



IN MEMORIAM

Rozanne S., Founder. Overeaters Anonymous
July 15, 1929 — January 16, 2014

“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.”

— The OA Promise, by Rozanne S.

“A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.”
(*For Today*, p. 311)

With one step into a 1958 Gamblers Anonymous meeting, Rozanne S., the founder of Overeaters Anonymous, set foot on her worldwide journey to bring help and hope to thousands of people struggling with compulsive eating. Rozanne’s journey has come to an end. The Board of Trustees and the World Service Office of Overeaters Anonymous pay tribute to the woman whose energy, vision, determination and compassion gave birth to OA in 1960. With the help of many others, hand in hand, she nurtured OA for 54 years.

Rozanne was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin USA, July 15, 1929, to parents who valued education and hard work. They instilled those values in Rozanne. When she was 12, the family moved to Chicago. Already she felt insecure about her weight and herself. At 18 and a junior at the University of Chicago, she thought being thin was the way to boys and happiness; she dieted from 142 pounds (64 kg) to 118 pounds (54 kg). A better fit, she thought, for her 5 foot 2 inch (157 cm) height. The boys came, and her grades plummeted. She left the university, enrolled in business school and regained the weight she had lost. A year later, she returned to the university and earned her degree.

She began work as a producer’s secretary, first in summer stock and then in New York City. She returned to Chicago two years later and became a fashion copywriter for a department store. Her love of writing flourished. Seeking warmer climes, she moved to Los Angeles and reveled in her job as assistant advertising manager for a chain of department stores. Despite her success, low self-esteem plagued her, and she continued to suffer from compulsive overeating.

January 1955 opened the door to love, and by the end of the year, she and Marvin S. married. The births of daughters Debbie and Julie followed. (Marvin passed away in November 1999.)

In November 1958, she saw a television program profiling a new Twelve-Step program, Gamblers Anonymous. She and Marvin took a friend-in-need to a meeting, not realizing it was she who would find salvation. She thought, “I’m just like that . . . Their compulsion is with gambling and mine is with food, but now I know I’m not alone anymore!” (*Overeaters Anonymous*, Second Edition, p. 11). She realized she wasn’t “wicked or sinful.” She had a disease, and it had a name: compulsive overeating.

However, no groups existed for compulsive overeaters. A year later, in desperation she returned to another Gamblers Anonymous meeting where the founder encouraged her to pursue her idea of starting a Twelve-Step program for compulsive overeaters. On January 19, 1960, Rozanne and two friends convened the first meeting of Overeaters Anonymous. (For more of Rozanne’s personal story of recovery, see “Keep Coming Back: Rozanne’s Story,” *Overeaters Anonymous*, Second Edition, p. 7.)



Rozanne became OA’s visionary, always searching for new ways to reach out and carry the recovery message. She abandoned her initial attempts to rewrite the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions for compulsive overeaters, relying instead on the universality of the original Steps and Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Early on she recognized the media’s value in carrying the message. She coaxed the producers of a syndicated television show to feature OA. On November 1, 1960, seven OA members appeared on the show; it produced a significant jump in OA membership. With meetings in her home, endless hours dealing with correspondence and counseling and cajoling on the phone, papers piled high in her dining room, and hours spent on financials, Rozanne’s life, with Marvin’s support, became OA. But “together we can,” and with increasing membership and helping hands, together she and OA members grew the organization.

Rozanne brought significant change to OA’s diversity, its outreach and its recovery program. She suggested OA hold its first Conference in August 1962. In 1961, OA had voted to ban men. Rozanne disagreed. With the Conference Committee’s approval, she invited A.G., a male Texan and co-founder of Gluttons Anonymous, to attend. Gluttons Anonymous merged with OA at the Conference, and thus began the welcome of men into OA.

The announcement of the upcoming Conference appeared in the first *OA Bulletin*, written by Rozanne and precursor to OA’s *Lifeline* magazine. She thought of the name *Lifeline* when imagining a lifeboat next to a huge ocean liner at sea.

A first Board of Trustees (BOT) emerged from the first Conference, and members also voted to hold an annual May Conference. The OA Convention grew out of a day of sharing experience, strength and hope at the first Conference.

In 1979, after Rozanne expressed concern for helping international OA members, the first Conference International Committee became a reality with Rozanne as chair. She also served on the BOT and as National Secretary.

Rozanne wrote many literature pieces for OA, including the original *To the Newcomer* pamphlet (1966) to orient newcomers; *I Put My Hand in Yours* (1968) to give information on how to start and strengthen groups; and *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams* (1996) to share OA’s history. A DVD interview titled *Reflections: A Visit with OA’s Founder* and a CD compilation of speeches *And Now a Word From Our Founder . . . Five WSBC Speeches* brought Rozanne’s insights and hope to members at large.

Rozanne’s compassion for and understanding of the emotional, physical and spiritual challenges faced by compulsive eaters have touched people worldwide. She leaves an enduring legacy that will continue to inspire and heal those who still suffer.

Members who wish to honor Rozanne’s memory with a contribution can go to 50447.thankyou4caring.org. Select Rozanne S. Memorial in the Designation drop down menu.

You may also call the WSO, 505-891-2664,

or send contributions by mail to

Overeaters Anonymous

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