

WORLD SERVICE BUSINESS CONFERENCE 2004 COFOUNDER'S ADDRESS

By Rozanne S.

Good morning my friends. My name is Rozanne, and I'm a compulsive overeater. Tonight I will have been coming back to OA meetings for forty-four years, three months and twelve days. That's what I mean when I talk about "Keep Coming Back." Also, I do thank all of the delegates who were here last year who signed that huge, beautiful yellow card you all sent to me in Los Angeles. I was very touched by your love and caring, and I'm so happy to be back with you this year.

The theme for this year's Conference is Unity: Together We Can. Keeping in mind that together we can do what we could never do alone, I want to start by taking you back to OA's earliest times. The year was 1966; we were six years old, and we had 100 groups across the United States. At that time Margaret P. was our national secretary, and I was helping her answer our ever-increasing mail.

"Rozanne," she said, "it's my job to reply to incoming letters, but I'm answering the same questions over and over. I wish we could send an experienced member to every meeting to share solutions to group problems and explain OA and our recovery program."

"Instead of a person," I answered, "we'll send a handbook to serve as a stand-in for that experienced individual." I envisioned myself and the older members physically reaching out to all those who came after us. As the idea took shape, that image became the theme of the new booklet, and the title of the booklet came from my visual image: "I Put My Hand in Yours."

"Remember, you are not alone," we said in the booklet. "We are all with you all the time, even though you may feel lonely and far away from other OA groups. We in OA have suffered as you have, we have been helped for many powers outside of ourselves, and we have been shown a new way to live. We say in all sincerity, 'come with us and let us show you the way,' and as we reach out to you, we truly hope that you will take heart . . . and put your hand in ours."

We were learning that we not only had to seek help for ourselves from another compulsive overeater, but in order to keep our precious abstinence, we had to give away what we had been given.

When we published our own OA "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions," in the Acknowledgement section we said, "We of Overeaters Anonymous would like to express our deep gratitude to our great preceptor, Alcoholics Anonymous, without which our Fellowship and our program of recovery would not exist."

Therefore, let's find out what AA had to say about this year's OA Conference theme Unity: Together We Can. In the Foreword to the second edition of AA's Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, we read, "The broker had gone to Akron on a business venture, which had collapsed, leaving him greatly in fear that he might start drinking again. He suddenly realized that in order to save himself, he must carry this message to another alcoholic. That alcoholic turned out to be the Akron physician." We know that this broker was AA's cofounder, Bill Wilson, and that the Akron physician was AA's other cofounder, Dr. Bob Smith. About Dr. Bob, the Foreword states, "He sobered, never to drink again up to the moment of his death in 1950. This seemed to prove that one alcoholic could affect another as no non-alcoholic could. It also indicated that strenuous work, one alcoholic with another, was vital to permanent recovery."

In case you still have doubts about the basic necessity of working together, let's turn to "The Doctor's Opinion," also from the AA Big Book. It was written by Dr. William Silkworth who said, "In late 1934, I attended a patient who . . . was an alcoholic of a type I had come to regard as hopeless.

"In the course of his third treatment, he acquired certain ideas concerning a possible means of recovery. As part of his rehabilitation, he commenced to present his conceptions to other alcoholics, impressing upon them that they must do likewise with still others [emphasis added]."

Now, let's turn our attention to OA. As years passed and we continued to learn our own lessons, we began to understand that together we could do what we could never do alone. Instead of living and bingeing in isolation, we joined with others who shared our obsession. In the OA groups we found love and acceptance. We discovered a sense of belonging and unity with other compulsive overeaters that satisfied us in a way food never could. In addition, we found that we could not keep this precious gift, this new way of life, unless we gave it away. None of us can survive unless we carry the OA message to other compulsive overeaters.

Tradition One states, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity." In our own "Twelve and Twelve" we read, "The unity of OA is a matter of life and death to us. However, unity isn't always easy to maintain. OA members come from diverse backgrounds, and in meetings we sometimes encounter people very different from us in their approaches to recovery." Our book continues: "Unity does not mean uniformity. In OA we learn we can disagree with other people on important issues and still be supportive friends. We listen to others with open minds, and we learn to express ourselves without insisting that everyone must do this our way. As we practice these new skills, we begin to better understand ourselves and others. It becomes easier to find a way of doing things which meet everybody's needs."

As I read through these wonderful books, it became clear to me that our Conference theme is really in two parts. Tradition One spells out the first part, the necessity for our all-important unity. Tradition Five and Step Twelve describe the second part, carrying the message of recovery to another compulsive overeater.

Our personal recovery depends on OA unity. We are not alone. We are connected to our fellow human beings. We must rejoice in our diversity, celebrate our many local and worldwide backgrounds, yet recognize that our shared illness brings us together on our common path to recovery.

In order to reach this longed-for recovery, we have learned to function together. As Bill Wilson taught us, it is imperative to work with others as his friend had done with him. "Faith without works is dead," he said. So we put aside our preconceived ideas, began to find and enlarge a spiritual life, turned for help to another compulsive overeater, and finally, began with zest and enthusiasm to help others like ourselves and to urge them to do the same. We found that we could abstain from compulsive overeating, live our lives according to the Twelve Steps, work with others locally, nationally and internationally—and in the end, take part in a vibrant and exciting Overeaters Anonymous.

Thirty-eight years ago I put my original dream into words which have become familiar to all of you, "I put my hand in yours, and together we can do what we could never do alone! No longer is there a sense of hopelessness, no longer must we each depend upon our own unsteady willpower. We are all together now, reaching out our hands for power and strength greater than ours, and as we join hands, we find love and understanding beyond our wildest dreams."