

Shades of Grey - Fall 1998 Issue

The Step Up

Step Four: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

I believe that this step, more than any other, strikes fear into our hearts. I did not want to go back into my past and make an inventory of my defects. I felt that there was nothing to be gained by pulling out those old issues that could not be changed and beating myself up with them. After all, wasn't my self-esteem low enough anyway? Why should I drag it down further? It took a real leap of faith and some strong pushing from my sponsor to get me to take the plunge. It helped that my first Fourth Step was done with a group. That helped me realize that I was not unique. I saw other Compulsive Overeaters struggling with this step in much the same way I was struggling. I used a Fourth Step guide to do that first Fourth Step and that also helped a lot. Not surprisingly, I do better with very specific instructions, like the Greysheet. In looking back it was not so important which guide I used as that I used one. The questions really helped organize and structure my writing but, most importantly, they helped define when I was finished. Closure, especially

around that first Fourth Step, was hard to achieve.

I have since done many Fourth Steps and used many different approaches to do them. None was as hard as that first one nor has any been quite so rewarding. I have, however, achieved great growth from this step and have over the years found that I have let go of many of those defects I thought I had forever.

Gary G., Jersey City, N.J.

Welcome Newcomer

A Second Chance

Yesterday was a Greysheet growing day. I heard early on that whatever you went through eating you will go through abstinently. I believe that on every level, of course, literally and ethereally. I'm back for my third go at back-to-back abstinence (the only thing I believe in, really.) For my birthday my co-workers have insisted they take me out for lunch. In my previous (combined - not back to back) of six and a half years of Greysheet abstinence, I always hid what I did with my food by avoiding all situations with strangers that required weighing and measuring in public. I could not get past whatever my issues of being open were. After four and a half years of abstinence (including a move to another state during that time and lots of other stuff on the outside) I made an exception in a restaurant at an office luncheon because I determined I did not have the strength to weigh and

measure with these people after one and a half years of hiding what I did with my food. Even though it's so early in my recovery again, I knew that the answer to my freedom is to love what I do, do it No Matter What and get over it already with the being out in restaurants with co-workers, people I think are above me, etc. Do I want a life or not? I wanted to come out of the closet so to speak. No more hiding. So all week I prayed, talked, wrote, etc. and asked simply for this: The strength to weigh and measure anywhere, anytime, with anyone. This is basically my daily prayer. Yesterday, while reminding my sponsor how important this was that I would be weighing and measuring in a restaurant for business because that was the day I left Greysheet in 1997, I realized we were going to the exact same restaurant. It had not hit me until I shared that with her. I was abstinent. It was fine. Some awkward moments. But they were moments. . . only moments. The dumping of the 2oz of cheese from a Tupperware and the same with the wheat germ. The plate being too heavy for the scale so having to do two rounds of weighing salad. Taking an apple out at the end. This amounted to about four to five minutes of something I have run and run and from. Me. Myself. And yesterday I experienced the real freedom of being who I am in this world. There's more work to do, but I got a chance yesterday of a taste of it. Whew! The day ended with a fabulous Greysheet meeting with a guest speaker from New Jersey. Then a Chinese restaurant that served us extremely well and we will be

molding their dishes so that future Greysheeters visiting Florida will have a very good reason to come see us! If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you. Thank you everyone for your e-mail and support.

Marjie A., Florida

Another Greysheet First

It's hard to believe that my recovery on the Greysheet is taking me to Chicago to the retreat in May. I have never flown abstinetly and haven't been out of this country for 12 years. Today I wrote down a list of questions which I would like to share as I know they will be answered and as abstinence is the most important thing in my life the decisions I make will be made in view of supporting and maintaining abstinence on the Greysheet. I am anxious and yet I know I am being taken care of as I am doing all I can and know at this moment to prepare.

Before the Greysheet I never bothered writing anything until after I'd binged and now I realize that when I did, self-pity flowed out of me. Writing in abstinence is always productive and I am gradually getting to appreciate and value this and most important for me to let go as there is always more.

I am scared that I have the questions but not the answers. I need to prepare for my trip as nine hours is a long time and so is the two-

and-a-half hours before that and I'll need to get to bed early. What clothes do I need? What shall I eat on the plane? How much money shall I take? What books and papers shall I take? What toiletries? What shall I pack? What shall I have on me? (hand luggage) Who shall I ask to help me with these questions? Shall I just do what they think? Shall I copy someone? What is your role in this, God? What can I do to find out your will for me?

I have got 21 days to go. I have weighed and measured three meals a day since February 1995 at home, in restaurants, in youth hostels, in friends' houses, at two funerals, at Christmas, and for a year at college. So now I am facing another first. If others have done it then I can learn, ask, and do it too. Because I don't eat no matter what.

Krys P., Bedminster, Bristol, U.K.

Our Voices

A Compulsive Cycle

A craving, is brewing,
A battle, I'm losing.
My concentration's being drawn away,
Focusing on binging, day by day.
It's getting worse, I cannot stop,
It's one mad rush to get to the shop.
Sugary sweets I have to buy,
Lots and lots, I'm on a high.
Eating quickly, on my own,
Another diet, I've gone and blown.
I am so full, I'm fit to burst,

Guilt sets in, I feel much worse.
I'll just lie down, for a bit,
Otherwise, I might be sick.
Why I do it, I don't know,
The urge is strong, my willpower's low.
You'd think I'd learn, and not do it again,
But for seven years I've done the same.
It goes on, for weeks at a time,
You have to get a grip, and draw the line.
When clothes don't fit, or your legs get sore,
Life becomes miserable, and a real bore.
For the millionth time, you start a diet,
Your body's confused, and starts a riot.
You still get cravings, now and then,
Like a time bomb it's waiting, you never know when . . .

Tanya G., Tisbury, Wilts, U.K.

Safe, Happy, and Clean

I was seeing some acting out defiance in my behavior with my food. I was doing tiny sloppy little things I pretty much knew wouldn't be "Day One" -- but they were foolish and dangerous. Then, of course, I'd need to "confess", tell my sponsor. I would feel very ashamed. ICKY, ICKY. I got very confused about how to handle all the angry, chaotic feelings I have toward authority figures. I was desperate. I was scared. Fighting against all the voices telling me I should be more recovered, I'm twice the age of most of these people who seem more together than me, they don't like me, etc., etc. I called one of the people in the Greysheet community who "has what I want." She gave me wonderful feedback. She said:

1. Act out any other place, but never with the food. Be a spoiled brat, be obnoxious, be a jerk - at home, in meetings, in the grocery store, with your therapist (I don't have one), etc. Never with the food.
2. Don't use the Food Sponsor relationship to work through authority problems. Take that stuff any place else. With your sponsor, she said, just do what you're told with your food. Just surrender. If you don't like it, blab your head off but do it somewhere else. The sanctity of the abstinence in the food, and of the sponsor-sponsee relationship are so fundamental to what we do, that it is crucial to protect them.

Then she passed on a 4-point program for long-term abstinence she'd recently heard from another "old-timer":

1. Don't take the first compulsive bite, no matter what
2. Don't quit before the miracle
3. Feel your feelings
4. Talk about them (your feelings)

The weak link in my program chain was # four: needed to do lots more blabbing and babbling. I needed to fight all the inhibiting, nasty, and tyrannical voices in my head that try to tell me I don't dare to share - and all the dishonest ones that tell me I don't need to. I started making calls like crazy. Not like before, when I felt OK but late in the day, when I'm filled with physical and

emotional pain. When I'm filled with despair and/or rage and/or any sort of ugly, nasty feelings, expose them!! Sometimes I make ten calls in a row and I tell the truth. It feels like magic, but it's no more magic than any of the other priceless gifts I get from this 12-Step process. I am so grateful!! I feel safe and happy and clean. How did I get so lucky, to have such an wonderful solution to such a horrendous, degrading illness as compulsive eating? All I have to bring is Honesty, Open-Mindedness, and Willingness. Talking My Head Off, Abstinant.
Pam W., New York City, N.Y.

Everything is Possible

In honor of my 12th anniversary a beautiful Greysheeteer from California gave me an article which I wrote nearly seven years ago for Shades of Grey. I was sitting alone in a Greysheet meeting waiting, hoping that the magic of abstinence would somehow touch other CO's in Los Angeles. The thought that we, being myself and the other original pioneer, Judy M., could have a room full of abstinent people like what I was used to during my early years in NYC seemed almost intangible. Yes, there were testers and maybes coming through our doors, and yes, we had to become very creative with our qualifications, but we did not give up hope! Within a year's time we had a phone list with about six names. I still have it in my wallet. Most everyone on that list is still abstinent today.

The word was out! Greysheet had arrived! Our meetings grew! Today we have five meetings a week! There are faces who have back-to-back abstinence that I do not recognize because I have not been to a certain meeting for a little while. There are old faces that I do not see on a regular basis anymore because there are many meetings from which to choose. I am giving suggestions on how to start meetings. The phone list now includes more than thirty names. Greysheeters here are getting married, having children, building careers. No one can tell me that dreams do not come true. I am living proof that they do!

The bottom line is that the Greysheet saved my life at twenty-one years old and continues to guide me. If I can remember the following then I know I have a chance one day at a time:

- Everything is a gift. Some gifts are wrapped in tears and some are wrapped in bows. Yet, they are all gifts.
- I am not a number on a scale. I am so many other things. I am a woman, a wife, a sister, a daughter, a friend, a business owner, a sponsor, a sponsee, and one among many.
- There is always another meal coming.
- I am on a journey.
- The biggest and the best!
- I do this with perfect heart!

And so many more tidbits of wisdom ...too many to think of now and far too many to

write. This Sunday I will be speaking at our meeting in Santa Monica in celebration of my anniversary the following day which is July 13th. The power of the miracle is so incredible. At times I am moved to tears at the volume of the voices reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison.

I share my very special date not only with the community but also with the most special man in my life who was delivered straight from my Higher Power. My wedding anniversary is also on July 13th. I was married to Mark on my tenth anniversary in New Hampshire, during a hurricane. The food was not an issue. It was buffet style with a table for Greysheeters and a guard to go with it. At times I swayed the guests away. They wanted what we have. But of course. I am reminded of one of my initial excuses for not wanting to do Greysheet which was not being able to have that wedding carb and alcoholic beverage customary for that day. There was more love that day than I could believe possible. That is what it is all about.

My article would not be complete without acknowledging the one woman who brought me to my first meeting and gave me her hand to hold while I began my life again and is still holding on . . . my abstinent sister, Laura. I love you sis!

To all of those abstinent people in far away places (and not so far away) may my experience help you to believe that everything is possible in abstinence.

Bethany C., Marina Del Rey, CA.

On Perfectionism

Did you see Groundhog Day? In this movie, Bill Murray has the opportunity to re-live one day of his life again and again until he finally does everything perfectly. What a fantasy! I have lived most of my life with the feeling that I blew it. I have been given a great many opportunities in my life. Given these opportunities again, I think that I should have done things differently. I would have gone to different schools, taken different courses, and gone to different places. Furthermore, I would have chosen to not eat on the many occasions I did eat. I chose to eat after I knew better. I chose to eat even though the Greysheet community told me that I didn't have to eat. To stop eating, I had to start forgiving myself, or at least acting as if I did. I quickly learned that my abstinence depended upon my willingness to forgive myself and others-for everything. Eating served as the way I punished myself and punished others for not living up to the expectations I had.

A wise person suggested I say to myself, "It seemed like a good idea at the time," and to shift my focus from yesterday to today. Furthermore, the Big Book tells me to work with others by sharing my story; sharing my experience transforms my painful past into my greatest asset. I submitted an essay about the Third Step to Shades of Grey several weeks ago. I have wanted so badly to write it over again. I would write it differently; I would say different things. This morning, when I called my food sponsor, I said to her that I

would abstain from re-writing that essay. For me, practicing the Third Step means letting go of perfectionism and trying to do everything over again and again. At the same time, I decided to write this essay in order to say those things I would have said in that essay, given the opportunity. In the process of writing that essay, I wrote thousands upon thousands of words, and used up hours upon hours of time. The final result seemed inadequate. A friend reminded me that I have an it's never enough perspective. Then, I allowed this friend to read what I had written. She commented, "It's okay, but you didn't consider the newcomer when you wrote it." So, in addition to feeling inadequate, I immediately resented my friend because of her comment. When I seek approval from other people, I end up despising them and myself. I don't eat over this. Instead, I pray for God's help and guidance.

As a child, I sought approval from my mother; she served as my first Higher Power. She used to say, "If you can't do it perfectly, don't do it at all." I took her precept one step further - when I failed to be the person I thought that she wanted me to be, I tried to obliterate myself with food. I continued this pattern as my life went on, using girlfriends and/or boyfriends as my Higher Power. Disappointed in them and disappointed in myself, I ate.

In the book **The Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions** it says that one need do only Step One perfectly. Thus, I weigh and measure my food perfectly: (in the manner directed by the Greysheet and my sponsor). We practice the rest of the Steps,

reminding ourselves, *Progress Not Perfection.*

Paulina M., New York City, N.Y.

A Change for the Better

There is a program, that's called the Greysheet,

A Twelve Step recovery, that helps you to beat,

The compulsive eating, that you've had for years,

That's been such a comfort, and brought so many tears.

It's quite scary, to make the change,

It feels so different, and feels so strange.

It's great to meet people, just like you,

No longer alone, it's reassuring, too.

Weekly meetings and sponsorship,

For when you need that handy tip!

Leaving the stress and tension behind,

Instead now finding peace of mind.

Scared of failing, you still walk on,

Staying positive, and keeping strong.

You have friends, who'll keep you in line,

Just keep smiling, and you'll be fine.

Tanya G., Tisbury, Wilts, U.K.

A New Definition of Strength

Step One, for me, is about

revolution. Challenging all my old

assumptions of what is correct and valued

behavior. Pre-Greysheet, I had a mental

check list of right thinking and

behaviors. They were totally rigid and

allowed for no infringement of the rules without punishment. Good Behavior included:

1. Never admitting to weakness.
2. Never asking for help.
3. Anger and rage were laudable. They demonstrated strength and superiority.
4. Consequently, anything soft - kindness, friendship, tears, relaxing, - was a dirty emotion.
5. Love was about criticizing someone in order to make them better than they were.
6. Life was an eternal quest for betterment and perfection.
7. Self-will and self-control were a measure of one's intrinsic worth and needed to be exerted in a superhuman manner to even approximate perfection.

Obviously this code did not work for me. Coming to Greysheet and hearing that I was not a deeply wicked, weak person who didn't deserve the air she breathed was an enormous relief. The First Step was like a hand gently letting the air out of a nearly bursting balloon.

However, I do tend to get over-inflated. I have to stay close to the community and be continually reminded that I am powerless, and that it is O.K. Not only O.K., but pretty marvelous, too, because powerlessness means that I can refuse that punishing list of behaviors.

It's not so much that I forget the horror around food; it's more that a little worldly

praise or success will blow up my ego until I begin to think, "Gosh, I'm so clever that I don't need to worry about anything more than weighing my food. I don't need to worry about the meetings or fellowship or God." Fortunately, so far, at times like that the community has pulled me right back into Step One and reminded me what a terrible mess I get into if I try to take back my power.

Sometimes I feel resentful about that. I want to embrace again the type of behaviors that I understand - being hard, critical, angry and pure. I am afraid that humility is a sign that I am weak, pathetic, subservient and soft.

I do know that this is diseased thinking. I don't always feel that it is though. It was the right way for too many years.

So where am I at the moment? Close to the program. I feel that I got my fingers too close to the food fire and only just got snatched back in time. So I've run straight back to Step One, really feeling powerless and, sometimes very glad to be so - because I can see that through that admission I can become strong with a new, radically different definition of strength. I suspect, but usually reluctantly, that strength means merging with what is greater than myself.

Janet, Los Angeles, CA.

Surrender is My Remedy

The following was submitted to us in response to the topic of "Interpreting the Greysheet Over the Greynet":

I know that for me, part of my disease says I will do this perfectly, and I want all the answers written down so I don't make a mistake - because I am desperate to LIVE. That's part of it. I'm not sure if there is any answer that will satisfy. But when I compare [Greysheet] to AA which has less room for variations, I still hear about differences in sponsorship. Some allow the use of mouthwash with alcohol (they don't swallow); some allow cooking with alcohol (it burns off?); some allow drugs - prescription or otherwise (it's an outside issue); some allow whatever the doctor prescribes; others would have you change your sobriety date if you did any of these, used perfume containing alcohol, or a number of other things. Pretty scary - they all use the same Big Book and profess following the 12 Steps of a co-founder who experimented with LSD scientifically and didn't change his AA birthday. So when it comes down to it, I have a few choices, and I have had to look at these and pray about these, especially during the first few years of my abstinence - whenever I hear about something someone else gets to do, or something I was sure my sponsor says is just fine when I ask a food question for a sponsee, but I had never done in my own nine years of abstinence.

1. I can go back to making my own decisions, and go back to getting what I always got from my interpretations of Weight Watchers, Atkins, Stillman or whatever. Fat and miserable.
2. I can shop for a sponsor who lets me do whatever I want and prove I can find someone to let me do it my way and get the same results as above.
3. I can shop for a sponsor who will not let me do anything that tastes good, get frustrated and go back to 1 or 2 above with the same results.
4. What I have found works best for me is to refer back to the Big Book, as I did when I first found the Greysheet and was looking for a local sponsor and support I could trust, kneeling on my kitchen floor, thousands of miles away from anyone I knew who was abstinent on the Greysheet and remembering the words on page 164 of the Big Book of AA:

Still you may say: "But I will not have the benefit of contact with you who write this book." We cannot be sure. God will determine that, so you must remember that your real reliance is always upon Him. He will show you how to create the fellowship you crave.

When agitated and doubtful, when I don't know who to trust, I ask God to let me know what to do - I know that's scary, trying to rely on hearing God's will when I know I'm sick - just like the people who wrote the Greysheet and the Big Book. But while I

turn to the people in these rooms for experience, strength, and hope, I have to turn to my Higher Power to let me know what direction to follow. I have to rely on more than the individual. But for me for today, I trust that my Higher Power will let me know a true danger signal of a sponsor that is veering from abstinence.

Meanwhile, if one sponsor says cup, and another says weigh; if one says half cup vegetable and another says whole; if one says minimum three hours between meals and another says five hours - I don't need to debate it. I don't have to prove you are wrong so I can be right. I need to know that what is on your plate is none of my business unless you've asked me to be your sponsor. And the only way I can preserve the integrity of the program is by following the direction of a sponsor who I believe is living an abstinent life that is happy, joyous, and free - and passing that on to those I sponsor. I've had some times of doubt over the years, and that's when I pray for HP's direction - and once that's meant changing sponsors.

Only you know what is best for you - you and HP. I pray that your HP will be loud and clear with what you need to do. We do suffer from a deadly disease, and we cannot water down our medicine and live. But I trust my HP to give me a sponsor to help me figure out the dosage, because I've lost the ability to read for myself, and left to my own devices, I'll end up with too much or too little. Surrender is my remedy.

Again, it is HP that I must trust.

Abstinent in Seattle,

Colette A., Seattle, Wash.

Editor s Corner

Happy Fall!

I want to thank all the contributors to this issue of Shades of Grey. As usual, Greysheeters in this issue have demonstrated their overwhelming enthusiasm for weighing & measuring without exception - first-timers and old-timers alike. There is also great depth to the sharing. Greysheeters are able to show how, because of their abstinence, they are practicing the Steps in all areas of their lives.

I am grateful to be a part of this community. See you at the Round-Up, October 17th and 18th.

Alison K., New York City, N.Y.