

Codependents Anonymous Speech
January 26, 2006
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Hickory Area CoDA

My name is Carroll and I am grateful to be a recovering co-dependant. I am grateful for this program, for all that you have shared with me and for this opportunity to share with you tonight.

I didn't always like 'me'. This program has helped me become more self aware. It's given me the chance to get to know and like who I am. I no longer rely on you to tell me that.

I came to Codependents Anonymous (CoDA) because of the addict in my life. This program has proven to me that I have an addiction, to people. Not just any people. I'm addicted to addictive personality types. If you are an alcoholic, sexaholic, workaholic, foodaholic, or just a common variety chaos magnet, I will be irresistibly drawn to you. I have come to surrender and accept that about myself. The last three steps have even shown me how to turn that negative into a positive. Today, I know that I am likely to use those sorts of relations just like a drug to help me cope with the pain and dysfunction of my past. Now, I know a new way to deal with my addiction and it works. When I work my program, I can experience emotional sobriety.

When I first came into these rooms, I was fortunate to have someone put the big book and the twelve and twelve in my hands and tell me to read them. I did. Later on, my sponsor gave me 'homework' related to some of the passages I read. Those two books are invaluable to me today.

February will mark 7 years in the program for me. And it happened just like you said it would. One day at a time. I just turned 40. And that happened one day at a time. I know this is a program of paradoxes. I feel younger and more alive than ever before. That's right out of the big book. "When the spiritual malady is overcome we straighten out mentally and physically." Just one of the gifts this program offers. When I was asked to consider speaking, I was touched by the creator's timing. What a wonderful birthday gift for which I say thank you and Thy will be done.

I feel as though I spent most of my life before CoDA trying to hide and then coping an attitude when no one noticed. Somehow I learned that I should hide from you. I thought I could hide from myself. I thought I could hide from God. With an ego that big you ain't gonna hide from much for very long.

Today I thank God for my ego. Sometimes I'll let it run just to watch and see what it'll do. That's the kind of fun I can have now. I've learned to laugh at myself. But I can remember a time when I thought I was powerful enough to hide - even from God.

Then, slowly, I came to believe all that was unnecessary. And I got my first taste of sanity and it scared me. I didn't know what it was and I didn't know that I was insane. See, I came into the program looking to fix every one else. I was miserable because they just wouldn't

do it my way - but I wasn't insane. I just kept doing the same things expecting different results -- and blaming everyone else.

Today I know why my marriage failed. I was a manipulative control freak and he had a lot to learn. I had to teach him how to hang clothes out on the line; in ascending order of size and overlapping with one clothespin at each juncture to make the most efficient use of materials. We were married for 12 years. Don't ask me how. Today I know it was self will run riot. My self will kept me in that marriage until God did what I couldn't do for myself and ended it.

I had never been shown any other way. I didn't know what I didn't know. This program has taught me that it's ok not to have all of the answers. I just need to follow some simple directions. Simple. Stop playing God. Page 62 of the big book: "this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom." Stop playing God and you'll free up a lot of time. Page 63 "established on such footing we became less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs [and] more interested in what we could contribute to life." My day just flows when I start out by asking that God direct me to be of service today. Seems like the days I think I've got problems, God will put people with problems in front of me. It takes me out of self and into service.

I love my job. I'm in maintenance at the Y.M.C.A. Talk about opportunity to contribute. You have never seen joy like the joy that will spread across the faces of half a dozen wet haired women when you throw the right breaker switch and the hair dryers roar back to life. That's a good day right there. Simple.

I did my first 4th step for all the wrong reasons. And it still worked out all right. My sponsor told me I couldn't date anyone in the program until I did it. Well, I had already culled one of the other crazies from the "recovery herd" so I was eager to do my 4th step. I did it with my sponsor at a 4th step workshop. Going in I thought once this is done I won't ever have to think of it again. I planned to burn the worksheets. Never mention it again. But before I was through I wanted to post the thing on the front page of the Hickory Daily Record. "We don't regret the past or wish to shut the door on it" it was humbling and freeing all at once. I could finally see my part in it. How my dependence on other people, places, institutions, or situations had become my higher power. I had shut myself off from the sunlight of the spirit. That had to change. I had to find a way to trust in the infinite rather than the finite. Working the steps every step of the way seemed to be the way.

I was told "you have to do this yourself but you don't have to do it alone." And with the help of my fellows, I began to learn. I worked 5,6,7,8&9. It brought new meaning to the first three steps. I felt like I had been asked to start over again. So I did. I didn't mind the setback I knew I would graduate one day.

I remember hearing the promises read at my first CoDA meeting. Those were the things I had been running myself ragged trying to get and getting nowhere. And you said "try it this way." I wanted what the program offered. Serenity. You said "accept the things you cannot change, change the things you can." Simple. I learned that the only thing I could change or ever hope to control was me. So I set my watch to beep on the hour. When it went off I looked to see

if anything I could change needed changing. I wasn't playing God anymore, much, so I had time to – oh I don't know– eat. Or take myself to the bathroom. I haven't had a urinary tract infection since I started this program. Self care, focus on me. I learned those things at CoDA.

My first attempts at making amends were clumsy at best. I hadn't had much practice at saying I'm sorry. No need of that when you're always right. I made my list and had become willing when my sponsor pointed out that my name should be top on the list. Because every co-dependant behavior is in truth a wrong done toward ourselves. Today I catch the wrongs I do to myself and others a little more quickly. I've learned to make the amends for me without expectation. I've learned that "I'm sorry" can't hold a candle to "I was wrong." And that all those words are empty without a change in my behavior to back them up.

I have been known to behave fairly well – in meetings. Meetings have become my 'time-outs,' where I rest up, fill up, take a break. The experience, strength and hope I gain at CoDA helps me to "cease struggling". Even today I can wear myself out in between meetings. Out there most people I meet in a days time don't have a clue that I'm trying to carry this message, practice these principles and stay awake spiritually. Some of them may wish I'd just go back to sleep. But, at CoDA there's accountability and support. One suggestion I was given early on was to come in, shake hands with everyone, tell everyone my name. No more hiding. Later on my sponsor encouraged me to share during meetings, every one. It's not always easy. Even now while I'm driving to a meeting, I'll sometimes try and talk myself out of saying anything once I get there. Seems my first instinct is to hinder my growth or the growth of another. I'm still learning how to accept responsibility and maintain friendships. Thankfully it's a continuing education program.

I feel like I'm a better parent now than before CoDA. I had to learn what was my stuff and what was their stuff. That what they did and who they became really was no reflection on me. Someone once suggested that I read through the twelve traditions and substitute the words 'family unit' whenever I saw the words 'CoDA group' there. That has been a big help to me in relationships to my children. It has shaped my role as a parent. The "traditions sheet" is the one I most often volunteer to read at meetings. I read it with my children in mind. My kids never fail to show me that when I try to have power where I have none, I get crazy. I end up checking my motives, asking myself how am I being selfish, dishonest, inconsiderate, or resentful and then making amends.

I used to dread the end of the day. I would lie awake worrying about things I hadn't found the time to do in days or about things that might happen in the days ahead. Now I just spend a few minutes reviewing the day. Just that one day. I look at the ways I used myself will and how God's will was expressed in my life. It helps me see where I am and where I need to go. I usually sleep pretty well. Mornings are rarely accompanied by dread. And if they are I can be comforted by the words on page 163 of the big book: "We realize we only know a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask him in your morning meditations what you can do for the man who is still sick. The answers will come if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with him is right and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the great fact for us. Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to him and to your fellows.

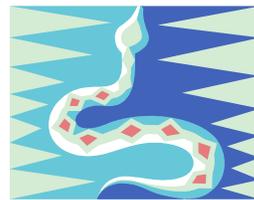
Clear the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the fellowship of the spirit and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the happy road of destiny. May God bless you and keep you until then.

In closing, I'd like to share a poem I wrote about my experience with my own addiction.

Bitten

Yes, I know what it's like
to withdraw
the painful process
of detoxification
as the poison is ever so slowly
replaced with
the will to find another way to live
and waves of nausea give way to
the dawn of every new and dreaded day
Yes, I am familiar with
The fullness of the void
That venom fills
And the endless empty pit
Revealed as life
The only one you've ever known recedes
Exposing places that are
To tender to touch
And I know that
Those places cry out
For the very same venom that
Left them black and blue
Gnarled and twisted in anticipation
Of a tolerance that
Will not come
Before death

Carroll



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