

Recording taken from Jeannie O's share in Edinburgh.

Main Share - Jeannie O

My name's Jeannie O and I'm a sex addict.

It's good to be landed and it's especially good to be in a place where I can share that identity that means so much to me, among my clansfolk here. I've been in various 12-step programs since 1977, the summer Elvis died and in that time I've ruined a lot of healthy habits. I don't know about you but sometimes I find I have a healthy habit that I practice at the wrong time and I wanted to share one with you. In America we have Thanksgiving which is a chaotic feast, chaotic in that all kinds of dishes go in one direction, until one relative thinks that it's good to try the opposite direction so food is going from the left to the right and the right to the left and I was at such a gathering with a large family membership and I saw my nieces rolls in a basket headed in my direction, I looked a way for a while and all of a second it came to me and all the rolls were gone and I was faced with an empty bread basket, and this ancient habit from all my years from the program, and I did what I always do in the presence of an empty bread basket, I reached in my pocket and put in a couple of dollars and passed it on. And at which point my grand-nephew at ten years old said 'I think it's free today'.

1:43

At any rate, there's lots of silliness in the process of recovery and I cherish that. I have a coin, a medallion, with the date stamped on it and I look at that date and I think that in reality it's just a road mark and it kind of reminds me of what we had in America - and I'm sure you have the counterpart here in Scotland - the Pony Express you know carrying the mail would go by Stage coach as far as it could go and where the populations thinned out and the distances between cities increased it was necessary for individual and a single horse to carry the message to the next town and when his horse wore out, he got a fresh horse and when he wore out he got a fresh rider and the message went on and that's the way it is in recovery we're carrying the message from coast to coast continent to continent and some of the message are the own story of recovery in that bag and some of it pre-dates our recovery some of it pre-dates the discovery or the creation of the 12-steps as well you know not all the stories in the stories that we carry are stories of hope but some of them are and not all stories are stories of tragedy but there are those stories as well.

3:20

And what I wanted to talk to you about today, I have to stop myself and I wanted to greet my friend Christine in America where it's 4.30 in the morning watching this and also Frank so hats off to them. What I wanted to talk about today is about carrying the message and do a quick review of how it was with carrying the message and addiction and recovery, how it is now and what's next because you represent what's next as a pony express rider I'm 76 years old next.. in two months and so I'm wearing out on my horse and so the next carrier is one of you or all of you or people we don't know yet. So that's why I'm speaking to you.

4:20

When I talk about carrying the message a lot of us think automatically of Bill W but the story goes before Bill W. There is a DNA so to speak, in the recovery program there's a DNA to

addiction in that it goes back several generations of humans looking at it, cultures looking at it, and trying to deal with it.

4:45

Speaking of DNA I was in Minneapolis in a line and there's this woman who's carrying a cute little mutt and one person in the line that was a rat terrier another person was insisting that was a chihuahua, and the owner of the dog said 'you know it's kind of funny, I had an extra \$100 and so I had a DNA done on my dog and going back three generations of this dog's history there's 17 varieties of dogs that went into the parentage of this puppy' and the man says 'but it was a rat terrier and 1% of it is rat terrier'.

5:27

And I think the SAA when it looks at it's own genealogy its own DNA recognise that pre-dates AA and it pre-dates what we would consider 12-step fellowships or spiritual fellowships and it extends into a wider realm and in preparing for these remarks I was struck by an odd coincidence and that's that one of my sources of understanding of recovery comes from a native son of Edinburgh that was born at number 8, Howard Place near Royal Botanical Gardens possibly walking a distance from here I have no idea where I am so I assuming it is.

6:18

And this Robert Louis Stevenson was born in 1850 and only lived 41 years and died in 1891 and in 1880 he wrote Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and those of you who ever read it in light of your own recovery you'll recognise the metaphor that is so profound in regard to addiction. Dr Jekyll starts out as the kindly person who wants to do good only he wants to be more than himself, and so he reverts to something outside of himself for power, and that power makes him glow brighter, burn brighter for a while until there is a split between him and that power and both of them set about destroying the other.

7:15

That is a story of addiction and Robert Louis Stevenson, your native son here, did not live long enough to hear about the story of recovery. He died in 1891 and maybe a few years later saw the birth of Bill W and doctor Bob who were roughly contemporaries and Bill W's wife Lois who in the 30s came up with the next step in that story and that is not only is there this duality within the human personality there is also a hope of bringing them back together again, not killing Dr Jekyll not killing Mr Hyde but integrating the two to one, and using the force of that tragedy to make the original spirit stronger and that's called the 12-steps.

8:18

Now when I look at this story of Dr Bob and Bill W and read the Big Book I realise that it was a story of recovery essentially for white men at the time, not because of discrimination but because of lack of vision, lack of imagination. It was the challenge that that group faced, AA first faced when a black man wanted to recover in New York City that they had to think 'well we have the 12-steps, there might be more..' then they had to come up with the 12 Traditions, how the group was to stay sober, how the group was to grow, and how the group was to recover and maintain its vitality, its humanity and the only purpose was to help the one who is still suffering and that black man in New York City did not have to have a group of his own to recover he was

legitimately a member by virtue of being an alcoholic. The same had to be discovered by them that alcohol referred to women too, this was kind of like a scandalous insight on their part.

9:43

It wasn't that long before I was born, but that was the story of AA's contribution of carrying the message, and the next challenge for them was to say this is a good thing we've got going, we can do this well and we can do it swiftly, you know, as far as mounting the effort against alcohol addiction, but there were the other forces challenging them and those other forces were Narcotics Anonymous people, the Gamblers Anonymous people, the Overeaters Anonymous people in the 40s and the early 50s, and the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous had to decide whether going faster was better than going farther. And they opted to go farther in their recovery efforts and to their surprise a number of their members were also qualified for other programs, and very un-astonishing now, but in order to deal with one addiction it was impossible unless one also addressed the other addictions present. That was the message that was carried in the 1950s.

11:07

In the 1960s there are other forces, other DNA forces that were operating in what would become us, sort of our grandparents, still a twinkle in their eyes. And those forces such as therapy when people were dealing with family systems for the co-addiction part of all those fellowships, and addiction itself they realised there's a woundedness often present in the background that needed to be addressed in order to reinforce the recovery that could happen and it was in the state of emerging in the 60s, it wasn't just strictly Freudian therapy, there were other forces entering, one of those forces was Carl Jung, he had contribution several decades earlier to Bill W's formulation of the 12-Steps.

12.23

One of Bill W's friends, Ebby, had gone to Zurich and talked to Carl Jung and this was before the Steps were written and what they had is the foetal part of this 12-Step was the notion that you should be able to just by your own bootstraps pull yourself up and Carl Jung's contribution, which was contribution as a therapist of his mindset, was that in Carl Jung's experience he had never experienced seen anybody have a spiritual recovery that did not involved some source outside of themselves. In other words the notion of Higher Power comes from Switzerland, from a non-addict. And other wisdoms in the DNA of SAA came from therapy and therapists dealing with the population that were our counterparts back then and also in the 60s forces that made it possible for SAA to emerge because in the 60s I don't think sex addicts anonymous, or any of the S fellowships would have gotten off the ground.

13.50

There were different social forces begun in American from my perspective by the Civil Rights movement, which grew into the women's right movement and grew into the gay rights movement and those forces of liberation were necessarily predecessors to the evolution of the 12-Step fellowship that affects you today. That's part of your DNA is the work and the message that was carried by Martin Luther King, [inaudible] and all of the rest and I'm not fluent enough to dictate all of those names right now.

14:31

In this 1970s there was, I would say that it was pretty wild and crazy in the 1970s in that there was liberation without any kind of temperance it's not that there was no moral fibre in the 1970s it's just that the moral fibre was polyester, as such it had quite a contribution to make towards our founders of our fellowship of SAA the four men in Minneapolis who were experiencing that kind of chaos with sex addiction so permission.. that kind of tragedy carried to them the message of their own addiction and the special nature of it being sex addiction and that was correspondingly happening in Boston the same summer of 1977 with SLAA and those two started that.

15:38

So that was the background of the formation of SAA and what happened subsequently the contributions of SAA were the structure, the Intergroup structure that helped organise and set up meetings, first locally in Minneapolis for our group and increasing circles outward. Started women's groups, intergroup, we had no literature that was particular to SAA. I did not use the Big Book, what we did is we wrote our own literature.

16:32

We started out on weekends we'd have meetings and on Saturdays we'd have literature workshops where we wrote literature, where we put together starter packs for groups in North Dakota, in Los Angeles, in North Carolina, we wrote our own stuff in what was called a zerox machine, which was probably carcinogenic pretty awful purple stuff and we took things to a place unfortunately called Kinkos and duplicated materials and sent them through what was called the mail, not email

17:20

And we created a library of material and we found that it was easier finally rather than to drag our own stories with us through life, to carry our stories than to drag our own messages about what is life about, but to carry a message. One of the things that has changed for somewhat negatively is that there's been a dilution of feminine in SAA. I think if you look at SAA as a whole you see that SAA does a good job of bringing recovery to men, and when it contrasts one of the things I see is that in Minneapolis which is largely the metropolitan of maybe Glasgow, Minneapolis St Paul. There were in 1994 a 1000 members of SAA collectively one third of whom were female.

18.39

I can't imagine 300 women in all the UK and Europe at this point and that's just what I'm talking about presently in the United States 9% are female and in the UK 1% of the people that show up 1%. It takes two kinds of skin to take in the world, it takes the tough skin on the soles of your feet that allow you to walk across hot tar without burning if you walk fast enough, and it takes the soft skin on your face to feel an infant's skin against you. And I think we're losing some of that influence by not having women in this room, well in this room is pretty good but in a typical room, proportionate to the number of sufferers.

19:41

What I'm talking about my pony express, what I'm talking about is the message I want to impart is that it's to your advantage to do what you can in your own group or in other groups or in your

life or in your 12-Step work to carry the message so that it's safe for women to show up at meetings that is safe for women to continue to recover that they have the sponsors they need. I recently received a message that there are five women in Israel who wanted to join the mixed up group there and that they were challenged because the gay men would be sponsoring those women since there are no other women available are tied up with sponsoring already and so it struck me that from my very far distant view from the middle-east to the middle-west that it seems we may need to re-arrange things that maybe that some of the straight men could take on more of the sponsoring of gay men and free up gay men for the few women that you do have. Because I really think there is a triage situation in the United Kingdom when it comes to the sponsoring of women and that is 100% in you.

21:23

I was thinking of that.. what an opportunity five women in that corner of the world want to join and they have no recovering among them which is exactly the experience I was in before other women who wanted to join the men's group and the men wouldn't have us but we were in the same city. You know, it seemed to me that in Victorian days and earlier that when a woman enters a room there's only one seat some gentlemen would rise and she would be seated, in other words there was an acknowledgement that some different presence was in the room and that presence needed to be accommodated.

22:14

That presence needs to be accommodated especially for having clothing and she had on. That some things need to shift when there's a woman in the room. That this is our programme about sex, and gender is obvious. There may be some adjustments that can be made, and apparently, could be made in order to bring the numbers up, so that we are not just a fellowship that successfully causes and helps with recovery of men and also helps recovery with women.

23:00

And I know a personal friend of mine in Seattle, who saw his mission as part of his nine step, to the women in his life looking at to whom he could not make direct amends, indirect amends by servicing the 12 step calls, where women through whatever way was safe for him. That we want to make this safe for our daughters, my grandchildren, your nieces, your sisters. You know, that this is not just a good old boys club. And that is also our 100% opinion, but I wish I get to do with right here.

23:47

So what is happening? And these are some, some notes, some styles of sponsoring are changing. That there's not just one way of sponsoring and how sponsors learn how to sponsor differently, how do sponsors stay charged, how do they stay motivated? I mean, I've been at it for 40 years. How do I do that? And that's by speaking to other sponsors. And to that end, Christine who's over there in little box.. in a little Hollywood square (*joined online*) has started a weekly sponsors helping sponsors group and some of the topics that are available for that group involve:

24:43

discussions by sponsors on each of the steps, how they.. how they sponsor other people, not just what the step is, but how they sponsor the 12 steps, cross gender sponsoring,

circles, boundaries, books and resources, dating, dishonesty, helping healthy behaviours, dealing with new sponsees, permutations, relapse, singles, slogans, sponsor challenges, sponsee issues, sponsees sponsoring, sponsor concerns, sponsor support. And there's some others here too, I'm leaving that with you that if you are a sponsor and feeling burnt out, there are resources for you to stay in, stay active, stay contributing, to .. to ride your horse to the next town for the message.

25:46

There are other things that are happening there's.. this is from a sponsee who's important, Christina. And Christina has said that one of the things that's really helpful in retaining, recruiting women is orientation. Recognising you can't just drop into an SAA meeting. If you're a woman with 45 men, I've been in that position and expect that what you know about 12 steps is going to carry you through recovery in SAA..

26:30

There are different memberships, that are different individuals who come into orientation. Some of them have credits to transfer from other 12 Step programmes. Their orientation is easier than people who come into this programme and all their understanding of the 12 steps is what they learned in Hollywood. You know, sober up, apologise, convert something like that.

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And so to try to modify that understanding 12 steps to how it fits with their lives and what it means for them, is best accomplished, as far as, what I understand, about stable membership, by having orientation meetings.

27:23

And that's a question that I get across the board finally submitted rather than reinventing the wheel, somebody decided to start to nail down. You have podcasts about orientation that started and that person needs help. It was Christine and I only review her.. I mean her contact information through Catherine you know, so that when you have a newcomer and they want to know what's higher power.. is that some kind of electrical company, and then you can plug them into podcasts and orientation.

28:00

Then you have the idea that you have as a fellowship, or as an intergroup, I don't know which packets for newcomers, especially packets for women. And that you have some way of addressing a newcomer's reaction to bottom line meetings. You might want to make a note that the bottom line notion of SAA meeting started in the 90s and was not original it came out of OA, the HOW movement of OA. It is not part of SAA itself.

28:40

It has become handy for some people, it's become comfortable for some people. But it is terribly disconcerting if a woman does not know what the 12 steps are 1) does not know it's sex addiction and 2) and sure as hell doesn't know what recovery looks like.

29:00

I went to one of those meetings and I thought if I were a newcomer it would be not clear to me whether that person was practising those behaviours or recovering and if I had small children I would think that it would not be safe for me to attend further, and I would disappear.

29:24

So I think that those meetings are fine for those people it helps, but to have a meeting that says mixed without that kind of a warning, I think can frighten off most people you want to attract and attraction is the principal. And I think bottom line is the personality and there's a distinction that helps your own recovery, fine. But be aware that there is a red light as far as women in recovery, and that is their recovery and your recovery are linked. We have the same DNA.

30:07

There are study.. step and study groups for sponsorship. This can be workshops, they're going on, in Portland they can go on anywhere. And the act of writing literature is part of the 12-step recovery.

30:26

I have a sponsee who feels uncomfortable doing sponsorship. She's married and her part of her marriage involves disclosure.. obvious disclosure to her spouse of her acting out behaviour, several years ago. What she is doing instead of sponsoring is.. I'm encouraging her to write a pamphlet on disclosure of infidelity in recovery, for those that is appropriate. I mean, she cannot it's not a choice for her. It's not a choice. And she has to do it. Your partner's not in recovery what does that look like. That's not a hypothetical. That's a real and that's her message and only she can write it.

31:21

There's a Women's Intergroup. And if you don't know about it, there is the Grace list in which is an international system where women can find sponsors. And if you have a woman interested in seeking a sponsor, that you should know about and how you get that and I have some cards that again I gave Katherine with that information on there too.

31:55

Whenever you hear about a woman who is interested she should be made aware of the Grace List which is international sponsoring. And if you are bilingual, trilingual, whatever, that is of assistance to women in recovery too. So.. so that were.. if you are not willing to sponsor women, may be able to write literature in whatever your other language is that could reach women.

32:25

Other than that, I will be rattling on and I just want to say that I need your help. I have a satchel full of messages that I've been carrying. And I'm going to be passing that on and my own message to you is that your stories are invaluable and you can take from this programme, but it's at some point, imperative for your own recovery that you give back, and that you give back not monetarily (though I'm not discouraging that, Katherine). But that you give back by sharing your own story and reaching to the next person in the next generation. Because you're part of this DNA.

33:19

You're part of the heritage especially in the city of Robert Louis Stevenson. Who could not, for all the wonderful eloquence he had about suffering, know about recovery. But you do. You are his descendants. And it's your message to carry. Thank you.