

The 12 STEP GAZE

Recovery Magazine for California

Get Ready...
Get Set... **GO!**

Make Your Mark

2015 Can Be Your
Year For A

Fresh Start

*Tips for Keeping
New Year's Resolutions*



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**Who are Your
Caterpillars?**



Dr. Judi Hollis

**Experience, Strength, and Hope
For People Struggling with Food Obsession**

Dr. Judi Hollis graciously agreed to meet with me and talk about her 40 years of personal and professional experience in recovery. Dr. Hollis is a true pioneer in an area that many people struggle with yet so few find true relief from – compulsive overeating. I understand why she is sought after on television talk shows and speaking engagements. She is not only a well-educated psychologist/marriage and family therapist, articulate and thoughtful with her message of hope and encouragement, she is beautiful, down-to-earth, and visibly comfortable in her own skin.

Sitting together in her unassuming office in Palm Springs, we started talking about the differences and similarities between Overeater's Anonymous (OA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). We touched on many of the complicated facets of recovery from compulsive overeating. In the interest of space and focus, I will paraphrase with Judi's approval, and share some of her wisdom and hope with you here (and in future issues).

Some Similarities and Differences between AA and OA. In AA, it is widely accepted and understood that an alcoholic cannot return to the days of enjoying and "controlling his/her drinking," as stated in the Big Book. Dr. Hollis' somewhat controversial opinion is that the goal of the compulsive overeater is the opposite. The ultimate goal IS to be able to enjoy and control his/her eating. After working with overeaters for 40 years, including herself, Dr. Hollis has found that some aspects of the Big Book can apply and some cannot. For example, by the time an overeater finds him/herself in the rooms of OA, desperate for help and frustrated with failure, the list of "methods we have tried" in chapter 3 would be so enormous it couldn't be lifted. We are gifted experts at everything from calorie counts to nutritional values, and could write volumes of books about it. As with alcoholics, overeaters have been applying this vast knowledge in their lives using "will-power" (or self-will). The missing component is surrender. People who struggle with compulsive overeating must surrender to the fact that they have a lifelong illness that requires daily monitoring.

Initially when people get into recovery from overeating, there is a necessary rigidity about their food plans. This is great! It teaches honesty. It teaches us to think about every sliver, slice, slab, and slob of food we want to take in; it teaches us to talk to someone else (our sponsors) when we've deviated from a plan we had and we have an opportunity to see our own machinations around food. This is an area in which OA differs from AA. In OA we need to talk to our sponsors every day. It is critical that we check in about what we are doing so they can witness the commitment we have made to ourselves for that specific window of time. OA sponsors are not intended to be the judge and jury, and they're not diet advisors although they may share their own experience. The purpose of daily commitment and accountability is to allow another human being to witness how we are doing at honoring OURSELVES. Another human being who has been through what we're going through can compassionately understand and encourage.

Honesty is a key factor in any recovery program. "Abstinence" is another term that is commonly used as a critical ingredient

of successful recovery. Abstinence is a terrible term to use in OA recovery. Abstinence is difficult to define in the recovery of compulsive overeating and should be replaced with surrender. Successful recovery from compulsive overeating comes one day at a time by honoring the commitment we've made to ourselves and our sponsors on the food plan we've chosen for that day. We surrender the need to rely on will-power, and we turn to our sponsors and the 12 steps for a daily reprieve. Relapse is an opportunity to learn about what is being neglected in our recovery, and what needs to be given more attention. Without relapse people don't pay attention. Recovery is a learning experience and a lifelong journey that isn't intended to be mastered in a day... or a day-count.

Day-counts and chips aren't intended to be an opportunity to show off. If you can say, "Wow... today I had a decent day with food," then you can also say, "Tomorrow I may have a decent day with food." The progress is very slow, gradual, and flexible. If a food plan needs to change based on circumstances, that doesn't mean "start over, you didn't do it right." It means that your food plan needed to change based on circumstances. We talk with our sponsors about it before, during, and after – and we continue on.

Later in recovery we may have enough time in grade where we can start sometimes enjoying things we would have NEVER had in our first 10 years (for instance). We plan for it, we talk about it with our sponsors, we say it out loud to ourselves, and we enjoy it. This philosophy is not shared by everyone in OA, and is a significant deviation from the AA philosophy on abstinence. Dr. Hollis and many other successful people with long term recovery from compulsive overeating have been able to deviate from the initial rigid food plan. The journey is never-ending, but it can and should be flexible.

As with AA, OA uses the 12 Steps. This is different from other self-help groups or diet clubs. The 12 steps guide us to a point where we face ourselves internally and begin to change our behaviors. We become better people when we make amends to the sales lady at Macy's for our ridiculous behavior. We learn to do nice things without needing recognition. We become honest about our feelings and healthy in our expression of those feelings. By working the steps, we notice our self-esteem grow.

Dr. Hollis remembers when OA was at its most healthy – a place where we all show up as fallible human beings and reflects, "The message I got from my first meeting in 1974, 4 days before Thanksgiving, was, 'there, there. We know how hard it is.' It wasn't anything anybody said to me directly, but it was the attitude of, wow! We're all huddled here together like little gerbils. We've been spinning our wheels our whole lives fighting this thing and we realize it's tough! Our natural state is bingeing. So every day to the good is fabulous!"

(K. Van Den Berg based on interview 12-5-2014)

