

STORYLINE

From Workaholics Anonymous

JUN JUL AUG
2016



“Our primary purpose is to stop working compulsively and to carry the message of recovery to those who still suffer.”

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SHARING: BALANCE

There is a thread in the WA literature telling us that we are enough, and we do enough. We do not need to feel undeserving of peace and serenity. In my own case, I have experienced an emptiness, a hole in my soul that needed filling. I tried in vain to fill this with work, while denying there was even a hole. Of course, work did not fill the hole, nor did denial ease my sense of alienation.

In some recent reading, I came on an interesting observation, that human beings are by far the most collaborative of all species (except, perhaps ants); we cannot survive without the protection and acceptance of other humans. Alone, we are unable to raise offspring. Interdependence has become a genetic part of our being. Those who lived long ago who were unable to cooperate and become trusted members of the tribe or clan simply did not pass on their genes. In dealing with my emptiness, my work and other addictive behaviors did not help; they actually intensified my feelings of alienation.

I became a loner, with the genetic need for close personal contact with others not being met. On the other end of this spectrum, my need for acceptance can also become an addiction, with my showing up as being a “people pleaser”, while getting little personal satisfaction. This seems to spring from fear of being cast out, should I be too selfish, stubborn, or excitable to be a member of my group. These are, then, other ways of trying to become whole that don’t work.

As in all things, there needs to be balance: between satisfaction and generosity, between preserving one’s dignity and empathy for others, between self-care and deep sharing. It isn’t something that works out, once and for all, but needs to be reviewed constantly.

--Harry

SHARING: STEP THREE

Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.

I was in 12 step recovery for several years before I noticed the "we" part of this step: "our will," "our lives," "as we understood..." Prior to then, I did not trust many other folks. My dad was a wonderful provider and we never had to worry about food or shelter. However, I grew up in an alcoholic home. My parents were emotionally unavailable to us and not present or competent with many decisions about my schooling and my life. As such, I became a young adult at age 4-1/2. I started looking out for myself and continued that distrust of others into my adult life.

Thus, in the early years of my recovery when I was in my 20s, seeing the "we" parts of this step felt emotionally dangerous. During those times, even though the steps were read out loud at meetings as they are, I now understand that I blocked out the plural words and simply, in my mind, substituted "I" and "my." In my early 30s, I had been in my first twelve step program long enough to trust my recovery peers. All of a sudden one day, I saw the "we" aspect of the other steps and was okay with it. I applaud my younger self for finding a way to stay in this lifesaving program even though there was a huge aspect that scared me to my core. And then when I was ready, I accepted the communal aspect of this step and of my twelve step recovery. In fact, I think I was relieved to consciously understand that I was starting to trust others in my life again.

Another important aspect of Step Three is the strong reminder that this is a spiritual program that I do not do alone. At meetings, I feel a special bond and connection to my fellow twelve steppers at a depth that can only be possible at a spiritual level. I am also reminded of the spiritual connection I've felt at retreats. Until about five years ago, I went on annual spiritual retreats. Some were group ones; others, private retreats. However, once I started in WA, I have not felt a need for a retreat. This has really surprised me as they were vital for my recovery for about 20 years. Delving into WA has helped me deal directly with my core issues. That has been key helping me be more present in each moment plus keeping up a daily meditation practice each morning.

About three years ago, I felt a need to deepen my spirituality and thought that must mean a return to retreats. However, my life situation has changed now. I am married with a family. It is harder to get away on my own; plus, I don't necessarily want to get away on my own anymore. As I continued to ponder and pray, the next right action came to me: find a spiritual director. So, I checked with a trusted colleague about spiritual direction and he referred me to the perfect person. We see each other a few times each year. Her additional guidance complements my 12 step recovery. *Thanks for reading/listening. Have a blessed, beautiful day as we move forward one day, and each next right action at a time.*

*--Peace and blessings,
--Tisa*

SHARING STEPWORK: MY BROTHER JOHN

My sponsor suggested I work step four with five columns [my trigger(s), my weaknesses, my feelings, program wisdom, and my strengths and resources] for each person important in my life in order to inventory my weaknesses and also my strengths.

My Brother John: John was 5 ½ years older than me. He was the third boy in a sibship of five; I was the fourth child. He never liked me, and Dad always told him to get the chip off his shoulder.

I was born cross-eyed and didn't have a reparative operation until I was 5. I think he was ashamed of me, and I'm sure his friends made comments that embarrassed him. When my mom got pregnant with her fifth child, Peggy, we had outgrown our house and had to move to a new town where she was born. I think he blamed me for having to move and leave his friends. I remember the only time he was nice to me---one of my birthdays...I was maybe 6 or 7 and he gave me a gift. He doted on my younger sister Peggy. He always liked my older sister, Lisa, and they had been getting close.

He was very popular and had tons of friends who loved him. He was senior class president and was panning to go to college to become an engineer. He had formed a Car Club to promote safe driving; ironically, he was killed in a car/train accident --the car he was in was hit by at train--at age 17.

I was 11. I just wanted him to like me. The last time I saw him alive was the morning of the accident before school. I was looking at him while he was shaving and he told me to "scram, you little punk," and he meant it. He got his senior pictures taken that day.

TRIGGER ONE

JOHN DIDN'T LIKE ME. If I got any attention from him, it was emotionally abusive.

MY WEAKNESSES

FEELING REJECTED

INSECURITY

EVERYONE ELSE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN I am: "I'm a mistake and shouldn't be here"

OVER-SENSITIVITY: easily hurt feelings; don't look at me wrong or criticize me---I'll take it personally

PROBLEMS WITH MALE RELATIONSHIPS / IDEALIZATION AND EXCESSIVE FOCUS AND DENIGRATION OF MYSELF

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS MAINLY THROUGH MY ADDICTION(S)

REJECTING

DISBELIEVING / DISTORTED THINKING: if he told me something positive about myself I never believe(d) it; lack of trust

MY FEELINGS

UNLOVEABLE / UNLIKEABLE
SAD / DEPRESSED
ALONE / LONELY
UNDERLYING SHAME
WORTHLESSNESS
“I don’t belong in this family...I don’t belong anywhere”
UNDERLYING FEAR / TERRIFIED

WISDOM

COMPASSION: John was the product of a dysfunctional family and carried the family shame and anger, which he displaced on me.

INSIGHT: I think as adults we would be the closest...because we were most alike---the emotional ones in the family.

MY STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES

STRENGTHS: COMPASSION; SELF-LOVE; LOVE OF MY BROTHER; FORGIVENESS
RESOURCES: MEETINGS, TWELVE STEP READINGS, THERAPY

TRIGGER TWO

Sex was an unmentionable dirty word in our house; the taboo greatly aroused my curiosity. One day when I was 9 or 10, John caught me looking through the clothes chute to the basement where my dad was taking a shower. (Why there was no shower curtain is beyond me.) INCIDENT OF ABUSE: He angrily grabbed me and threw me down on the bed. I don’t remember what he said, but he acted like I had done the worst thing in the world and I was the worst person in the world; I thought he was going to kill me or at least hit me. He didn’t, but the incident left me with so much shame. John was very serious about church and was an acolyte (helped with the service), so I thought he knew everything and I knew nothing. This made me feel that my curiosity was a moral downfall and I was a bad person--and if this is what John thought of me, it must be true.

MY WEAKNESSES

INTERESTED IN THE “TABOO”
SECRETIVE
SHAME ABOUT BEING HUMAN
I’M SO FLAWED I’M WORTHLESS; I’M BAD BECAUSE I AM I’M A LOWLIFE
I CONNECT SEX WITH IMMORALITY; BEING SEXUAL IS BAD

PROBLEMS WITH SEXUALITY INTIMACY (I abused alcohol for a time in order to be sexual. I'm no longer drinking but currently somewhat sexually anorexic in my marriage.)

GULLIBLE

MY FEELINGS

ASHAMED

LESS THAN

WORTHLESS: John likes me even less now and has no respect for me

AFRAID

ANGRY: at myself for being so bad

PROGRAM WISDOM

NORMALIZING: I was just a child and children are naturally curious about sexuality.

PERSPECTIVE: Because of the way we were brought up, I think John had his own confusion about his body and sex. I was his scapegoat.

COMPASSION: John was also just a child, not understanding about sexuality.

MY STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES

STRENGTHS: INTELLIGENCE; PERSPECTIVE: COMPASSION

RESOURCES: SHARING AND VULNERABILITY with my husband who has similar awkwardness and pain from his own childhood, and understands me and my pain;

MEETINGS; LITERATURE; PSYCHOTHERAPY; MEDICATION

TRIGGER THREE

DEATH: John's death in a car/train accident on October 27, 1966 at 7:20 pm.

MY WEAKNESSES

MAGICAL THINKING AND SELF-BLAME: I was so angry with John for being so mean to me all the time and not liking me that about two weeks before he died, I wished he was dead and daydreamed about it. I think I thought I caused his death.

SELF-PITY: I asked, "Why do all the bad things happen to me?"

ENTITLEMENT; USING TRAGEDY FOR OWN GAIN: I hoped the kids at school who were mean to me and made fun of me would feel sorry for me and be nice. So in my heart I milked the tragedy and in a sick way was glad for my brother's death.

FEAR OF INTIMACY: I can't be with anybody who could hurt me by leaving. So I sabotage relationships with men who might leave me. I have chosen men whom I can leave.

MY FEELINGS

ANGRY: for not being able to grow up to resolve our issues

HEARTBROKEN

SAD / DEPRESSED: at the loss

SCARED: at life's unpredictability

HYPER VIGILANT always waiting for the next shoe to drop

DISTRUSTING

HEART-HARDENED

NUMB / PROBLEMS WITH INTIMACY WITH MEN

RELIEVED: he couldn't hurt my feelings anymore

PROGRAM WISDOM

PERSPECTIVE: Living with unresolved issues is very detrimental to growth---causes pathology.

NORMALIZING: Death is something that happens to all of us; we cannot change the past; we need to accept what we cannot change.

PRACTICALITY: Must have survival tools in the toolbox to be ready for triggers.

MY STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES

STRENGTHS: HONESTY; WILLINGNESS TO WORK MY PROGRAM

RESOURCES: THE SERENITY PRAYER; PRAYER IN GENERAL; SHARING MY FEELINGS IN MEETINGS

--from Sarah

SHARING: STEP TWELVE

Step 12 Q3: What message of hope can I carry to workaholics who still suffer?

For me, the most important message is hope itself. One of the first things I heard in Twelve-Step groups is that there is no graduation from our fellowships: Recovery and spiritual awakening are journeys, not destinations.

So here I am on Step 12 but I could not possibly claim that I am completely recovered or fixed. I am simply on my way, and a little further on than I was when I started. I know more about myself than I did before I got here, I inhabit my body a lot more than I have done for quite some time, and I feel a lot more both in terms of physical cues and range of emotions. I have deepened my relationship with my Higher Power and I have made some valuable new friends along the way.

I think that it is also important to say that my experience in WA has not been nearly as dramatic as my first experience in another fellowship. My progress has been slower and less consistent. For quite a while I felt that I wasn't getting anywhere, but, looking back, it's clear that I was in denial about the extent of my activity addiction and my dependency on adrenaline; it took a while for that thick blindfold to come off.

Since then, it's been quite a struggle to learn to use new "tools" and change old, entrenched habits. I am aware of comparing here but not at all in the sense that "comparing is despairing". The point I'm trying to make is that I can now see that it is important to understand that there should be no expectations of how recovery should evolve. As long as recovery work continues and there is some forward motion, I don't think speed and intensity of growth are as important as I used to think.

In WA, I am tackling the habits of a lifetime ... I've learned that the origins of my adrenaline addiction lie in my early childhood, when living in a dysfunctional home meant chronic fear and stress, which cause adrenaline to flow more constantly than nature intended. Also, I developed coping mechanisms, like stuffing my feelings, numbing my emotions, and trying to appear perfect; I focused on developing my brain at the expense of maturing emotionally. This, and so much more, formed the basis for the attitude and addiction problems that multiplied over the years. These messed up my life until I finally achieved clarity and surrender.

This helps me to understand why progress may seem slower here ... I'm dealing, I believe, with the oldest and deepest parts of my disease. Also, abstinence in WA does not mean simply not touching a certain external substance ever again like smoking one last cigarette. Here, I am basically dealing with my own body chemistry, chemistry that has become disordered because of the way I have been living for most of my life. I need to be gentle with myself and accepting of a different kind of progress, which is more of a crab's recovery ... a little scuttling to one side or another with an odd and uneven way of moving forward.

As I sit here writing this, I feel quite excited. I am "on the mend" again. I've found another part of myself that was missing. I have to reintegrate that properly and I know and accept that it will take time, patience, and willingness to keep going forward with the work of recovery. I am not simply going to stop changing and growing when I finish the last question for this Step, I'm going back to the beginning again to review where I am with each of the earlier Steps and see what I may have missed or not tackled thoroughly. Giving myself permission to be gentle with myself is tremendously hopeful and I hope it will come across that way to you, too.

*-Love in Fellowship,
-Jane*

SHARING: HOPE

I created a few acronyms for Hope that I would like to share with you all. I've reproduced them in the order they emerged.

HOPE IS:

*Humility Originating in Prayerful Entreaty
Handing Over to Power Extraordinary
Heart Open, Peace Entering
Horror Over Pain Exiting
Harsh Overworking Patterns Eliminated
Holding Onto Positive Experience
Happily Overcoming Perfectionistic Excesses
Harmful Overdoing+Procrastination Ending
Handing Over Power Easily
Having Open, Positive Encounters
Harmonious Order Prevailing Endlessly
Honesty Overcoming Past Errors
Having Occasions to Practice Empathy
Healthy Ordinary Pacing Evolving
Humor Overcoming Preening Ego
Holidays Occuring Practically Effortlessly
Heaps of Playful Enjoyment*

That's quite a lot of hope, isn't it?

*--Love in Fellowship,
--Jane*

SHARING: SIGNPOST SIX

Signpost 6: Work has become an addiction. We lie to ourselves and to others about the amount we do. We hoard work to insure we will always be busy and never bored. We fear free time and vacations and find them painful instead of refreshing.

When I first entered WA in 2011, I really did not think I hoarded work. I thought this was one of the aspects of workaholism that I had escaped. As time has worn on, though, I've discovered that I do, indeed, hoard work. I've been surprised to see how I do this.

One of the major ways has been to keep myself overscheduled, so that I always have deadlines looming ahead of me. I recently realized that my procrastination and work aversion is a way to hoard work. By putting off finishing certain projects, I have them with me for weeks and sometimes months at a time. Wow! That was a surprise to me. As soon as I realized that, I felt a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I suddenly had energy to pour into a project I had been avoiding. Another miracle of this program for me!

I think my dishonesty to self and others with my workaholism has been mainly my skewed sense of what I could get done in any particular timeframe. Until WA, I always overscheduled. I did not want to be bored. I wanted those continual adrenaline highs as I moved from deadline to deadline. With the WA tools and support from the fellowship, I am doing much better about under-scheduling, saying NO when I need and want to do so -- especially to too much volunteerism and freelance projects that do not fit for me-- and being okay with the peace that comes to me with a slower pace.

When I first started taking Sundays off, I really did not know what to do with myself. I had three guidelines: NO billable hours, NO volunteerism other than minimal twelve step service work, and NO professional writing. I came to realize there was a long list of activities that I really *did* want to do and I engage in those activities now.

Due to having my own small business, my vacations and travel are connected to my professional activities for tax purposes. Until WA, I viewed that as a strength. For pragmatic purposes, I still need to do that, but I am becoming better about keeping my work to a minimum and having good boundaries around it. For example, my husband and I are planning a vacation at end of July. Other than visiting some museums that are work-related, I am not planning on working. I'm not even taking any books to review, only a book for fun, and if only if I want. My laptop will stay at home, as I can check my email from my phone. I'm at peace with these limits and boundaries. Also, until I was writing in this share, I had planned to work the day after we get back. I know, today, deep in my heart and head, that I need and want a day of transition. So I will work the day before we leave and then again the second day after we arrive home. I am going to wisely remove myself from my client's roster for that first day back!

--Peace and blessings, Tisa

The following meditations have been submitted to appear in our new meditation book. Perhaps you would write a meditation and submit it to the Committee (please see the invitation on page 12) or to STORYLINE.

MEDITATION: PROGRESS

Tool of Accepting: We are gentle with our efforts, knowing that our new way of living requires much practice. (Book of recovery, p 12.)

Sometimes, we can be enjoying the fruits of our recovery from workaholism - feeling present in the moment, experiencing serenity, able to approach life with humility and grace, and feeling warmly connected to our higher power and others - only to find, a few days or weeks later, that we feel rushed, insecure and overwhelmed again.

We might wonder if we had made any progress at all!

If we go to the sea to watch the tide come in, we see the waves surging in to fill the beach, only to retreat again, back out to sea. It is only by being patient and staying awhile that we might see that, during the rhythmic ebb and flow, the tide has been imperceptibly but surely moving in toward the shore.

Higher power, help me to have faith that, if my focus is recovery, I will be drawing closer to serenity even in the midst of the ebb and flow of life.

--Morrie H

MEDITATION: SLEEP

STEP TWO: Came to believe a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Having enjoyed several years of WA abstinence, which has included regularly getting enough sleep at night, I recently needed to catch a flight which meant only being able to sleep for three hours that particular night.

A short while into the next day, I became overwhelmed with the idea that I wouldn't be able to cope with any events the next few days would bring. I was full of fear and I 'knew' I shouldn't have left the safety of my home. I foresaw every interaction as potentially painful. How different from the optimism and acceptance I had become accustomed to!

Reminded of the importance of sleep, I took naps when I could over the next few days, and made sure I went to bed early each night and got good sleep.

One way we can allow ourselves to be restored to sanity is simply to get enough sleep at night. A good night's sleep can make the difference between living in a world of paranoia and negativity, versus a world of balance and calm. There are few things that have such a powerful influence on our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health as regular and sufficient sleep.

Today I am grateful today for the gift of sleep, which restores me to sanity.

--Morrie

Thoughts for the Day

Day One:

Have a sober flowing day.

Day Two:

May we grow a bit more trusting in our Higher Power today.

Day Three:

Be true to yourself today.

Day Four:

May our choices today align with our recovery program.

Day Five:

As we walk our recovery journey, may our self-esteem grow.

Day Six:

If we fall short in an action, it is an experience to grow.

Day Seven:

As we choose to be happy, we are better able to accept the not so pleasant aspects of life.

Day Eight:

May we live our lives on our own values without conformity to a group, being careful of this within our recovery groups.

Day Nine:

May we be in the present doing our best through our Higher Power.

Day Ten:

May wisdom and goodness be expressed from our lives' experiences.

Day Eleven:

Through our Higher Power may we lay aside our fears, so we may know peace and serenity.

Day Twelve:

Through our Higher Power may our reasoning and intuition become complimentary leading to more meaningful lives.

Day Thirteen:

May we stay with our feelings and see how we may express them without burying or avoiding the painful ones.

Day Fourteen:

May the love for ourselves increase, thus having more to give to others

Day Fifteen:

We have value for those who we interact with because our unique talents and abilities may benefit them.

Day Sixteen:

May we see how we are affected by others as a mirror for our own character. If uncomfortable or comfortable, what are these saying about me.

Day Seventeen:

As a plant sends forth the root first so that visible will have a strong foundation, we are growing our roots of self-esteem, humility, willingness, hope, faith, and love, so that changes to our character may shine forth.

Day Eighteen:

Through the guidance of our Higher Power, we are able to be transformed by changing how we handle our day to day lives with the tools of our program.

Day Nineteen:

Although we have laid aside our active addiction, are we still mentally acting as if using? If so, we need to apply the tools of the program to overcome our mental drunkenness.

Day Twenty:

In recovery are we affirming the values that we are to live our life, and adjusting our behavior in accordance?

Day Twenty-one:

May we walk aside others to aid them in their life's journey without controlling their way of proceeding.

Day Twenty-two:

Today let us choose to be honest with ourselves so that we may be more authentic with those whom we meet.

Day Twenty-three:

As we walk along with others, may we offer comfort and compassion through the life we are building.

Day Twenty-four:

With the words that we speak today, are they honestly saying what we are truly feeling or are we deceiving ourselves and those to whom we say them.

Day Twenty-five:

As we work our recovery program, are we changing our coping skills to meet the realities of our lives?

Day Twenty-six:

Humility is not being a doormat but recognition that we have surrendered our ego and self-will to follow the guidance of our Higher Power.

Day Twenty-seven:

May we be grateful for our successes and also for our failures through which we grow.

Day Twenty-eight:

In our addiction we ignored our body signals; as we walk the recovery journey, are we listening to our body signals for emotional, physical and spiritual health?

Day Twenty-nine:

True serenity comes through inner direction by self-acceptance and self-love.

Day Thirty:

Only as we change our thinking will our recovery progress for a better condition in our lives.

Day Thirty-One:

Within our talents is the creativity to reform ourselves and be authentic to others.

--from Jerry

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Storyline is the quarterly newsletter of Workaholics Anonymous, published in order to share our experience, strength and hope with each other, and to announce information about our fellowship. We welcome shares, stories, commentaries, quotes, and poems: anything original that we can reproduce. Please submit what you have to share and encourage others to do so as well. Send us your own work, and if you see something you like in your email group written by someone else, please secure permission from the author and send it in or include their email address. Send contributions for to: storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org, with STORYLINE in the subject line.

STORYLINE is particularly grateful for the heartfelt submissions that are coming from the email groups. Tisa has two contributions in this issue, and Jane has offered us ingenious ways to understand HOPE (see page eight). We are always grateful to Harry, who continues to be “the soul of STORYLINE,” both with his own contributions and with the contributions he forwards written by others. We are also grateful to Morrie for sending us meditations, and to Jerry for his very special Thoughts for the Day series.

Notice that this issue delves into stepwork for Steps Three, Four (“My Brother John” on page three) and Twelve. We hope others will submit work to show how they understand the steps, as stepwork is the core of transformation for many WA members and STORYLINE can be a great venue for our teaching each other.

Please know that STORYLINE welcomes help. We invite not only stories, shares, and other written contributions, but also administrative help editing, assistant editing, proof-reading, and outreach to get more contributions. Let us know if you are available to help with any of these or with other tasks of your choosing, on your own schedule. We truly support any abstinence that is part of your sobriety, and yet note that reading the submissions and collaborating with others potentially enhances our recovery. I find working on STORYLINE to be interesting, creative, and gratifying.

-Shelley, Chicago

CONTACT INFORMATION: EMAIL WAWSO

For any Program issue, concern, initiative, suggestion, etc.:

Bruce A. facilitator@workaholics-anonymous.org

Lia F. secretary@workaholics-anonymous.org

Drew D. treasurer@workaholics-anonymous.org

For general information: communications@workaholics-anonymous.org

For meeting and WSR assistance: Bob wrsupport@workaholics-anonymous.org

For WA Literature volunteers or corrections: Amber literature@workaholics-anonymous.org

For eNewsletter and Outreach: Michele outreach@workaholics-anonymous.org

For STORYLINE: Shelley storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org

For Meditation Book: MeditationBook@workaholics-anonymous.org

For literature ordering questions: Sandi fulfillment@workaholics-anonymous.org

For technology matters: Ken technology@workaholics-anonymous.org

General mailbox: wso@workaholics-anonymous.org

ANNOUNCEMENT AND INVITATION: NEW MEDITATION BOOK

The W.A.W.S.O. Literature Committee is creating a meditations book. We would like all the meditations to come from the fellowship, so . . . **We need your help!**

All members are welcome to write and submit meditations for publication. Some examples are on pages ten and eleven. Your contributions can be submitted individually, or as a group. Consider having a writing play day for your home group. Not only would this activity provide opportunities for reflection and meditation, but it would also allow group members to make contributions to a book that will serve the needs of the whole fellowship.

A suggested meeting format for writing meditations is available at the WA website. For more details about submitting meditations, please visit: <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/page.php?page=bookofmeditations>

Also, a suggested meeting format for writing meditations is available at the WA website at: <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/pdf/MeetingTypes.pdf>

We look forward to receiving your meditations!!
Have fun with us!!

Your trusted servants,
W.A.W.S.O. Literature Committee

STORYLINE: OUR MISSION

- To produce a quarterly publication of news about WA in a way that serves as an example of balance between service and our program.
- To provide a space for people of the fellowship to share their experience, strength and hope with the broader membership.
- To provide real stories from real people to those in our fellowship who do not have access to a local meeting.
- To bridge the gap between the fellowship and the WA Board, and aid in replenishing the Board with new members as the trustees' terms run out.

STORY LINE invites WA members to share their experience, strength and hope with the WA fellowship around the world. Each of us has something to share that can help another workaholic to abstain from compulsive working. Please send your submittals by email to: **storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org**, with **SL** in the SUBJECT LINE. Include your contact information and please also let us know if we can include your first name as author. Your contribution will make this publication more alive, while improving your recovery by helping others.

Note that materials submitted are assumed to be intended for publication, are subject to editing to provide conformity for the newsletter. They become the property of WAWSO, which may publish them in any format in any Workaholics Anonymous literature. The tentative deadline for submissions for our next issue is: August 15, 2016.

Workaholics Anonymous World Service Organization

PO Box 289 Menlo Park CA 94026

Telephone: 510-273-9253

www.workaholics-anonymous.org storyline@workaholics-anonymous.org



