the doors were locked because there weren't enough people with the willingness to give back what was so freely given to them?

Our responsibility pledge states "I put my hand in yours and together we can do what we could never do alone". Well, that's what we can be, if there aren't enough people coming to help the still-suffering compulsive overeater. Alone. It is often said that this is a selfish program, because we come here to get ourselves better. However a program of recovery requires fellow-

ship or none of us can get better and stay spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically healthy.

During this season of giving, gratitude and a magnified

focus on spirituality, let's try to remember the meetings that really need additional support. Let's

try to keep the fellowship strong and growing for the still-suffering compulsive overeater.

May everyone have a happy holiday season, and a New Year filled with serenity and peace.

~ Reprinted from *Loveline*, January/February 2005



## 7th Tradition Donations to MHIG

IDEA DAY. November 18	\$66.00
Intergroup Board Donation	\$39.00
Mini-Marathon, October 15	\$48.00
Wappingers Falls #27308	\$100.00
Red Hook #48932	\$51.00
Stone Ridge #38963	\$60.00
Woodbury #27311	\$45.00
Blue Mountain #22578	\$20.00

Thank You!

It is with great sadness that we announce that the

**Tuesday 6:00 pm  
Kingston Meeting is  
closed**





## Staying Abstinent Over the Holidays

Looking back over eleven abstinent holiday seasons and trying to sum up how I have got through them all, the word that comes to mind is service. Within OA, contact with other members around that time plays a big part in reminding me that I'm an overeater, that I don't want to go back to where I was, and that there are other people who find this time of year and the attendant celebrations difficult and who suffer much more than I do.

Going to meetings, including on Christmas Day itself if there is one nearby, helps with this.

The main kind of service that I am talking about, though, is not within OA. It is a more general kind of service that helps me to get my mind off myself and is a very powerful way of keeping me away from the food. Wherever I am, I try to focus on other people. Are there people who are worse off than I am? People who are lonely, insecure, among strangers, sick in some way, overeating compulsively? Can I try to make someone feel wel-



comed and comfortable?

Can I help the person who has organized the day? I try and see how much work they have put in and be grateful for that and take some of the load off them. A very good trick for me is to assign myself a job, and the one that seems to suit me is to do the washing up. If that's not appropriate, or if it puts me too close to food, then I can take on the job of offering to make the tea and coffee, putting presents under the tree, entertaining the children, or driving to pick people up - whatever needs to be done.

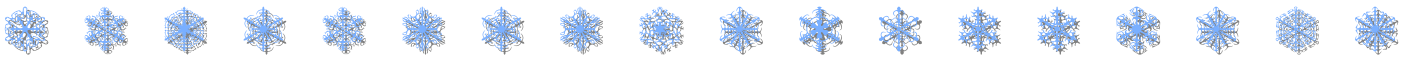
For me, all of this is also part of making amends for my past behavior, when people showed me so much hospitality and did so much work to entertain and feed me. I felt no gratitude and spent my time complaining about my lot in life, wallowing in self pity and depression. I was sure I was the centre of the universe, and I couldn't stand the fact that other people had failed to live up to my expectations and focus on making my life

comfortable, as if they didn't have lives and worries of their own.

This kind of amends-making is part of becoming more mature, and of reversing the condition described in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. "We have not once sought to be one in a family, to be a friend among friends, to be a worker among workers, to be a useful member of society. Always we tried to struggle to the top of the heap or to hide beneath it." (p.53)

For the last few years I have been having the family Christmas at my place, and this year my brother is getting married a week later and I will be in an isolated part of the country surrounded by food and alcohol. I am already asking my higher power to help me do the footwork now that will keep me safe then, and not leave it till the last minute. I am planning who I will phone, and how I will be of service at the wedding. I know that to go into a week like that unplanned would be asking for trouble.

*Anonymous  
From Sydney Morning Serenity, December 2000 - January 2001*



**The joy of brightening other lives, bearing each others' burdens, easing other's loads and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the magic of the holidays.**

~W. C. Jones

### Editorial Policy

PACE is the bimonthly newsletter of the Mid-Hudson Intergroup of Overeaters Anonymous, Region 6. Material cannot be returned nor can payment be made. All submissions to the editor must include full name and return address. When published, articles will appear with first name and last initial unless otherwise requested. Names will be withheld upon request. PACE reserves the right to edit all submissions for length and clarity. Other OA groups may reprint without permission. We ask that you cite the writer and PACE as your source.

The opinions expressed are those of the writer, and do not represent the Mid-Hudson Intergroup, Region 6 or OA as a whole.

Please address all submissions and correspondence to PACE via e-mail to: [PACEeditor@midhudsonoa.org](mailto:PACEeditor@midhudsonoa.org) or via US Postal Service to: PACE Editor, c/o Osherowitz, 15 Overlook Drive, Highland Mills, NY 10930.

