

The background of the cover is a photograph of a garden pond. The pond is filled with numerous lily pads of various shades of green, some with small pink and white flowers. The water is calm, reflecting the surrounding greenery and the sky. In the foreground, dark, out-of-focus branches of a tree or shrub frame the scene, creating a sense of depth and enclosure. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

the Journal

Issue # 163

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Topline Behavior

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.

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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

1. We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.
2. We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.
3. We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual intrigue and emotional dependency.
4. We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.
5. We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.
6. We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.
7. We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.
8. We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.
9. We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.
10. We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.
11. We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.
12. We are restored to sanity, on a daily basis, by participating in the process of recovery.

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Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

The only qualification for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. S.L.A.A. is supported entirely through contributions of its membership, and is free to all who need it.

To counter the destructive consequences of sex and love addiction we draw on five major resources:

1. **Sobriety.** Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.
2. **Sponsorship/Meetings.** Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. **Steps.** Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. **Service.** Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.
5. **Spirituality.** Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

As a fellowship S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy. S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements, or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We need protect with special care the anonymity of every S.L.A.A. member. Additionally we try to avoid drawing undue attention to S.L.A.A. as a whole from the public media.

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The Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.*

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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Letter From the Editor

Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

I really enjoyed reading this issue and learning ways to better take care of myself. I am reminded that I need realistic goals and can pursue them without fear of failure. Higher Power is by my side. I used to go to a Monday night meeting that had a round robin at the end of the meeting. Each person would share their top lines for the next week. I hated doing that! I felt like a liar because I knew I wouldn't find the time to pursue goals or fun. I would be too focused on making money or numbing out watching television. But the more I practiced stating the intention, the easier it got to follow through. Hearing others' struggles helped me know that I was not alone. As an addict, I need balance. I stay close to my top lines and my recovery to avoid slipping into anorexia.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

The Conference Journal Committee, a service body within Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, publishes *the Journal* for the good of the international S.L.A.A. membership. Oversight and policy is provided in accordance with the Ninth Tradition.

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The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. 1550 NE Loop 410, Suite 118 San Antonio, TX 78209, 1-210-828-7900 Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT except for holidays (fax) 1-210-828-7922. www.slaafws.org

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Managing Editor	Lisa C.
Art Director	Fiona
Proofreaders for this issue	Andrew K. Beth L.

Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE AROUND DEFINING AND MAINTAINING TOP LINE BEHAVIOR.”

My sobriety equates to self-love; unequivocal self-love. If I have old negative thoughts, I ask God to love me some more.

— **GF, Philadelphia**

I see top lines as things for me to work towards so that I can have a bridge to normal living — working the Program to include the Steps and working these with my sponsor and sponsees. Top line behaviors are things I try to work towards in a loving way, e.g. practicing self-care one day at a time.

— **Jaki Jo, London, UK**

Top lines are things I strive for, not maintain. They are what I want my life in recovery to look like. More often than not, they are things that if I do them I feel great, but for some insane reason, I am dead set against doing them.

— **Trevor, Seattle/Singapore**

If I feel I don't want to do something, I do it. The more vulnerable I am, the more I grow. I work the S.L.A.A. H.O.W. Programme, define my own bottom lines, discovering them with my sponsor, sharing them with God, and committing to them from a loving place.

— **Paul T., London, UK**

I set a firm appointment with myself to say my daily gratitude list and check in with my Higher Power as soon as possible after I wake up in the morning. I ask my Higher Power to give me the tools I need every day to stay sober just for today and I ask Higher Power to take away my defects of character.

— **Natalie K., Chicago, IL**

I do daily work with recovery support people. Through meetings, sponsor, and journaling, I address triggers and trauma quickly. These daily practices honor my light and dark sides and free me for more love, joy, gratitude, and hope. One of my most successful top line behaviors was to date with a dating plan. This is a top line behavior to be repeated. Dating with a dating plan helped me set boundaries, go slow and refrain from people pleasing, caretaking behaviors.

— **Nancy G., San Diego.**

My focus has really only been on bottom line behavior which, for me, needs to remain current with my developing sobriety. Sometimes bottom lines are clearer than others, generally clearer when my sobriety is stronger.

— **Angela A., Fort Lauderdale**

Applying U.A. (Under-earners Anonymous) tools. There's a direct ratio between acting out in S.L.A.A. and not doing those tools.

— **Debra, Los Angeles**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Please share your experience, strength and hope around defining and maintaining top line behavior.” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: #164 — Setting Bottom lines — “Please share your experience strength and hope around setting bottom lines.” — The deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2016; and #165 Letting Go of the Outcome: Easier Said Than Done. — Describe your process of “letting go” of strong desires or important outcomes. — The deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2017. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

I never take off top line behavior activities, I only keep adding more and more. The longer I stay off my bottom lines, the more need I have for top line activities and the more I appreciate them. Many of my top line activities involve members of the Fellowship. In my first year of sobriety, I learned to knit, professionally decorate cakes and had small intimate dinner parties that kept me busy so that I would not act out. They built up my self-esteem in a healthy way and expanded my S.L.A.A. Fellowship relationships. This became a foundation to my current 3 and a half years of sobriety.

— **Suzanne D., Los Angeles**

Behaviors that make me feel good about myself and actions that are non-addictive in nature that result in my feeling happy and content with the outcome of the actions are by definition top lines for me.

— **Anonymous, CT**

My first sponsor did not define top lines. He only focused on bottom lines. About 6 months into recovery, at Fellowship, an old-timer asked, “What are you doing for fun?” He then explained, “We are not a glum lot.” With his help, I determined some healthy enjoyable behavior. Now I can focus on what I can do that I enjoy instead of what I must avoid.

At the start of recovery, my only top line behavior was attending meetings and doing fellowship. As my recovery progressed, my top-line behavior has included exercise (yoga, biking and hiking), participation with charities either as a board member or background organizer (which helps me with gratitude and to get out of myself). I also have started to go to art classes and I have other interests.

— **Dave G., Los Angeles, CA**

I have defined those things that enrich my life (intimate female friendships, exploring new hobbies like backpacking, growing in my career) and I focus on all that I have to be grateful for. Once I felt whole and complete on my own and faith in a Higher Power had been restored, it became second nature to maintain behaviors and practices that were self-loving and respectful.

— **Amy G., Austin, TX**

Since I’ve been in program for the last 4 years I have maintained a service commitment on some level the entire time. I have not relapsed. My top line is filled with a bunch of stuff that has supported my recovery, and my life. In fact, I just looked at my recovery plan and I saw that years ago, I had written a lot of visions for my future as top lines. Most of those visions have come into being as I’ve used my top line behavior to support my recovery. I’ve rewritten my plan, including some new visions for my future and some new top lines to support those visions. All of this is only possible because my recovery is the most important thing. I always focus on it and respect it. Without recovery, I don’t have a relationship with others, God or myself.

— **Glenn S.**

For me, top line behaviors are anything that nurtures my relationship with myself, my inner child and my Higher Power – especially having fun! I often take myself too seriously, and picking up my guitar, or putting on my sneakers, making my bed, and getting out to a movie can be challenging. But when I invite my Higher Power to help me do one loving thing for myself every day, I gain spiritual momentum and grow.

— **Bahia S., North Hollywood, CA**

Question of the Day

I used to get triggered on social media. Then I realized there's a button where you can tell the algorithm that. "I don't want to see posts like these." Sometimes (as an addict) I really want to see these pictures, but I feel better about myself when I push this button, so that has become a top line and it's my way of showing love to myself.

— **Chris Y., Glassell Park**

For me it's helpful to be in nature and exercise at least 3 times a week, to meditate daily, to do things that are fun every week, to put less on my to-do list, and to use positive self-talk.

— **Harmony, Los Angeles**

Doing less helps me maintain top line behavior – being comfortable with staying in my PJs – not scheduling my day – not running around in order to avoid simply being with myself.

— **Jane, Los Angeles**

Defining top line behaviors and maintaining them has been a real challenge to my anorexia. Carrying through with top lines has been an action of Steps 6 and 7. The willingness to do these new behaviors, with my Higher Power's help, has been difficult but very spiritually rewarding. Anxiety and obsession has given way to peace and serenity.

— **Jim B., Huntington Beach, CA**

9 months into S.L.A.A. and I am still working towards defining and maintaining the critical bottom lines for me. Top lines are easier to get into and practice.

— **Jean J., Seattle, WA**

I have used my experience from another 12-Step Fellowship to develop my top lines – get a sponsor, go to meetings, work the Steps, and then give it back by sponsoring and doing service.

— **Phillip W., Little Rock**

When my spiritual condition starts to slip, the first thing to go is top line behaviors – those things that are good for me, spiritually and physically. Two things that I can do to keep me on track is to start every day with prayer and meditation.

— **Steve B.**

One of my strengths with maintaining top line behavior is that when I'm not in a good place, I have to remember to pray and trust the process (TTP).

— **Jack S., Seminole, FL**

The most important aspect of top line behavior for me is the practice of meditation.

— **David S., Akron, OH**

My top lines are the best and most nurturing things that I can do. These are the things that I don't want to do, but by doing them I grow spiritually.

— **Rick B., Largo**

I simply do the opposite of what got me into trouble in the first place.

— **Andrew E., Pittsburgh, PA**

Top line behaviors are behaviors that I strive for on a daily basis to replace my old destructive bottom line behaviors. Top line behaviors define what self-care looks like for me and remind me to love myself and connect to my Higher Power instead of looking for fulfillment outside of myself.

— **April, Houston**

Top line behaviors changed my life and helped keep me sober. They help me redirect thoughts and behaviors that no longer serve me.

— **Ashly M., Houston**

Doing something that does not include the guy I'm dating. He asked me to live my life when not with him. I found this to be telling that he knew what I had to come to S.L.A.A. to learn.

— Eileen, Boston, MA

As an anorexic sex and love addict, top line behavior is essential for my serenity and sobriety. I have found that it helps to ask trusted recovery partners about actions that help them keep their serenity. I work with those people, writing down those actions on slips of paper. I put all these slips of paper in a tin, and draw one each day for 30 days. By then, it's become a daily practice and I have maintained my top lines.

— Sarah C., San Antonio, TX

When I heard people say, "Take care of yourself," I used to interpret it as a sort of generalized farewell. Now, I take it seriously! In recovery, I see great opportunity, even in the smallest moments to practice self-care.

— Alyse, Montreal, QC

I treasure my top line behaviors. When I get too busy I know I need to pause and pray, meditate, do yoga, and read. Then I resume at a different level.

— Amalia, Boston, MA

The activity or behavior is balanced and involves serenity in regards to the physical activities and emotional feelings before, during, and after behavior. Serenity is the outcome of the behavior. Example: Bicycling 10-50 miles a day is a moving meditation that brings me joy and I sleep better afterwards (unlike addictive behavior that involves too much or too little sleep and the outcome is anxiety).

— Dion M., Orinda, CA

I find that I need to stay busy. Sometimes, when I feel overwhelmed, I remember I am an addict and to let go. I swim competitively and do lots of service.

— Tim P., Hollywood, FL

My participation in the anorexia UK meeting reminds me to state top line behavior. Outreach calls assist me in self-care.

— David F., Poland

For me, when I asked a sponsor what to do with so much free time he replied, "Now instead of bad things you can do good things." He suggested things such as going to the gym, getting a hobby, and doing something creative. When working on creating and defining my topline, I choose things that make me feel good and that I like to do. It is very empowering! Thanks S.L.A.A.

— Lindsey H., West Palm Beach

Bookending, service, service, service, self-care. I have a written recovery plan that I committed to and gave to my sponsor.

— MaryJane B., Ft. Lauderdale, FL

It is important for me to do healthy things for me, and healthy things with others. I need to be accountable in doing these things.

— Rich K., Worcester MA

For me it's taking care of myself, the people I meet, and my Higher Power. That's always a difficult balance, I have to stay in the middle and not go to extremes.

— Maarten K., the Netherlands

God, God and God. The Program, the Program and the Program. Being a sponsor, doing service, going for walks in nature, and being with my daughter.

— Gumilla, Sweden

I define my top line behavior through the help of my sponsor, Higher Power, and examples of people I look up to in program. I maintain topline behavior best when I am focusing on what I can do for my recovery one day at a time, remembering I am more capable of contributing positively to my environment when I'm taking care of myself.

— Becca M., Rhode Island

Focusing on Myself



For me, focusing on myself is a huge component, if not the main component - in defining and sustaining my top line behaviors, thinking or attitudes. I do not have power — am powerless to anyone/anything and the energy outside of me. I focus on what I can do at my work (profession or education), with people (whether in the media, community, friends or family) and in my addiction. I am able to get recovery, sanity, and relief. Especially in our nation's current turbulent and often narcissistic

state, I have to continue to focus back on my local area, myself, and I am able to find serenity and meaning in my own work and program.

In another area, I also am recognizing that my top lines or outer behaviors are only there for me. I've finally come to the spot in my life where I'm okay with not having a romantic partner and want to focus only on myself for the next year. This is almost *three* years after maintaining sobriety from my original bottom lines. I think in recovery, most of us

understand that our top lines and bottom lines are there for us individually, but as a recovering love and sex addict, I always wish I could be partnered off eventually or have a "healthy relationship" as one of my top lines. Today, I'm fine with having my program just for me, even if I was to die tomorrow. Because if I'm not sober, working my life and my program for myself first, then I'm no good for anyone else.

Thanks,

— **Samantha C.**

Finding New Ways to Improve My Well-Being

I had been in S.L.A.A. for a good while before I started hearing in meetings about top-line behaviors. I was already familiar with bottom lines, but had no experience with top lines. I am happy that I always get messages that I need in meetings and in other member's shares.

This helps me to recover further and it is always nice to discover new ways of improving my own well-being. Soon after hearing about top lines, I started to explore and found many things that I liked to do and which made me feel good.

To me an important topline behavior has always been physical

exercise, but since I got married and had children, it somehow dropped away from my priorities.

This was also when my disease got worse. I can see the importance of practicing these top-line behaviors when I'm feeling lousy.

It is so easy to get off balance. That is an important part of my disease.

When I am off balance in my self-care I can easily slip into my disease-coping skills.

When I realize my behavior, I list my top lines one by one.

I find that going to the gym twice a week makes me feel good. I practice yoga at home when I feel

the need. I also sing, do handicrafts, draw, go for walks in nature, do guided meditations and many other things. I have so many things on my list already, but I know that this is a never ending process of discovery. My top lines seem to change with my program.

I am grateful that recovery has given me time to do all these things that I enjoy and helped me to see progress in everything.

I had forgotten so many things that I enjoyed doing while in my active addiction and it is such a pleasure to have this rediscovery.

—Tina

Top Line Behavior Is Critical to My Recovery

My name is Mandy and I am a sex and love addict. I have a disease of negativity, fear, doubt, and insecurity. Treatment of this disease requires medicine that will work in opposition to these forces. This is why top-line behavior is a critical factor in my recovery plan.

My top lines are to have the best possible relationship with my Higher Power, my husband, my family and my friends.

My top lines also include having dignity, health, honor, freedom (within God's will),

having no shame or guilt regarding sexuality and to be healthy in my thought life.

This disease is a disease of intimacy disorder, so my recovery is founded in God to create healthy, loving relationships in appropriate ways.

To achieve this, I work with God, my sponsor, my spouse, and the tools of this program to proactively do my Steps, follow my recovery plan, and help others. Practical actions are the cement of my recovery plan. I work the Steps with my sponsor, practice specific

spiritual disciplines, am active in the Fellowship, live a life of honesty, and stay in a community of recovery.

I have literature, phone calls, meetings, sponsorship, meditation, writing, service, and a recovery plan to avoid bottom lines and to get me through tough times in life.

I am so grateful for a blueprint for living that works when times are tough! What a gift to be in recovery in S.L.A.A.!

—Mandy

Combating Fear of Intimacy With Top Lines

When I first started in S.L.A.A., I needed to focus on recovery from my bottom line behaviors. These were things like not having sex outside of a committed relationship, and more importantly, not dating until I finished my 5th Step. I also had to watch my tendency to flirt because I learned that was the beginning of my pattern of acting out.

So, in early sobriety there was a lot of new awareness around not participating in compulsive sexual and emotional addictive behaviors. I needed to focus on my recovery before involving myself in a romantic situation. I had enough work to do on myself without adding someone else into the mix.

I knew that in my early sobriety this would only throw me into obsession and confusion. Although I didn't understand they were top lines at the time, I attended meetings, did a lot of Step work and went to fellowship. Being with Program friends taught me how to be in reciprocal and mutually supportive relationships. I needed to steep myself in Program because, in order to stop acting out, I had to change my whole persona.

In working the Twelve Steps with a sponsor, I was able to start a new way of living that was free from addiction. I began to replace acting out with top-line, healthy behaviors. I learned to turn my thinking and behavior over to my Higher Power by seeking my Higher Power's guidance through prayer and meditation.

I did not use these tools perfectly, in fact after years of

practice, I still take my will back on a regular basis. The key word here is practice. The program is about spiritual growth rather than becoming infinitely wise and whole over a short period of time.

After having been in Program a while and getting a bit of abstinence from my bottom lines, I learned about another characteristics of sex and love addiction from which I suffered: anorexia. It is the compulsive avoidance of giving or receiving social, sexual or emotional nourishment. I learned that it was underneath all of my acting out behavior because I was so afraid of real intimacy. It was at this time that I started sober dating. I used the telephone a lot!

Reaching out for support is one of the most difficult new behaviors for me. I have extreme fear of intimacy; I don't like to be vulnerable because in my mind it may lead to rejection. I practice this top line as well as others because experience shows me that it works. I didn't know how to be in a healthy romantic relationship. Once I got into a committed partnership, a program friend whose recovery I respected, told me that my most important top line behavior at this point was to stay in the relationship and not run.

During my time in Program I have been able to be of service in various ways. I began by taking commitments at meetings such as selling literature, and being treasurer. I have also been able to participate at the intergroup level. I have learned that even showing up and sharing is being of service. The contribution that has helped

me to grow the most in program has been sponsoring. I have found I get back just as much if not more by helping another sex and love addict through the Twelve Steps. In order for S.L.A.A. to function, the group needs its members to be involved. I have been rewarded, by the small effort of stepping up, with a sense of purpose and belonging.

Top line behaviors help to get my physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs met. I walk, practice yoga and try to stick to a healthy food plan to satisfy my physical requirements.

Before Program, I used to only have sex to relieve a physical demand. Having regular sex with my husband not only fulfills my physical need but the mental, emotional and spiritual as well. Mental and emotional top lines include communicating, being vulnerable, and most importantly for me, working the Twelve Steps. I believe that not only prayer and meditation but doing any top line behavior helps to fulfill spiritual requirements.

Today, the healthy behaviors I am working on are mostly social. I tend to isolate so it's important for me to consciously make dates with friends and say, "Yes" to social opportunities. My husband and I have an annual party where I try to interact with our guests rather than spend the whole time cleaning the kitchen! I attend a local anorexia/top-line focus meeting to continue my ongoing recovery. I thank you all for being a part of S.L.A.A. because I cannot do this alone.

— Kim S., Orange County

Top Lines – Top Priority



The first time I heard about top line behaviours, I thought, “Great, I’ll get to them as soon as I’ve mastered staying away from bottom and middle line behaviours.” When my sponsor told me to define and write down my “lines,” I even forgot

to tackle top lines – she had to remind me. Top lines simply weren’t my *top* priority. As I entered withdrawal and started to gain sobriety, for about three or four months I was ecstatic that I was sober – and being on that pink cloud was enough. However, as the novelty of

sobriety was beginning to wear off, I started to feel the anxiety and agitation that were all too familiar.

We have all heard that addicts can’t get sober in a vacuum, and this sentence came back to me around that time.

By then, I had a meagre list of 12-Step-related top line behaviours (going to meetings, making outreach calls, reading S.L.A.A. literature, calling the S.L.A.A. Inspiration Line), but I knew I had to come up with more if I was to maintain my hard-earned sobriety.

The first not strictly 12 Step-related top line I came up with was exercise. I have a health condition that requires working out a minimum of three times a week, but before becoming sober I was simply unable to stick to this regimen. So when I was suddenly looking for additional top lines in my sobriety, I couldn't continue ignoring this one.

I downloaded two fitness apps on my phone, and, for the first time in my life, I managed to start and not quit a sport. I have been doing it now for more than a year, and it makes me feel so proud of myself. I feel so much better and I have so much more energy as a result.

When I'm tempted to slack off, I remind myself: "This is for both your health and your sobriety".

Coming up with other top lines wasn't so easy.

Somebody in my support group suggested I think back to my childhood and try to remember what I used to enjoy doing back then. I had to cast away many activities that already then were tainted by sex and love addiction (e.g. shopping, hanging out with certain friends), and this is what I found: I used to love to read, go to the theatre, and learn foreign languages. But even with these ones I wasn't

sure if I didn't used to (and wouldn't in the future) take them to an obsessive level. However, I really needed more top lines, so I gave them a go. I mobilised friends as well as my partner to go to the theatre, and I have to say, for a few months I overdid the whole thing. Now I'm trying to find a healthy balance.

Theatre season is going to start again soon, so we'll see. As for reading and foreign languages, I think I'm doing quite well. I have started to read in French, and as it's not as easy as it is in English, I can't overdo it or get obsessive about it.

A very important top line has been with me since the beginning of my recovery – without me realising that it was a top line: affirmations and mantras. I don't know about you, but for me there are days when my thoughts (addictive or simply defeating and negative) whizz through my mind all day. It's exhausting. So one of my most important tools/top lines is drowning out their voice with affirmations.

They can be program slogans or inspirational quotes that I read or hear here and there. I wrote them down in my phone, and by now I know all of them by heart. So when walking in the street or sitting on the metro, I repeat them as long as necessary. They are lifesavers!

Then there are some top lines that I would still very much like to improve on. I'm thinking about self-care activities, which are obviously good for me (so top lines), but

not necessarily fun or easy. Going to the dentist, for example, or cooking a nice meal for myself when it's just me, or setting boundaries with kindness. I'm happy to report I went to the dentist last week. It wasn't fun, but I felt great afterwards that I had been able to do this for myself.

To maintain this top line, I created a reminder in my phone for the next appointment. I'd like to become a good "parent" to myself, so I'm also trying to watch what I eat when I'm alone, and make myself go to bed on time – though I still find these hard. Boundary setting with kindness is also still a challenge for me. These days, I sometimes manage it with anger, which I presume is an improvement compared to not having any boundaries at all. Still, I reckon there is some progress after all as last month I managed to do it with my active alcoholic dad. I did it with anger and fear; however, I did remain polite. And that is a huge step for me!

To end, I'd like to mention three more vital top lines. The first one is praying. Praying was an almost foreign concept to me; I used to pray when I was little to please my mum (reciting a ready-made kids' prayer). Today, after a year and one month of sobriety, my prayers are very different. I started praying with a "fake-it-till-you-make-it" attitude, but today it doesn't feel fake anymore. I pray every evening, gradually adding more prayer time during the day whenever I need it. It makes me feel connected and happy. The

second one is journaling. I loved writing a diary when I was a teenager, so I'm recycling this old tool now in my recovery. Whenever I can't reach my sponsor or support group, I write down how I feel, and this way I'm able to feel what I need to feel.

Afterwards, I usually still like to share about it and pray

about it, but journaling gives such great immediate relief. The last top line I'd like to mention is finding and spending time with true friends. In my addiction I used to be so alone, focusing solely on my qualifiers. In recovery, I'm learning about human relationships such as friendship. In my sponsor, I

have found a great model who shows me what it means to be a friend (without having to be perfect). So when, despite feeling overwhelmed by the idea of closeness, I reach out to friends and risk being honest, that's one of the best courses of action I can take.

— **Anonymous, Brussels, Belgium**

Topline Actions – Nourishing the Spirit

In my S.L.A.A. home group, we are given the choice to share our bottom and top lines with others and in so doing bring our actions, hopes and fears into the open, transparent for our peers to hear, understand and learn from (should they so choose).

I have realized that my top lines rarely vary and they are typically a single word or a short phrase that carry significance for me. For others, they might sound shallow at best, meaningless at worst.

So I decided to take one of my top lines (mindfulness) and “unpack” it a bit. That way I can learn publicly and perhaps share how my top lines are more than mere words; they are in fact nourishment for my spirit.

By mindfulness, I mean the process whereby I become more and more present to my life as it unfolds in every moment. By “present to my life” I mean aware of, open to and engaged in my life — including what I see, hear, smell, touch, think and feel moment by moment day in and

day out.

In practicing mindfulness, I learn, with ever growing clarity, how much of my life as an addict I spent avoiding reality rather than being present to it. By that I mean, much of my life was spent avoiding discomfort, fear and pain and using other people to numb myself to real feelings or real experience.

Practicing mindfulness helps me feel what I feel. If it is good, I luxuriate in that. And if it is not good, I learn from it and what surrounds it so I can change myself, (the only thing I can really change). This way, my spirit and I are unified, not isolated, and my spirit is fed with love, peace, excitement, joy, open-heartedness and all those feelings I was numb to in the closed off life I spent fearing fear, fearing pain and fearing discomfort.

Whatever the initial cause, from an early age I was highly fearful and sought comfort from attention, especially from girls and women.

As I grew older, that attention

seeking became sexualized and I found brief moments of comfort from sexual encounters and masturbation that had no meaning. It actually brought more misery, self-degradation and self-disgust than anything else. Addicted to these “hits” of comfort, like a quick drink or a shot or puff of drugs, I failed much of the time to experience my life being so unavailable to the magnificent reality that surrounds me. Consequently, my spirit was starved and my life was fragmented. Sad but true.

Now, as a result of my commitment to my top line of practicing mindfulness I am able to dissolve my discomforts and fears, even pain to some extent, by living my life in a sober and integrated way. My life is now fuller and healthier and my relationships — especially with my wife — have integrity (a quality I always espoused but never fully realized due to my debilitating addiction).

— **Anonymous**

Top Line Activities



The term “top line” is not one I’ve used in the past. However, I understand it means what I do to help support my sobriety. The more I thought about it, the more I realized I do have several top lines – some daily and some intermittent.

• **Meditation:** I only started meditating when I joined S.L.A.A. and initially it was a way to try to help with the pain of withdrawal. The challenge was that positive results were not immediate and I didn’t, at that time, know if it would ever help. But it’s become the highlight of my day. It’s

allowing me to get to know myself and it improves my conscious contact with my H.P.

• **Maintain conscious contact:** This is important throughout my entire day, however, a couple of years ago I started trying to maintain more of a conscious contact in the workplace because that is my greatest challenge. For example, when I’m in a stressful meeting, I try to bring my H.P. into the room. When I do that, I feel a lot of the anxiety leave me, I feel my shoulders relax a bit and I get more in touch with my breathing.

It has really helped a lot.

• **Morning and evening prayer:** Ever since I joined my first 12-Step program in 1978 I have gotten on my knees in the morning and begged my H.P. to keep me sober for another day. And I thank my H.P. for another day of sobriety before getting into bed. For the last few years, I’ve been saying the Third and Seventh Step prayers in the morning and asking my H.P. to remove my most glaring character defects (shame, fear, control, perfectionism, obsessive thinking, and false gods).

• **Meetings:** I go to meetings for several reasons but I realized a new reason recently. If something significant happened in my life like an illness, death, or loss of a job or home, I'd want to be able to call someone from recovery. However, if I haven't gone to meetings and maintained a relationship with my recovery sisters and brothers, it would be harder for me to reach out. So one benefit of going to meetings is that I minimize the chances of isolating when I really need a connection. The bottom-line (no pun intended) is that relationships to others in meetings is critical to my recovery.

• **Service:** Perhaps I would stay sober without doing service, but I sure would be depriving myself of a lot of spiritual and

emotional benefits. Each morning I try to think of some way to be connected to recovery and that is often through service.

• **The Twelve Steps:** During every morning shower I recite the Steps to determine where I'm at with them. I don't always get through all 12 but normally I get to Step 7. In addition, when I'm distressed about something, I work Steps 1-9 and normally feel better after a day or two.

• **Exercise:** At least five minutes of stretching in the morning gets me more in touch with my body and helps me feel better throughout the day. That, and as much regular exercise as possible are important top line behaviors to stay sober and practice self-care.

• **No caffeine:** When I first

met with a member to develop bottom-lines, he mentioned that I was so obsessive that it would be best if I stopped drinking caffeine, so I stopped, even though this was a big sacrifice. This may sound like a bottom-line but it isn't – it just helps me to maintain my S.L.A.A. bottom-lines.

• **Have fun:** A friend who was in my first meeting focused on the need for incorporating fun into one's life. As I'm growing in recovery, I'm learning how to have more fun and not take myself so seriously.

Just writing these down make me realize their importance. Thank you S.L.A.A. for another day of sobriety.

— **Chris D.**

Quieting My Mind to Find Serenity

The most rewarding top-line behavior that I engage in is to do anything I can to quiet my mind.

I love writing about my feelings and emotions. I have been in recovery for two years.

I am so anorexic and emotionally bound up that there seems to be no limit as to what I can still find out about myself. Every time I learn something new about myself, it feels so affirming, as it takes me further away from operating on emotional autopilot. Instead of getting high off of obsession and sex, I'm being nurtured by self-discovery and self-knowledge.

In place of the manic high of acting out, this nurturing high provides an incredible feeling of well-being and serenity.

Other top-line behaviors I engage in are prayer, reflection and meditation.

I especially love reading recovery literature and reflecting on the concepts that I have highlighted that really resonate with me. I am not only studying for a new life; I am acting my way into that new life.

Anytime I can slow down,

reflect, write and pray is top-line behavior. My personal and emotional growth has been so exciting and so amazing. This serenity is such a great feeling compared to the obsession and mania that I felt in the throes of my addiction.

I never knew such serenity was possible. Now, I don't want to do anything that jeopardizes this serenity. Finally feeling connected to myself and to others naturally leads me to maintain top-line behaviors.

Basically, the best top-line behavior I can engage in is to slow down and quiet my mind so my Higher Power can come in. So whenever I do activities like hiking or biking, I make sure that during the trip, I set aside time to sit and

be quiet.

I need to constantly remind myself to calm down. Being manic in any way has no place in my new life of recovery, connection and serenity.

I attend weekend retreats

hosted by my intergroup. Recovery is now the center of my life and not sex and escape. Recovery is the best thing that ever happened to me. I am so grateful for this program.

— Craig G

Living a Completely Different Life

Being in S.L.A.A. has completely changed my life. Actually, I think it would be more accurate to say that being in S.L.A.A. has *given* me a life.

Before recovery, I had no life. It may have looked like I had a life, but what I was doing was just “borrowing” a life from whatever guy I was with. His hobbies would become my hobbies. His interests would become my interests. And his friends would become my friends.

But none of these things were mine. And when the relationship ended, I’d have to “borrow” a life from the next guy. Then I’d get a completely different set of hobbies, friends and interests. On my own, I was like a hollow shell. I had no idea what I liked or who I was.

When I entered withdrawal in S.L.A.A., I had to face the fact that without a guy around, my world was pretty empty. I felt so lonely and isolated. I had nothing and no one in my life to fill the void. I desperately needed to come up with some top-line behaviors if I was going to make it. But I had no idea where to start. I couldn’t think of anything. I was at a complete loss when it came to taking care of myself or having fun.

So I started listening for

suggestions from my fellows, picking up ideas from the shares that I’d hear in meetings. I started making a list.

In the beginning, the top lines on my list were very simple. Take a bath. Go for a walk. Pick up the phone and call a fellow. During one of my first outreach calls, when I was deep in withdrawal and wanting to act out, a long-timer suggested that I call a friend and ask to meet for coffee. I was too ashamed to tell her that I didn’t have any friends. But I added her suggestion to the list.

As time went on, the list got longer, and I would refer to it whenever I was feeling triggered and needed something positive to fill my time. Even something as simple as petting my cat or eating something nutritious could help. I started adding more things to the list that could help me out of my anorexia and isolation, beginning with very simple actions like getting out of bed when the alarm goes off in the morning.

Eventually, I added more challenging things like taking a class or volunteering. I kept adding to the list. Go to a play. Visit a museum. Go to the beach. Try something new. I knew I really needed to connect with other people, and so I’d try to do some of these things with

someone else. Invite someone to go to a play. But sometimes that was just too scary. And that had to be okay. It had to be about progress, not perfection. Going to a museum by myself was better than not going at all.

With time and practice, top-line actions got easier and easier. Some of them just became good habits, like making my bed and washing my dishes. I eventually found myself actually making friends of my own, saying yes to more invitations and reaching out more.

I started having fun! I discovered that I love swing dancing, and I now go dancing every Thursday. I joined a group of program friends in forming a “movie club” going to dinner and a movie every weekend.

Slowly and gradually, I was developing a life of my own. And all the while, I was also working my program, sticking to my bottom lines, going to meetings, working the steps with my sponsor, being of service, and building a relationship with a Higher Power.

After about two years in program, with the help of my sponsor, I developed a dating plan and began “sober dating” while also maintaining my commitment to my program and to my own life.

Today, after 3½ years in S.L.A.A., I'm now in my first "sober" healthy relationship with a great guy. For now, I only see him twice a week, and the rest of the time I continue living my own life.

A few weeks ago, my boyfriend left for a month-long trip abroad with his daughter. Based on my past history, I was a little nervous about how I would handle this time alone and what my life would look like in his absence.

I quickly realized, though, just how much all that hard work of developing and maintaining top lines had paid off, and just how very rich and full my life is today.

Literally every single day since he's been gone (except for Tuesdays, when I have my acting class), someone has invited me to do something fun. One friend had an extra concert ticket. Then another friend invited me to dinner. Then a group of us went to

see Shakespeare in the park. Then I went to a movie. How very, very different my life is today, compared to that bleak and empty place that I was trying to fill with "borrowed" lives. I am no longer lonely and isolated. Today my life is fun and rich and full, even when there's no guy around!

— Mona

The Evolution of Defining and Maintaining Topline Behaviors



I define top-line behaviors as self-care – the exact opposite of my bottom-line behaviors, which I define as imminent or protracted self-destruction.

When I joined S.L.A.A., the

dark truth was that I had no idea what self-care was. The concept of treating myself kindly and compassionately was foreign to me, let alone keeping myself safe from harm.

When someone suggested doing self-care – just for the sake of doing it – a sneer would emerge inside me.

For example, if my body was feeling run down and tight, and

someone suggested I get a massage, my response was to assume that getting a massage was a sign of weakness.

I can tough it out, I'd think. I'd almost feel superior to people who "needed" to get a massage to feel better.

For the first year of my recovery, as I developed my relationship with my sponsor, she would invariably remind me to be gentle with myself, to treat myself with compassion and kindness.

She would always end our weekly calls with these words. But in my gut, I thought she just didn't get me. I wanted to keep her as my sponsor, so I would agree to do as she suggested.

I even wrote those words on a card and put them on my spiritual altar so I could look at them every day. I realize now that she probably knew I had no idea what she was talking about. So she kept reiterating the message until it began to sink into my being.

One great tool I used to define top-line behaviors was a Recovery Plan, which my sponsor asked me to create even before we started working on the Steps. The Recovery Plan included, first, my bottom-line behaviors, which were five highly risky or detrimental sex and love addicted behaviors that I committed to never do.

Then I defined my accessory or mid-line behaviors, which were the thoughts or actions I engaged in that would make me vulnerable to acting out on my bottom lines.

Next came my top-line behaviors – things I could do to counteract an urge to act out.

Basic topline behaviors included:

- pray daily and deepen my connection to a Higher Power
- attend S.L.A.A. meetings regularly
- do Step writing
- make daily outreach calls until I find someone to talk to
- call my sponsor each week

and in crucial moments if I think I'm about to break a bottom line

- write in my journal regularly

Other topline further down the list were:

- take a hot shower
- take a nap
- read S.L.A.A. literature
- take a walk

I couldn't think of anything else at the time. My sex and love addiction had crippled me emotionally and socially.

I did not have a romantic partner, and I had few close friends, so doing social activities was not really an option. I also did not get a lot of physical exercise.

For at least the first year of my recovery, these were the top lines I turned to with great commitment. And they worked. A year passed, and I was able to stay sober on my two riskiest bottom lines.

In my second year of recovery, I realized that, up until then, I had only thought of top-line behaviors as "opposite actions" to my bottom lines. Now I began to see them as self-care.

I decided to address my "acting in," which S.L.A.A. refers to as social, emotional, and/or sexual anorexia. I defined my anorexic bottom lines as not allowing myself to engage in non-sexual activities (e.g., computer games) in which I numb out for long periods of time so I won't feel anything, or to stay home all weekend without interacting with anyone.

In contrast, my two top-line behaviors include: (1) feeling my feelings, and (2) engaging in social activities.

I have worked closely with a trauma therapist to learn how to feel safe with my emotions. I now have many tools I can draw on to stay present with myself and other people when I experience uncomfortable feelings or situations.

I am strongly committed to this work, and I have seen a major transformation in how I relate to and interact with people.

For me, the key to feeling safe with emotions is to accept them as they're happening. First, I have to figure out what I'm feeling by sitting quietly and doing a body scan. I locate where the feelings are in my body and then try to name them.

Then, I either think or say aloud that I accept the feeling.

One emotion that is particularly hard for me is anger. Growing up as a child, I had to suppress any anger I felt while bearing the brunt of my father's rage.

I learned how to automatically shut anger off, reject it completely. Over time, I had no idea when I was angry or what anger felt like.

Therefore, to accept my anger felt impossible. I can now identify when I'm experiencing anger and I no longer lash out in rage at others, but I still have a way to go to learn how to express anger in healthy ways.

Another top line is developing a social life. That means every weekend, I have to do at least one social activity, whether it be sharing a meal with someone, going with someone to a movie, or going to a local event alone where I have the opportunity to meet other people.

Doing social activities can be quite triggering. It's easy for me to succumb to the self-pity of my childhood, during which I had few friends, due to family circumstances I was not aware of.

For most of my life, I have felt unlovable, unwanted, a freak, and that something was fundamentally wrong with me.

Working with my sponsor, and doing Step 4 in particular, helped me start to see myself in a new light.

I realized that unless I hold myself in high regard, how are

other people going to? In fact, I automatically scorned people inwardly who had good things to say about me.

I can now say that my relationship with myself has transformed dramatically. I have learned to accept myself so much more and to give myself a break when I make a mistake.

As a result, I like people much more than I ever have, and am much less critical of them. I've become more adept at small talk as a way to build the foundation of getting to know someone better. I still have a long way to go, but I like the path I'm on.

In my third year of recovery, now sober for three years, I made physical health a top-line

behavior. I had a lot more self-confidence due to my recovery and evolved as a human being.

I decided to address a 40-year-old eating disorder by entering a 5-month intensive outpatient program. Having also learned how to set healthy boundaries, I temporarily dropped some volunteer activities in order to squeeze 14 more hours into my weekly schedule, which also included a full-time job.

I was able to overcome binge eating and develop a regular workout schedule – two things I've never done before.

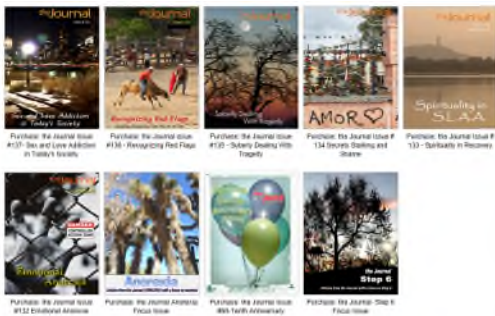
An important tool I got from this intensive program is positive affirmations. Sure, I knew all about them before, but the

thought of saying them was abhorrent. Now I feel more comfortable with affirmations. For instance, I have a strong positive physiological and emotional response when I say, "I am lovable" and, "There is something fundamentally right with me."

I'm now in my fourth year of sobriety and recovery, and addressing health issues is still an important goal. Who knows what other top-line behaviors I'll come up with? I never thought I would be in a place of such hope and inner strength. I have a lot to be grateful for, and I try to express that gratitude every day.

—Anonymous, Arizona

Single issues of the e-Journal



The Journal is a meeting in a magazine. It can be used: To read at meetings, To find experience, strength and hope while on vacation, To read with sponsees, To stay connected to the program. Topics now available:

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Top Lines

“I find it more useful to keep in mind what I call my top line rather than my bottom line. My top line is what I do want for myself, my program goals...These things are beginning to happen for me.”

— S.L.A.A. BASIC TEXT, PAGE 270

SHARE: The distracting influence of addiction leaves undiscovered corners of our life left unexplored. What dreams has our addiction kept us from realizing? What might we have done with the weekends spent trolling the internet for porn, the hours spent obsessing about our qualifier? What goals did we let fall by the wayside? Recovery gives us our life back. We can pick up old hobbies, spend more time with our family, or even return to school to pursue a new field of interest. It helps to have positive goals to strive for. Too much time spent dwelling on not acting out can be intensely frustrating. Rather than constantly striving not to do something, we can place our focus instead on what we can do to better ourselves. Recovery allows us to uncover the bright, talented, and interesting human beings we were meant to be. What will we do with our new lease on life?

AFFIRMATION: *I will explore the neglected areas of my life, growing mentally, physically, and spiritually.*

Share space

My 72 Hour Day

CONTINUED from Issue #162 of the Journal

— Santa Monica, 4 p.m. meeting.

I shared more on what my life is like in recovery as opposed to what my life was like in active addiction. I spoke more of the gifts I've received in recovery than the pains of the addiction. I remember people saying, "Thank you. You give us hope."

— Sherman Oaks, 6:30 p.m. meeting.

This meeting was a special meeting for me. After it was over, a young man approached me and said that he had heard me speak the night before at the men's meeting.

He went on to say that he felt a strong connection to my experiences and asked me if I would sponsor him long distance. I was flattered and said I would do it temporarily. I thought we'd have two or three calls and that would be that. Five months later, we still speak every day. After dinner, with no more meetings to attend, we drove to the Griffith Park Observatory. What a beautiful place! We were on top of a hill, overlooking Los Angeles!

The view was spectacular! I was for a moment, very happy.

Then I looked down into the city. I began to wonder how many people were still suffering.

Suddenly I felt sad to think that millions of people in the world have addictions. Drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, food

disorders and others. You name it. I felt bad. A— said, "Michael, what's wrong?"

I said, "I'm not quite sure, I just feel sad."

So we left the observatory and went down to the grounds and prepared to leave. Near the parking areas were two small telescopes for guests to look through. A— went first, and then I took a look.

I looked up at the sky and for the first time I noticed a few stars. I smiled when I realized that the reason I had not seen any stars the night before was the fact that you can't see them from the ground with the naked eye because of all the city lights. I looked through the telescope for quite some time and prayed for those who still suffer and prayed that my visit might help just one person see the light.

I felt better, believing I might make a difference.

— Hollywood, 8:30 a.m.

At 7 a.m. I hopped into A—'s car.

As we drove I said to myself, "Who the hell gets up on a Sunday morning and goes to an 8:30 a.m. S.L.A.A. meeting? There will probably be five people there. This is nuts. I need breakfast."

There were ninety-three people at that meeting.

I could not believe it. Ninety three people at a meeting! "Wow!" I said to myself as I grabbed a cup

of coffee from a table next to the literature table. I was really wishing for a donut, but straight coffee would do.

A— led the one-and-a-half hour meeting. While introducing me, A— shared with the group that I was a member of GDVI and that our work in Philadelphia has helped hundreds of people find recovery. I felt honored to represent GDVI.

Unlike the other meetings we attended, I got to speak for twenty minutes instead of ten. I was so nervous but somehow God helped me through it. I never broke eye contact with the group and never felt any shame when sharing my inner secrets. Using a two-minute timer, with one minute to wrap up, many people got to share. I was blown away with the level of honesty and commitment I felt from the group. Never have I been to a meeting with so many people. I left that meeting feeling very close to my Higher Power.

After the meeting A— took me to a spiritual service.

This was not something I would normally do, but I went anyway.

What happened over the next three hours changed my life forever. I believe now that the reason I went to Los Angeles was not to tell my story, but to experience this spiritual service. It was selfless, and sacrificial. They practice unconditional love.

Everyone is accepted into the congregation, no matter who they are or where they come from, what they've done in the past, or whether they are rich or poor. Just like walking into my first meeting.

Not only did I walk out of there feeling loved, I left there feeling touched and held by My Higher Power in a way I never thought possible.

A woman guided us through a fifteen-minute silent meditation. She was so soothing to listen to, almost hypnotic. I closed my eyes as instructed, and began to meditate according to her instructions. She asked us to breathe softly and to look inside ourselves for love and peace. As I walked through my mind, looking for that peace, I began to cry.

I saw myself running through a violent jungle, at first. Danger and pain everywhere. I was so frightened. I saw what the jungle did to me as a child. I also saw the many atrocities that I had committed in my life, and cried even more. I began to breathe heavier as my heart began to beat faster. I was beginning to gasp for air. I was experiencing some sort of body memories.

It was so confusing and so painful. I had gone back to places in my mind that I had blocked for years. I had only been meditating for five minutes.

All of a sudden, as I was about to scream for help, I felt a hand on my shoulder from behind.

It was a firm reassuring hand and a voice that said "Come with me." Immediately, my heart slowed down and my body surrendered. I stopped running and began to walk. I could hear the harp on the stage that was softly being played the whole time I was meditating. I realized I was walking with my Higher Power. No one will ever be able to tell me otherwise.

I was with a Presence, a Presence of peace, a Presence of love, a Presence of forgiveness.

It was real, not imagined. As we walked out of the jungle, I saw a garden. It was so beautiful. It had millions and millions of flowers in it, all in my favorite colors. Then I noticed a path in the garden that was just wide enough for two people to walk through.

The Presence said to me, "You came here to help others and carry the message. You have done well; you have touched so many. Continue down this path, and I promise you, you will never see that jungle again."

At this point I was crying uncontrollably.

The meditation ended. The lights came back on, and you could see that I wasn't the only one crying.

It was very apparent to me that the tears some of us experienced were tears of joy and relief.

I felt like forty years of pain were lifted from me in fifteen minutes. I was in a place that was safe, and peaceful. It was like no other experience in my life. Just for the hell of it, I looked at the seat directly behind me to see if anyone had touched my shoulder. The seat was empty.

Then the speaker came out. He was wonderful, loving, caring, and inspirational. He spoke of unconditional love and acceptance from within ourselves and to all humanity. He spoke of nations who embrace peace and understanding. He spoke of looking inside to find the true answers to our problems outside. He was absolutely awesome!

The service ended, and as we walked out to the car, I noticed that I looked at people differently than before. I looked at them as friends of my Higher Power, not as objects of my addiction. I could not help but wonder if God had

this all planned, and that A— and I were just participants in a much wider story.

Lunch was great. A— took me to a place in Manhattan Beach. We had pizza and then took a walk around the pier. The weather was fantastic and the ocean was so beautiful. As I looked out over the water and watched the waves hit the shore, I realized that each wave was a symbol of new happiness and new challenges. My future happiness would depend on how I rolled with the waves.

— Culver City, 4 p.m.

A— said it was a beginners meeting and to tailor my story to focus on hope and recovery. She said to share the gifts, and to give hope to the beginners.

That's exactly what I did.

I spoke about a fight between the addict and the wonderful human beings we all are, that it can be a life long struggle, and that we can prevail.

I spoke about making amends and changing the way we see life. I spoke about recovery as a way of life, and how to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

After the meeting, one of the newcomers asked me how I dealt with shame. I said I kept going to meetings, I always shared, and I never isolated. He liked that answer, he may not have understood it completely, but he liked it.

After dinner and fellowship, we proceeded to Los Angeles International Airport.

As we got closer to the airport, I silently wished we had another day. I wanted to stay with my feelings and not get distracted by the trip home. I wanted to go to just one more meeting, to express my gratitude to the members of S.L.A.A. in Los Angeles. When A— dropped me at the airport, she kissed my cheek and gave me a hug, and simply said, "Thank you, Michael." With that, I felt like the

luckiest man alive.

My thoughts were, *What a beautiful human being she is. What a wonderful recovering person she is. How is this possible, that a person who I've never met before, could bring me clear across the country to carry the message, face my demons,*

and finally have peace?

How extraordinary is that? As we rose above the clouds, I began to replay in my head all the feelings of the weekend.

I remembered all the feelings of love and acceptance, all the feelings of "being taken care of."

I felt high from the drug of

Recovery. It was incredible.

I landed in Philadelphia at 5:10 am. As I sat on the bench waiting for the 5:30 am train, I looked up and saw the clear night sky filled with thousands of stars. Then I heard a voice say, "Thank you."

In Service,

— Michael S

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