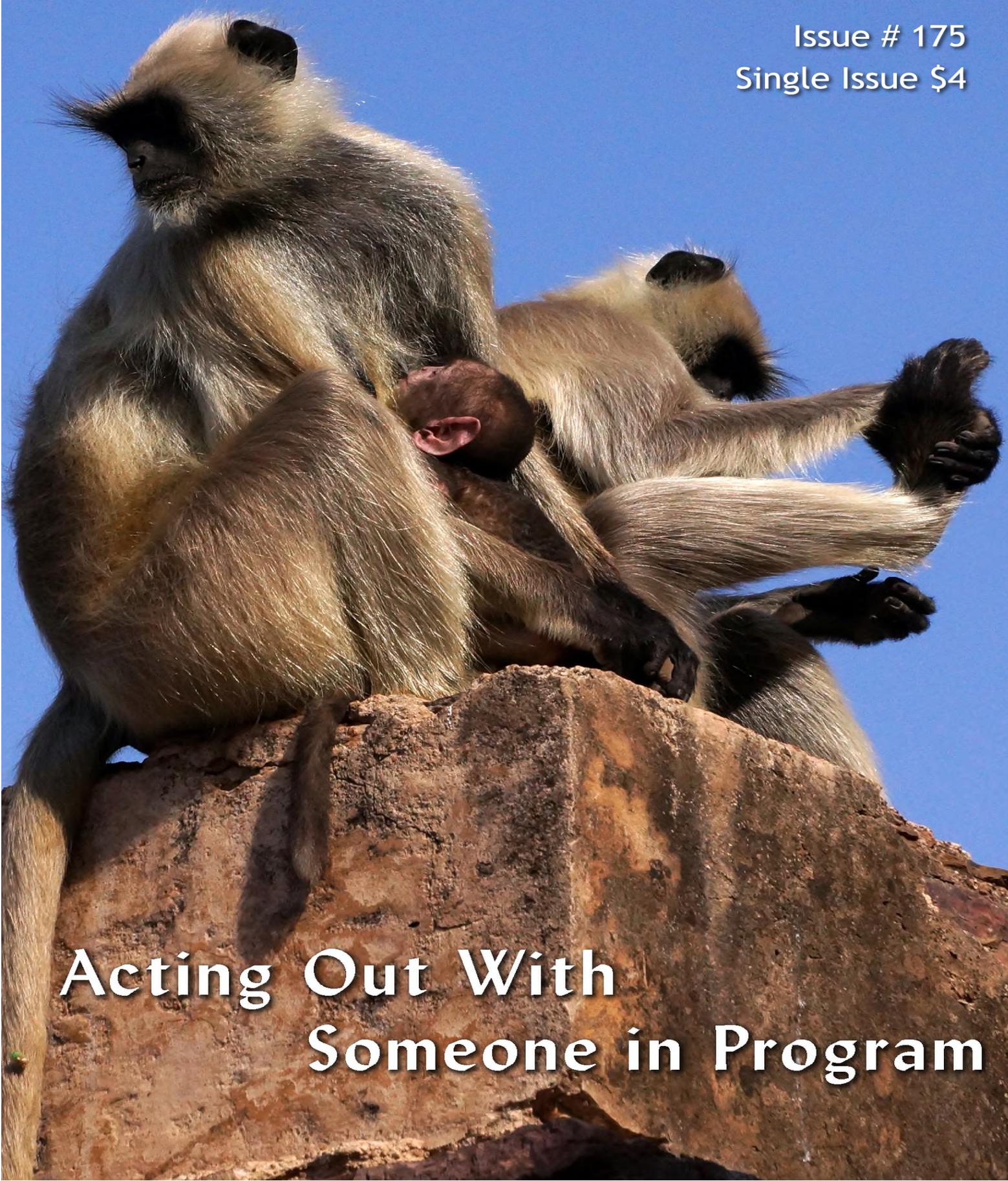


theJournal

Issue # 175

Single Issue \$4



Acting Out With
Someone in Program

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 re-

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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.

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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

Dear Reader,

A lot of the articles in this issue focus on ways to avoid acting out with other S.L.A.A. members. These are a useful resource and something I wish I had in the first few years of Program. Hopefully they will help others to avoid the pain of acting out in Program. It also helps to be reminded of the pain that acting out causes and how we need to keep our Program safe for everyone. If this issue prevents one member from hurting themselves or their fellows, it will have done its job.

One of the articles mentions the “Triggers as a Resource” pamphlet as a useful tool to avoid acting out with another S.L.A.A. member. Like the pamphlet says: “Triggers in meetings and in our daily lives can be opportunities to come to a greater awareness of ourselves. As we continue to expand this awareness, we can experience our meetings as safe environments for sharing about our triggers as they occur. Some of us have come to see meetings as opportunities to have safe encounters with familiar and unfamiliar triggers.” Hopefully, this issue of the *Journal* will help us keep meetings safe and work through those triggers to avoid acting out.

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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at its meetings.

In submitting such content to S.L.A.A., the member releases S.L.A.A., any other members of S.L.A.A. and S.L.A.A.’s officers, directors, employees and agents (collectively, the “Releasees”) from any and all claims which the member may have against any of the Releasees in connection with the member’s submission of content to the Journal.

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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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“How do you recover from acting out with someone in Program? How do you act around them, around your group?”

I have been attracted to newcomer men. I refrain from flirting or offering my phone number for calls. If I have a mental obsession, I don't talk to him at fellowship dinner. I talk to women instead.

— **Kara B., NYC**

By the grace of God, I have never acted out with anyone in my group. I feel safe with all my brothers in my group and I've learned how to have healthy relationships with men. I would trust them with my life today.

— **Diane S., Pittsfield, MA**

Share, talk with recovery partners and my sponsor, pray, work the Steps.

— **Jean P., NM**

To date, I have had comfortable boundaries with Program members. I have a strong commitment to keep my Program safe and secure for the benefit of my recovery and the recovery of others.

— **Nancy G., San Diego**

Go to a different meeting. Pray about it. Check in with your sponsor. Protect boundaries.

— **Mark M. Sacramento, CA**

Acting out may mean that a person in program triggers or challenges me. Working through with fellows or sponsor and addressing the issue, setting boundaries and walking through my challenges with honesty.

— **Glenn S., Los Angeles**

First, I take time off. I assist other groups. Right now I'll be going to the group that “he” goes to and am discussing it with my sponsor. I bookend with fellows when I attend that meeting. I know he is someone that I cannot relate to. I just say, “Hi and goodbye.” That's it.

— **Amalia, Houston**

Having acted out with a woman in Program, I know the difficulty of going to meetings afterwards. I had to talk with my sponsor and fellows and do a lot of praying to be comfortable coming to meetings. I kept showing up with the intent of no contact. Fortunately for me, the person I acted out with no longer showed up at meetings I went to. But, for me, the main recovery tool I used was willingness.

— **Jim B., Huntington Beach**

The primary way that I keep from acting out with Program members is to pray for them, that they become happy, healthy and whole. The best secondary way is to talk to them. I get to know them. Once I get to know someone, they go from being a sex object for me and become a person. My addiction wants to act out with someone who I have objectified. Once I get to know them and their past, I am not going to add any harm to them.

— **Anonymous, USA**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “How do you recover from acting out with someone in Program? How do you act around them, around your group?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #176 — January/February — Dating Apps: Have you met your partner with the help of a dating app (or online dating) and/or have you learned to deal with dating apps soberly? Please share your experience, strength and hope. The deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2018. And #177 — March/April — Finding S.L.A.A. — What was it like to first walk in the doors? Did you feel welcomed? What can meetings do to help Newcomers feel more welcomed? The deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2019. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

Being a sex and love addict, I’m attracted to anyone who shows me some form of love- healthy or not. It helped when I reached Step 9. My sponsor suggested I outreach with 5 women who I’d known for a year or more who were past Step 9 also and be totally honest.

— **Anonymous, UK**

Not applicable for me. However, we have adopted safety statements in my group to help both parties recover.

— **Mike S.**

I have never acted out with someone, but I certainly have been triggered. I think that realizing the other person is diseased and needs help allows me to stop objectifying them.

— **Steve B., Sunrise, FL**

After a few months in Program, I found myself attracted to someone in the rooms. He seemed to be acting in a way that communicated he was attracted to me as well. It was suggested to me that I talk about it with my sponsor and pray about it. I did so, and found myself beginning to intrigue with him during meetings and at fellowship. I talked to my sponsor continually about it, and she told me that this was an opportunity for me to focus on my feelings and experiences, while choosing to not take actions that would result in either intriguing or running away from the situation. This was really difficult for me, and I didn’t do it perfectly. With the help of my Higher Power, I decided that I would make sure to not sit next to or directly across from him at meetings, that I would speak only with women or larger groups of fellows rather than to him on a one-on-one basis, and that I would share honestly about my feeling with trusted fellows in outreach calls and in meetings. The “Triggers as a Resource” booklet was invaluable to me during this time. Coming up with boundaries I could enforce and behaviors I was in control of and able to adhere to was crucial to me being able to continue to attend the meetings I so very much needed at the time.

— **Sarah E., Oakland**

The S.L.A.A. Basic Text eBook
IS HERE!



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Keep Your Life Raft Afloat



In-Meeting Acting Out Has Destroyed Meetings!

I first attended S.L.A.A. in 1990 in a West Coast foothill town after being abandoned by a polyamorous partner who was married to another. I released much shame working the Steps and had completed my amends when that meeting folded because of acting out within the group. The perpetrator had a history of severe trauma but I think fondly of him since he had been supportive of my recovery and never made advances towards me. He then moved to a larger city and was eventually banned from the Program, which is exceedingly rare. You have to work hard to be banned from a 12-Step group!

Eight years later, in intense withdrawal when that same lover

left me again, a friend miraculously started an S.L.A.A. meeting. I was unaware of how serious my addiction to unavailable men was when J. arrived at our meeting boasting 12 years in Program. It took years for me to realize that I had mistaken his arrogant and belligerent behavior for strength, that a sober member would not date a newcomer and that I had overlooked the sensations in my belly when I read the framed caveman cartoon on his dresser. A Neanderthal leader has just pushed another clan member off a cliff. The leader turns to the tribe and asks, "Anyone else not getting their needs met?"

Though filled with distrustful feelings, which was a step up since I wasn't rushing in as before, I

began to date him. The meeting set up rules for couple's shares but mostly newcomers did not understand acting out was afoot. I married this difficult man eighteen months later, not aware that marriage doesn't mean either people are emotionally available! I was feeling hopeful since we were both in recovery and had group support. Two months after the wedding, he abruptly announced he was quitting the Program, "which no longer served him." Though shocked, this turned out to be a blessing since I could now share freely in the meeting through our seven-year unfulfilling and difficult union.

I did heal through this marriage and when he left me, I was finally strong enough to commit to a year of being on my

own. It was an intense withdrawal including psychotic flashbacks of abuse and a vision of a shrouded inner child resurrecting but I emerged more intimate with myself. We had a party when I achieved my first year of no dating.

The group also had to deal with a long-term member making secret advances on a newcomer. They were both married with very different levels of education and

came from divergent social classes. When she revealed his behavior, I was blown away. I and another member met with the perpetrator privately. He projected such a sober image that I felt very angry, judged him harshly and passed shame onto him. After healing from my issues triggered by this betrayal, I made amends to him. After this experience, we added a statement to our opening readings, "If you

are concerned with anything that happens, inside or outside of the meetings, please bring your concerns directly to that person, your sponsor or another member you trust".

I am happily surprised how little acting out occurs in our S.L.A.A. meeting. We are vigilant to maintain a sober meeting since it is our life raft and we all need it to stay afloat!

— **Anonymous**

Making Myself a Priority

When I first came into Program, I was drawn to a fellow who I decided in my head was a good match for me based on a few fellowship gatherings and from hearing him share in meetings. A few years had passed and about halfway through reading my Fifth Step to my sponsor (and before I was cleared to date), I decided I was ready to begin dating this fellow...I was convinced I was ready and jumped in head first.

We dated for about 4 1/2 months. About a few months in, my life became unmanageable. I began isolating because I was sitting in shame and guilt over why I wasn't happy and why things were becoming difficult both in my life and the relationship. I thought I was the one to blame and was terrified of losing the relationship. One day, I did lose the relationship and although I was a mess, deep down, I was also relieved that the ride was over because I didn't have the energy or well-being to keep up anymore. I made my way back into Program and into the loving arms, warm embraces and genuine understanding of the women who have held space for me during a time where I felt so low and defeated. I began relating to others and healing my shame

with the help of my sponsor, whom I left when I began the relationship, and whom I'm so thankful has also stood by my side to help me when I was ready to help myself again. We worked on top lines to help curb my obsessions and get back into MY life again. I also tried this super helpful exercise... whenever I missed something my ex did for me, I would vow to give those things to myself, including stroking my hair and face for comfort and going out to events on self-God dates. Sooner than I thought, I began to awaken to the truth that I am a divine creature who deserves to make herself the number one priority in her life.

I avoid mixed meetings where men attend and I'm fortunate that I know his meeting schedule, which has allowed me to avoid specific meetings I know he will attend. In fact, I have that on my bottom lines so that I can put myself and my sobriety first.

I'm also starting to truly understand how important the process of working the Steps and creating a dating plan is before I consider dating again. Working the Steps is a way for me to brightly illuminate and work through the false beliefs I have about myself so that I'm easily able to align myself with others

who are healthy for me. I have a tendency of turning red flags into white ones, compromising my values and happiness and working hard for love from emotionally-unavailable men (this goes back to my experiences with my unavailable dad). I believe working the Steps and creating a dating plan will be a reminder for me of all the red flags that have caused me pain in the past so that I can avoid them and live a life that God intends me to live — one filled with freedom and happiness. As my sponsor once said, FREEDOM is in the truth and I'm ready and willing to face and accept all of my truths...the biggest one being that I'm loveable exactly as I am, with or without a partner.

What that relationship taught me is that I have the choice to step into my life in a profoundly healing way. I get to have all of the things I want for my life without a damaging relationship holding me back. I get to truly be there for myself and bask in independence and balance in my life. I get to choose who will enter and who I say, "No thank you," to. I'm not broken, but I do need support. That's what S.L.A.A. gives me and I'm forever thankful.

— **Anonymous**

Look at Shoes

I remember an old literature announcement joke from when I first got clean and sober: “We have A.A. literature available for purchase at our cost. If you’re in C.A., I’ll front it to you. If you’re in G.A., I’ll roll you for it. If you’re in N.A., I’ll turn my back so you can steal it. If you’re in S.L.A.A.... meet me in the parking lot in 10 minutes.”

Yes, hooking up in S.L.A.A. was a punchline before the term “hooking up” was invented. Who better to act out with than another person who thinks about acting out 24/7, 365? A dozen or more sex addicts within 25 feet of your current location -- S.L.A.A. was Grindr before that was invented,

too.

My sponsor knew that, so she gave me a great tool to save me from myself: “Look at shoes,” she said. My sponsor knew that if I looked at someone in the face, I would be staring into his eyes in no time. Intrigue would lead to fantasy and fantasy would lead to no good outcome. Ever.

So I looked down. I stared at your shoes. There’s a freedom in not looking straight at you. One, it freed me to listen. Two, it freed me from the self-consciousness of you looking back at me. It was a cool discovery.

I also discovered two new brands of trainers in my early days of abstinence, and developed an

aversion to those Mark Zuckerberg Adidas sandals. Who wears shower shoes in public? I learned to love a nice wedge, especially on a suede bootie. I have a delightfully diverse shoe closet today.

You know what I didn’t do? I didn’t have sex with anyone from an S.L.A.A. meeting. This isn’t to say that no relationships formed in S.L.A.A. ever works out. It’s just that as another old joke goes: The odds may be good, but the goods are odd.

Enjoy the shoes.

— Ethlie.

Member of S.L.A.A. since 1999.

Avoiding Acting Out

For a gratefully recovering sex, love and fantasy addict, a more helpful question may be, how do I avoid acting out with someone in the program? I will share an actual experience that happened to me in July. There is a new member of my home group who I find extremely attractive. The first step to staying sober for me was to be aware and honest with myself and say to myself, “I find this guy physically attractive,” instead of trying to deny reality.

I immediately got a red flag when he gave a female who happened to be the youngest and newest member of our group his phone number privately in the parking lot. The only reason I found out about this is she is my sponsee and she shared this information with me. As her sponsor, I let her know that we

really did not reach out to members of the opposite sex (if we are straight) for recovery partners. She threw away his phone number. Another odd behavior was he would take copious notes during meetings and never share his experience, strength and hope. That led me to believe he was a writer doing some sort of research and possibly not an addict at all. I just filed all of this information away, did not act on it, but did not ignore it either.

Months later, I was on Facebook and the category of People You May Know popped up. I am working on two political campaigns and involved in the arts, and my grown daughter no longer lives with me, so I feel comfortable to selectively add some of these suggestions with scrutiny. There was an attractive

man who popped up, who was a writer (I am a writer) and we had many mutual friends and I looked at his page and it looked healthy enough. I added him as a friend and the same day received a private Facebook message. I initially did not recognize him as the person from my S.L.A.A. face-to-face meeting. This is how I handled it to keep myself safe and sober:

Him: Hey, I had no idea that you were also a writer. Hope you’ve been well.

Me: Hey I am not very observant! People You May Know popped up on Facebook. Lately when those people have lots of mutual friends, I send a friend request. I did not know who you were until you sent me a PM. You don’t have to answer this if you don’t want to, but were you just



doing research in meetings or more?

Him: It's always great to meet another writer! I've been meaning to come back to the meeting. I think I will do that next week. Oh, not research.

Me: If I may be so bold, how much sobriety do you have? I will explain why I ask after you answer, if you feel comfortable to do so.

Him: Sure thing. Several months.

Me: <12?

Him: Yes. 7.very

Me: So, for my sobriety, I will be able to communicate with you in meetings, but not on this platform until you have one year of sobriety. Thank you for being forthright and for your graciousness.

Him: Of course, I completely understand. Be well.

I find the guideline for all 12 Step programs of not dating until one year of sobriety to be a very wise one. One of the great tools of our program is working with your sponsor and agreeing that it is time to date and developing a

customized dating plan to stay safe and sober.

I remember wanting to act out and lying to myself that spending time flirting and intriguing with unhealthy guys was not acting out and my sponsor and Higher Power gave me clarity. The longer I am sober, the more my topline behaviors become my first instinct instead of my addictive behaviors. I have more than five years of sobriety in S.L.A.A. and am so grateful for this program and the opportunity to share. Peace today.

—Heidi

Being Mindful

This may focus more on prevention of acting out with a Program friend, but here it goes.

For starters, I find it easy to intrigue with people of the opposite sex. This is a one-sided way of acting out, because they usually don't know of my intrigue. I have to remind myself that someone else's attractiveness is not mine to have. I also am mindful of receiving Program

hugs, or rather expecting Program hugs from others. There is nothing that says these will be automatically given to me, and I have learned to quiet down my "wants" in the realization that life will go on if I don't get a hug from a particular person.

Another has to do with preconceptions. While not in the Program, there is an attractive person at my workplace. They are both goofy and on top of their job

and attractive. All of these qualities are endearing to me. However, this person is married, and I keep a mental note and say to myself, "Appropriate conduct, appropriate conduct." I don't want to lose my job or interfere with a marriage. I value them as a person more than my desire to follow my first instincts.

I hope this helps in the area of acting out with a fellow.

— EBE

Avoiding Triggers

I am a cisgender, heterosexual who attends women's meetings, so I haven't been tempted to nor have I acted out with a fellow from a physical attraction sense. But as a love addict I learned early on there is a nuance when acting out, specifically in conversations with fellows that can slip back into fantasy/obsession.

When I have a program-centered outreach call, my soul feels it. I feel enriched, serene. However, when sharing about my experience in a "non-sober" way, talking about my qualifier as a conquest, dwelling on the humor (my "bad actor" from the 12&12) then sliding back into obsession about a future with him ... if I'll ever hear from him...and so on--then later feeling depressed and, once again, powerless--I know my fantasy/love addict was at play.

I acted out in that way with a fellow earlier in my recovery; the healthiest way for me to manage



the situation was to no longer engage in outreach with this fellow as calls/texts became too

triggering and slippery slopes.

— Anonymous

Share space

My Story

My name is Shane, and I am a grateful recovering sex and love addict. By the grace of my Higher Power and the power of the Twelve Steps, I have been sober from acting on my bottom lines since February 20, 2013.

My journey to addiction began when my adopted father, an alcoholic and sex addict, introduced me to pornography at the age of six. I now realize that exposing a six-year-old boy to pornography is a form of sexual abuse. As a child, I lacked the maturity to deal with the feelings I began to associate with these images.

My secret activities continued into adolescence, where they collided with my struggle with same-sex attraction. About the time I hit puberty, I became a born-again Christian. Over my teenage years, I repeated a cycle of being attracted to boys my own age, looking at pornography, sex with self, experimenting with same-sex peers, and then drowning in a sea of religious guilt and shame.

By age sixteen, pornography and sex with self became my drug of choice to medicate my shame, guilt, confusion, and fear of being gay.

After High School I entered the clergy and was married, mistakenly believing doing so would cure me of my struggles.

How wrong I was! These issues persisted despite prayer, fasting, and faith. It left me convinced that I was unworthy of God's intervention. Regretfully, my need to control everything (so the real me would never be revealed) drove a wedge between my wife and me and we divorced. I eventually married again with an honest commitment to do the right thing.

However, I quickly returned to my addiction, this time discovering the internet. Addiction is progressive and debilitating, and every barrier I said I would never cross I did.

In the 15 months I was acting out I had scores of sexual encounters, one of which was with a young man I met online who was under age. Sex addiction is a sure pathway to insanity.

How else can I explain the perfect sense it made (to me) to imagine that an emotional and sexual relationship with a teenager would be acceptable?

I had so detached from the reality of my life that I was trying to maintain the public persona of a faithful husband, respected religious leader and member of the community while hooking up with men at the risk of my freedom, my family, my career, and my sanity.

Eventually I was found out and arrested. I seriously considered suicide when the police came to

my door, but the thought of my children or wife finding my body stopped me from doing the deed.

After a 93-day stay in sex rehab, I was able to admit that I was an addict and came out to my family as a gay man. While there, I was introduced to S.L.A.A. and made a half-hearted attempt at recovery. After rehab, I did a one-year stint in state prison. I left state prison in 2012 thinking I had everything under control. Within six months, I had relapsed. I did not believe the stories I heard about relapse being worse than the first go around with our disease, but I became a believer. I rationalized that I could handle a little pornography.

That thinking error began a journey that led me back to prison for four years. During that time, I missed my grandfather and uncle's deaths/funerals, the birth of my two grandchildren, and so much time that can never be regained.

It took that second arrest and imprisonment to wake me up and get serious about recovery.

I wrote S.L.A.A.'s office asking for a correspondent sponsor who would work with me while I was in prison.

My Higher Power sent me just what I needed in my sponsor! He had been in prison as well and had an almost identical background. While inside, I began to work the Steps, set my bottom lines,

caution lines, and top lines, and I developed a daily spiritual routine that includes prayer, meditation, and affirmations.

For a brief time, I actually met with other inmates for S.L.A.A. meetings in our dorm. It has been said that suffering is a pathway to peace.

Those four years were the most difficult days I have ever experienced – so much violence, darkness, isolation, and despair. Working the Steps, the support of my sponsor, my family, a small group of fellow inmates whom I trusted, and my Higher Power were how I got through it. On December 20, 2016 I began my recovery journey in the “free” world.

Since my release, I have continued that work by seeing a licensed sex offender therapist, regularly attending our local S.L.A.A. meetings where I serve by setting up chairs, leading meetings, and serving as the chairperson for our Intergroup. I am beginning work on my Ninth Step and have one sponsee. I have

been able to find work and have a recovery job as a restaurant manager. I recently led a discussion group at my church that discussed the connection between the Twelve Steps and the Gospel as Jesus lived out – an opportunity I never imagined I would ever again have.

I have built recovery friendships and meet regularly with a group of men in recovery. I am actually developing healthy, intimate same sex friendships! I have a close friend who serves as my spiritual advisor and mentor who is well versed in recovery. I have surrendered my right to have sex anytime I want, with anyone I want, and have made peace with abstinence unless I am in a committed relationship.

Almost five years of sobriety has restored much of my sanity and empowered me to begin to love myself. I am now fully present for my family and friends.

My spiritual life is exactly where it needs to be, utterly human yet touched by the grace of my Higher Power. Now, when I

feel those familiar triggers creeping in, I call a trusted recovery partner or my sponsor.

My biggest struggle is with loneliness and much to my surprise, feeling lonely does not kill me. Each day I do not act out is a step back to restoring my reputation as an honorable man.

I now pray for an opportunity to live out this hope by carrying this message to others trapped in their own struggle with sex and love addiction, especially those who are in vocational religious ministry.

In that regard, I am now a certified Recovery Coach who focuses on helping recovering clergy stop living out a pattern of sex, love and pornography addiction.

My recovery has not been perfect, but it has been the recovery I needed, including my prison sentence. I am thankful for the pain it brought and the hope I discovered behind those bars through the Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.

— Shane M. Conway, Arkansas

Learning

In recovery, I am learning about the many ways in which my principles have been ineffective.

It's mind boggling!

That I used addictions as band-aids to cover up my feelings for most of my life.

That I have used codependent traits to manipulate to get what I want for most of my life.

That I let my codependent mother, my Higher Power, make all of my decisions for me for most of my life.

That I made my qualifier my Higher Power and all of my values were lost and became his.

That I have been living in fear my whole life.

That I have acted as a child all of my life.

It is so great to learn that there is a better way. That there are resources now that weren't there before.

Recovery is eye opening in so many ways!

I am finally starting to use boundaries.

I am feeling my feelings instead of acting out.

I am taking care of my life like an adult.

I am learning what my real values are.

I am choosing who I want in my life and who I DON'T want in my life.

I am being patient and knowing that full recovery is not going to happen overnight.

I am accepting myself and everyone else.

I am learning that I am not an alien and what I've felt my whole life has been felt by others too.

I am thinking about my intentions before doing anything.

I am learning that I can't do it alone.

I am learning to love myself!

— Jamie

I'm a Grandma!

I became a grandma yesterday! or an “Oma”, which is German for grandma.

I am so thrilled. My disease robbed me of the opportunity to be a mom. I have so many regrets about not having a family of my own. My step-daughter had the baby. But there really are no “step-Grandmas”. It’s just Grandmas.

This program has given me a new life to live, and gifts beyond my wildest dreams. My husband’s daughter loves me today. She was suspicious and mistrustful at first, when my husband told her how many times I’d been married. But I stuck around, and she has come to trust and love me. We are family now. I’m reminded of the 12 Promises of S.L.A.A. many of which have come true for me:

1. We will regain control of our lives.
2. We will begin to feel dignity and respect for ourselves.
3. The loneliness will subside and we will begin to enjoy being alone.
4. We will no longer be plagued by an unceasing sense of longing.
5. In the company of family and friends, we will be with them in body and mind.
6. We will pursue interests and activities that we desire for ourselves.
7. Love will be a committed, thoughtful decision rather than a feeling by which we are overwhelmed.
8. We will love and accept ourselves.
9. We will relate to others from

a state of wholeness.

10. We will extend ourselves for the purpose of nurturing our own or another’s spiritual growth.

11. We will make peace with our past and make amends to those we have hurt.

12. We will be thankful for what has been given us, what has been taken away, and what has been left behind.

I especially relate promises #5, #7 and #12. This is the wonderful house my Higher Power has built. I am no longer lonely, I am with my family and friends in body and in mind. I have made peace with my past and I can’t wait to see what’s next!

— Anonymous

Recovery Has Been a Rigorous Journey

Recovery has been a rigorous journey for me. Thank goodness this is a one day at a time program, or I’d have left a long time ago. I could have never digested the big chunks of truth about myself that I have without this program. It’s been a process of little by little. My Higher Power (HP) has been like a steady drip on me.

I have to remember that a steady drip on solid rock carves out canyons (though it may take centuries).

Over the years (feels like centuries) since I first started here, my HP (Higher Power) has

been dripping away at my character defects.

He has worn some humility into me that I’ve never had before. It used to be all about me. I was always right, *they* were always wrong. *They* would cause me pain and problems, and I couldn’t tolerate that.

So I’d find a man to fix it, until that panacea quickly wore off. In recovery, I’ve gotten a true look at myself (who I’ve been), who I am, with the help of an HP and a sponsor (Step 5).

And I’ve gotten a clear glimpse of who I can be. Steadily I’m moving towards that which is on

the horizon; I want this today.

In this program, I’ve been pointed towards my true North. I’ve come to learn that He doesn’t steer me wrong when I stop, look, and listen.

I’ve also come to learn that I need to get out of His way. It can be so painful at times, though it’s a good pain (like the cleaning out of infection). By this slow but steady process, I am healing. I am so blessed to have found this program, my sponsor, and all of you. Thanks for being here to read my share.

— Anonymous

Learning Intimacy

As Bill Sees It: Selected Writings of the Alcoholics Anonymous Co-Founder (Page 76)

“Letter 1966

Change is the characteristic of all growth. From drinking to sobriety, from dishonesty to honesty, from conflict to serenity, from hate to love, from childish dependence to adult responsibility — all this and infinitely more represent change for the better. Such changes are accomplished by a belief in and a practice of sound principles. Here we must discard bad or ineffective principles in favor of good ones that work. Even good principles can sometimes be displaced by the discovery of still better ones. Only God is unchanging; only He has all the truth there is.”

My thoughts on this reading:

It’s reassuring to hear that Higher Power’s (HP) greatness and power are unchanging. He

doesn’t take breaks! I can’t trust anything less than a powerful HP to rescue me from my diseased thinking and compulsions.

As to the belief in, and practice of sound principles - I’ve really been trying to show up in all of my relationships today, instead of “ghosting” them.

With the help of HP, my sponsor and all of you, I’ve closed off all of the exits. My M.O. when things get tough is to exit stage left. So today, one of my bottom-lines is “leaving” or threatening to leave (in a huff). One of the gifts of the Program for me is the insights I’ve gained into my own behavior.

Threatening to leave, or hinting I’ll leave is a form of manipulating, my husband for example, trying to get him to stop a certain behavior that I don’t like. I might think about leaving because my thinker is broken, but I don’t say it, or act on it.

Today I’m learning to stick it out, be real, show up to intimacy with my husband, fully present.

~Ufff~ it’s hard sometimes because I’m still just a child on some levels; but I have a real HP today, one I can lean into to help me.

So I keep showing up. HP invites me to put on my “big girl pants,” and trust Him. It’s important for me to remember that I can tend to ghost my HP too. I need to be ever vigilant to this, because I’m the one who suffers for it.

But I’ve got a different way to go today, because of the incredible love and grace of my HP. Thank God for meetings too, for all of you, because you remind me of my relationship with HP — of the incredible source of power, peace, and good will that I can plug into. All of you remind me of the sound principles I am trying to live by today; thank-you for this. I don’t want what I had in my life before the S.L.A.A. Program. I’ve never had it so good. I’ll keep coming back.

— Susan G.

Thinking of Others

I read this morning in my morning meditation: humility is not thinking less of myself, it’s thinking about myself less. Wow! what a concept. I never even realized I was thinking about myself 24/7; Even when I was crazy head over heels in love with someone, I was thinking about me: how I felt without him, how I was burning with desire, when would “I” see him next? Does he love me? How can “I” entice him?

It was never about him really. I never really even knew the “hims.” It was always about what “I” felt,

needed, wanted. Never mind the fact that I was like a tornado roaring thru people’s lives: family, and friends who were devastated when I divorced yet again.

My poor little nephews had so many uncles because of the revolving door of my heart. There were so many discarded lovers - like soiled tissue paper, until the day that I just couldn’t do it anymore.

I was so at the end of myself...I couldn’t go on.

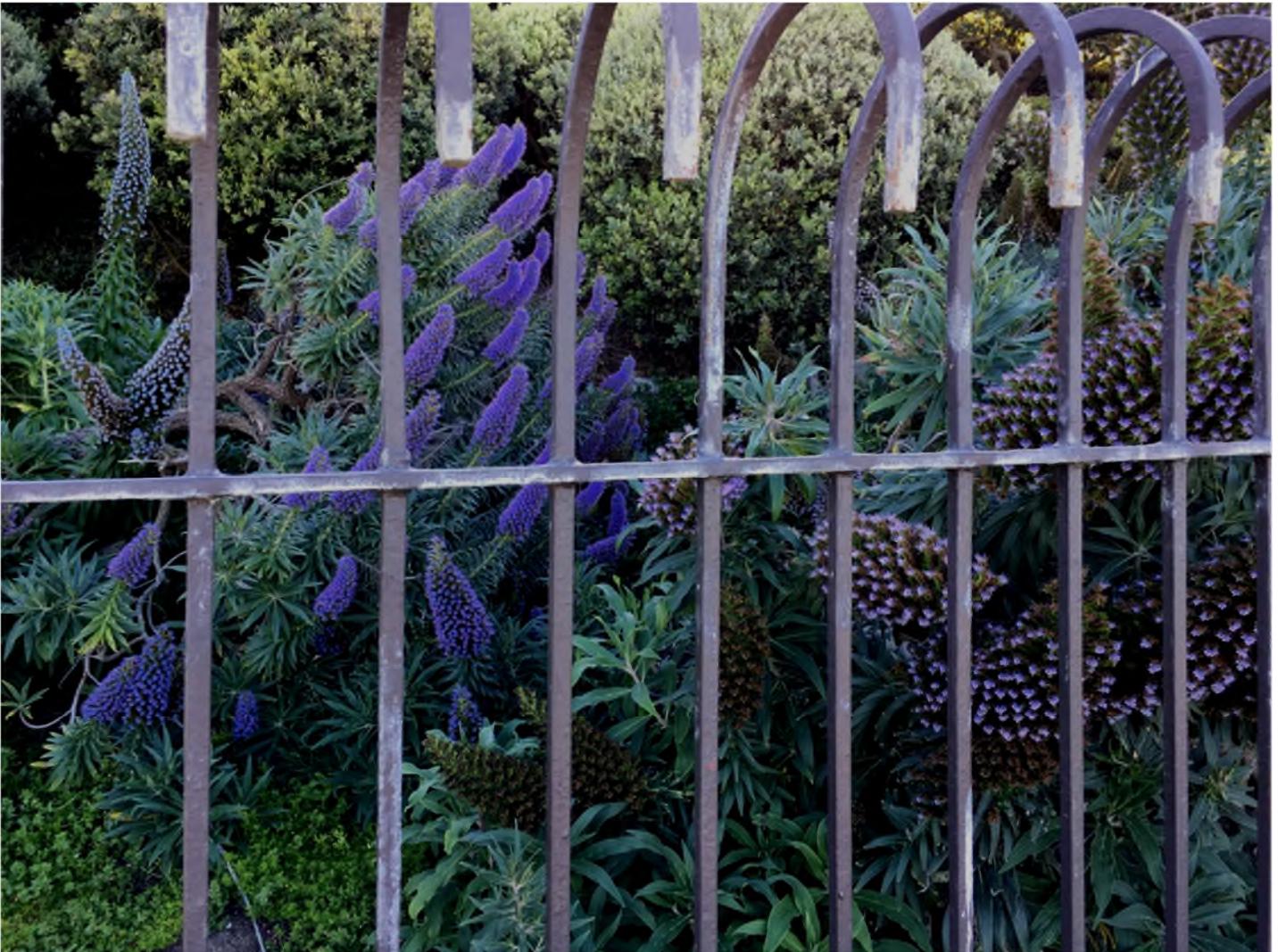
My heart and soul were like a bleak desert or a moonscape. I was

dry, dry, dry. I cried out to Higher Power to water my soul. I just couldn’t keep the balls in the air anymore; they were dropping to the ground one by one. When I cried out to Higher Power, I turned around and there He was.

I thought I had run so far away, I would never be able to get back to Him, but He had been pursuing me the whole way. I only had to turn around. My life has never been the same. I’ve never had it so good. I’m free, and so glad you are here to help me.

— Anonymous

Arrested Development



I was born into a double life. Raised by people with secrets. I was the fourth of five children and grew up in the tightly-knit communities of Utah, where people looked out for each other, you knew your neighbors, and church members were always eager to lend a helping hand.

And so, for a violent, abusive, dysfunctional family, this meant learning to hide in plain sight — to lie to people’s faces — to conceal the truth from people who cared, from people who could help: friends, family, clergy, teachers. I

was born in 1979 and this is how I was raised, and it took more than three decades before I began to realize how truly strange it was to act like the Osmonds on Sundays but the Mansons every other day of the week — compartmentalizing everything — never sharing feelings or telling the truth.

Mom was, to use psychological terminology, a “malignant narcissist.” Hers was a personality disorder, caused by horrific sexual trauma endured in childhood, and for which there was no cure.

She destroyed every single one

of her children — through torture, neglect, starvation, gaslighting, shunning, violence, screaming, and above all unpredictability. It was a police state: never knowing when you’d hear the knock on your door, never knowing if you were in favor or disfavor, being told it was Tuesday when the calendar clearly said Wednesday. Arguing otherwise never, ever ended well.

Dad was a sex and drug addict. A high-powered attorney, he couldn’t face that he’d married an insane woman, so he retreated

from her abuse and the realization of what she was doing to us, finding his refuge in cocaine and escorts.

He went to prison while I was in high school. Typical of our situation, my mom insisted we lie to everyone and say he was just “in Texas” receiving life-saving medical treatment! (We could really milk the sympathy with that line.)

I found my way to cope: hyper-compliance. I saw two of my older siblings’ attempts at standing up to our mother, and how that led to their becoming homeless as teenagers. My strategy to avoid their fate: become mom’s “golden child,” never rocking the boat.

I became her surrogate spouse: confidante, enforcer, enabler. I did whatever was necessary to keep her from flying off the handle. Church taught me “blessed are the peacemakers” and “honor thy father and mother” and I used such teachings to give cover to what was emotional incest. My siblings stood up and got the stick. I sucked up and got the carrot. Both, it turns out, were deadly.

As a result, I never grew up. While my body aged, in my mind and heart I remained a frightened boy: desperate for approval, eager to please, fragile, deluded, selfish, and wounded. Most of my daily thoughts were lost to fantasy. I could never handle conflict with anyone and thus was never emotionally honest. I went through life stunted and inauthentic, with predictably negative results.

My sex addiction thrived within this compartmentalized, emotionally constipated life. I was a brilliant, accomplished scholar and musician by day, and a compulsive sexual deviant by night — a smiling church deacon Sunday mornings, a weird pervert Saturday nights. Lots of plates to spin. Lots of chainsaws to juggle. So many stories to keep straight. Such a burden to carry.

And my addiction started very early. I was introduced to sex by an older sister at the age of five. (She was being molested herself.) I don’t remember this, but was told about it much later. In fact, all recollections of my life prior to, say, middle school, are swiss-cheese-like, at best.

But I do remember my first porn magazine, picked up on the side of the freeway at age seven. (Mine was the kind of family where seven year-olds were left to just wander up and down busy interstate highways.) And I must say: it was love at first sight, me and that magazine. The images thrilled me. With so much chaos, shouting, violence, and rage surrounding my childhood, here was something that brought comfort. Soothing. Warmth. Pleasure.

At age seven, my “Linus blanket” was a Playboy.

Soon after, I discovered hardcore porn on our satellite dish. It was really easy to do: I just secretly observed dad, mom, or my older siblings watching porn and looked up the channel numbers when they were finished!

At age twelve, masturbation started. Despite a by-then years’-long porn habit, I had yet to connect what I was seeing on the TV to my own body. Now, that link was fused. I realized I could orgasm just like the porn stars.

Now, I belonged. I’d found my niche, my people: those who have sex all the time for no real reason and love every minute of it. I thought orgasms were what life was all about, the secret mystery of the universe, and these people got that and now I did, too.

I watched every moment I could, until the satellite was disconnected.

Around the same time, I became a peeping tom. Neighborhood girls’ windows drew me in, until one night my parents noticed I was gone and asked me to explain myself.

I never went back to peeping

again. I responded well to a boundary, but, I just diverted that energy into more masturbation, fantasy, and whatever “porn” I could get my hands on — passages in books, glances down shirts, ads, scrambled cable. The internet showed up while I was in high school. I would sneak into a teacher’s room after hours and use his computer to log onto a chat site, immediately trawling for sex topics. I now realize I was endangering a good man’s career, for if anyone had ever checked that computer, he would have taken the blame.

All this time I remained a committed Mormon. I masturbated six times a day (hating myself for being so weak), but finished high school without being kissed, without a girlfriend, even. Mine indeed was a double life.

This pattern continued in college. While others began to develop and experiment sexually, I remained rigidly puritanical in my outward appearance. Everyone HAS to know I’m a good Mormon boy. A girl in my dorm wanted to fool around with me, asking for back rubs late at night and so on. I self-righteously proclaimed how I was saving myself for marriage, and a mission, and was way above all this petty teenage hormone crap. When her back was turned, I stole a pair of her panties.

My early 20s were more of the same. Getting girlfriends, then preaching abstinence while having sex with them. Eventually, I cheated on all of them. And the reason given when caught in my infidelities? They were no longer “pure,” they’d tempted me out of my vows, I needed to try again with someone new, with a clean slate. I actually saw it that way.

By 25, all this hypocrisy was burning me up. I had a “mini-bottom” and resolved to get clean. I began dating a staunch, faithful Mormon. Also 25, she was not only a virgin, she’d never even

kissed anyone! She'd seen two R-rated movies in her life — one by accident, the other under duress. Perfect! Just the relationship I needed to rescue me from sin!

We saved ourselves for marriage. Then, our wedding night was a total disaster. We could not have sex. *At all.* This was a total mystery to us. It took nearly two years of doctor's consultations and internet sleuthing to finally learn of her medical condition. For her, sex meant only pain and discomfort, never pleasure. She told me the sight of my naked body disgusted her. She got disturbed even thinking about sex with me. We managed to have a son, but never any joy in our lovemaking. Ever. It was only duty to her, and frustration to me.

We were the Irresistible Force vs. the Immovable Object. Me, a sex addict, her, a sexual invalid. I felt cheated by God. I'd done my duty, cleaned up my act. I'd given up porn, cheating, and hooking up. I felt entitled to sex as my reward. And love meant sex, right? A wife was there to satisfy me, right? Marriage just meant a Chinese buffet of sex, didn't it? I mean, all that stuff about trust, and commitment, and loyalty, and devotion — it only applied if I was given endless sex, right? Right??

Zero guesses how this turns out.

I lasted three weeks before I was looking at porn again. Binge and purge cycles — one crazy night, then three weeks of self-loathing. I graduated to chat rooms and online personals. I discovered BDSM. I dominated women online to compensate for the loss of power in my real life. I took my anger at my wife and marriage and diverted it into these online, make-believe "relationships."

I had no capacity for emotional honesty. I ran and hid from my problems, same as my father — my surfing the web standing in for his snorting cocaine.

One of my chat partners revealed that she was not in fact, a college student. She was in eighth grade. As in 14. She asked if I was going to hold that against her. Her confession put me in an obvious quandary, but, never wanting to disappoint anyone (especially if it meant enjoying myself along the way), I re-assured her that it didn't really matter. I understood. I "got" her. I didn't walk away. I remained "there" for her. I was getting what I wanted, so, who cared about morality?

My second "mini-bottom" came soon after. I got fired from my job in college admissions. I viewed it as God's wrath for online infidelity, real infidelity (a one-night stand while out of town), and porn binging. I deleted everything, told the underage girl goodbye, and vowed to never again betray my wife.

Graduate school. A move to a new state. A "clean slate". A fresh start! My marriage ended five months later.

Our ISP disconnected our service due to my illegally downloading copyrighted porn. I finally got caught. I confessed my porn addiction and my two different infidelities, online and off.

My wife and I tried counseling, but all I really wanted to do was scream, "Yeah but if she didn't have a medical condition none of this would've happened!" I never said that out loud, of course.

No, hyper-compliance demanded I express the appropriate levels of sorrow and shame and regret (which were indeed real feelings).

But my anger and frustration are so constipated inside me, all such apologies would have sounded hollow. Our reconciliation was ineffectual. Separation and divorce soon followed. And our three year old son was caught in the middle.

I tried recovery for the first time in another S-fellowship. I entered therapy and began

learning about sex addiction. I read a bunch of books. I gave it all a go, but, I realized what the 4th Step was going to require from me, and I panicked. There was no way I could actually TALK about these things. Not to strangers. No way. So I wobbled. I looked for an exit. I decided my real problem wasn't over-indulgence, but rather, the sexual straightjacket imposed on me by the Mormon church. So I quit the faith of my fathers and decided to go it alone.

The pendulum swung from asceticism to hedonism.

I started having lots of sex. I saw divorce as freedom, not failure. I told myself I needed to make up for lost time, since I didn't even kiss a girl until age 19! A virgin until 21! And a weird loser ever since! Now, the "new me" was going to Get It Right. This time would be different. I would be suave and cool and in charge and healthy and fulfilled and I was convinced lots of sex would make it all happen.

That attitude held up all the way until I was arrested by Homeland Security, indicted in federal court, fired from my job, and exposed on network television.

What goes around comes around.

Just one year into this "new life" as an unapologetic hedonist, I'd relocated to a different state. I'd been offered a plum position at a university, and my professional success gave me a great deal to boast about. Everything was going my way. Before moving, I dumped my devoted, frisky, sane girlfriend to ensure maximum opportunity to live it up in my new situation. Living alone for the first time, I was totally unfettered, unattached, and unhinged.

Things started falling apart. First dates didn't work out. Online dating yielded so few results. Genuine, intimate relationships eluded me. Anything with depth and substance remained out of my reach.

This wasn't grad school, where it was easy to meet women socially and impress them with arcane knowledge in my field. This was real life, and real women saw how immature I was, they saw through the lame excuses for why my marriage ended, and they couldn't believe I'd deliberately moved away from my son. They saw I was bad with money, bad with my diet. I was caustic, cynical, selfish, passive-aggressive, mean-spirited, and fatalistic. They weighed me in the balance and I was surely found wanting.

I once again retreated to the internet to "cope."

I ran a BDSM blog and it began to take off. It had thousands of followers. This blog's popularity became my compensation. My entire self-worth and identity was wrapped up in the "likes" and "shares" my posts got. "Here," I said again, "Are my people — women who aren't creeped out when I ask about bondage five minutes into our first date. No boundaries! No limits! No responsibilities! No consequences! I said to myself, "I am awesome, and I have the 'likes' to prove it!"

I was in total moral and spiritual free-fall. All the lessons learned in therapy, all the seeds planted during my first crack at recovery, were lost to me in this miasma of craving and delusion and self-indulgence. I knowingly chatted with a married woman. I started hooking up with total strangers in seedy motel rooms. I travelled hundreds of miles for forty-five minutes of sex. My phone displayed an endless string of notifications from sexting partners in a half-dozen countries and time zones. 24/7 stimulation with no respite or release.

It all became a living death.

I befriended porn stars and other sex workers. I interpreted their take on everything to mean there was nothing wrong with paying for sex. So I dove right in to that. I couldn't really afford to, but my urges ruled me. The

escorts I hooked up with were frightened, emaciated drug addicts, not the plucky, empowered feminists I read about online. Real life didn't conform to my internet fantasies. I required increasingly intense "doses" of sex to numb this awareness: often phoning the next hooker right after leaving the last one, desperate to wash away the shame of exploiting these women.

Not every follower of my blog was an adult. At first I ignored this fact, but eventually, I just stopped caring. So I chatted with teenagers. I told them their curiosity was perfectly normal, that if social media had existed when I was their age I'd totally be doing the same thing. I asked them questions and said whatever I needed to keep them on the hook.

I literally said to myself, multiple times, "Better me than an actual child molester!" That's the kind of person I'd become.

And this was how it all finally unraveled for me: the paying for sex and the chatting with teenagers both became so commonplace that, one day, when offered the opportunity to combine the two, I took it. I gave a man \$140 to have sex with his 14-year-old step-daughter.

Next thing I knew I was being thrown on the ground. At first I thought I was being mugged, and I considered the possibility that that was how I would die. But no, it was a sting operation, and I was in some seriously deep shit.

And it turns out I did die, after a fashion.

During that interrogation that night, it finally hit home: my entire life's operating system was flawed. The secrecy, the compartmentalizing, the deviancy, the reckless and dangerous behavior, the hiding in plain sight, the living death that was my life-- it finally came to an end. I had this "eye of the hurricane" moment of total peace, and a sense of relief washed over me. Finally, I was

stopped. An intervention took place. I could quit. Give it up. Surrender.

Then the reality of my situation sank in. This wasn't a prostitution misdemeanor. I couldn't pay a fine and check in to treatment, hush hush. This was Sex Trafficking of a Minor and it was ten years to life in prison and my picture was on TV and my university fired me and only my siblings understood or cared what was going to happen to me. All my internet "friends" vanished. Colleagues were consumed with simple damage control, too angry about putting out my fires and disgusted at what I'd done to have any time to reach out. I was given house arrest and felt totally alone. I burned my entire goddamn life to the ground and all I wanted to do was die.

I attended my first S.L.A.A. meeting five days after being released from jail. It was a speaker meeting, and, for 45 minutes I heard a man tell his story. (The judge let me leave my apartment to attend.) And his story was heartbreaking: molestation lasting a decade, multiple addictions, a criminal act that put him on TV too, and a lengthy prison sentence. This story was told by someone possessing the kind of serenity and peace that seemed (to me) impossible for anyone to attain. There was a lightness and unflappability to him. Here I was, broken by shame and misery, listening to a man who'd found a way out. I wanted what he had and was willing to go to any lengths to get it. I surrendered that night, picked up a white chip, and asked him to sponsor me.

I plunged in to the Basic Text. Step One is my life story. Every single sentence in that Step triggers a memory for me. Yes, I'd tried that. Yup, I'd tried that too. Sigh, and that. And that. Oh and that, too.

There was no escape. No "yeah, but" was possible. It was all there in black and white. The shitshow that was my life. I kept reading.

The slogans started to sink in. "You are not alone. Progress not perfection. My best thinking got me here." The Serenity Prayer. The Characteristics (check... check... sigh, yes...check). The Promises.

I realized these were not empty slogans. They are life-affirming wisdoms spoken by those who've earned the right to say them. The truth of them was standing there in front of me, embodied in the experience, strength, and hope of my sponsor and other home group members.

I committed to a program of recovery, setting bottom lines, defining accessory behaviors, and establishing top lines.

Withdrawal was filled with nightmares and hallucinations. I was banned from the internet during my pretrial house arrest.

My brain compensated by waking me up with ringtones and notifications that weren't actually there. I stood for hours at my door, peering out of the little fisheye glass, waiting for one of my exes to magically arrive and rescue me. (None ever did.)

I fantasized about writing a New York Times bestselling book about my recovery. I assumed the government wired my entire apartment with cameras and microphones, so I yelled at them. My skin itched. I banged my head against the wall. I punched pillows. At one point I held a knife up to my genitals, determined to self-mutilate as an act of penance. I watched an awful lot of C-SPAN.

Frankly, if it weren't for house arrest (allowed to leave only for therapy, meetings, and grocery shopping) and mandatory internet deprivation, I wouldn't have completed withdrawal. My disease had progressed to where I needed the "Feds" as accountability partners. God doing for me what I could not do for myself. "No such thing as a self-powered cure," indeed!

At first I was terrified to share at meetings. I compared rather

than identifying. These people were just cheaters and codependents and porn addicts! If I opened up, they'd toss me out! I took the risk, though. And I was hugged, not shunned. I was loved, not despised. I was listened to.

I couldn't believe it.

And that willingness to listen, that safe place to turn to in my darkest hour, it saved my life. Literally. I had become a monster, and I felt I had to do humanity a favor by killing myself. My home group held my hand and showed me a way out. They helped me understand that I was sick, not evil. Nothing was fixed. Nothing about me was set in stone. And with that knowledge came RESPONSIBILITY. No more excuses. No more self-pity. No time for "yeah but." Time to wake up. To realize...I dug myself this hole and now, it was time to accept help, rely on a Higher Power, stop hurting others, and recover from this disease.

My addiction thrived on a deluded fatalism. My recovery grew out of an empowering accountability.

I worked the 12 Steps. My sponsor was a patient and loving guide. My 4th and 5th Steps nearly killed me, and he stayed with me through it all. The 6th Step was actually the most powerful one for me in terms of self-discovery. I realized I and I alone was responsible for my choices. No more "abstract psychological theorizing" or placing blame elsewhere. Time to admit that I was addicted to acting out because acting out had so many payoffs. It was my one true love. I always chose it over anything else: family, friends, colleagues, career, morality, sanity. I learned the very real difference between explanations and justifications.

Nothing I did was justified. Ever. Not every kid from a screwed-up home winds up indicted in federal court. No, I got there entirely on my own, and it

was time to give in and give up the "whole life strategy" that had destroyed everything I'd ever touched.

I became willing to change.

It's weird, but true--my 12th Step "spiritual awakening" happened six months to the day of my first meeting. It was an experience I cannot put into words but it was real and it was healing. I stopped looking back, stopped giving myself God-puzzles, and started looking forward. Onward.

I began sponsoring others, and gave away what I'd freely received.

Of course, my 9th Step amends needed to take a certain course. I'd broken the law, and until I took responsibility for — and was held publicly accountable for — my actions, my amends would remain incomplete. It was time to make things right.

I asked the Government to allow me to plead to enticement rather than trafficking, to acknowledge the real-life harm done to a teenage girl they'd interviewed. So here I am, one year in to a seventeen-and-a-half-years sentence. I've earned my fate. And every day that passes, I work off the many, many moral debts I've incurred along the way — to my victims, to society, to my family, to my son, to myself.

Prison is difficult. It's often pointless and very dehumanizing. Many, many sex offenders remain in deep denial over what they've done. Not all of them are sex addicts, of course. Either way, they're hard to be around. I'm surrounded by lots of triggering talk that undermines recovery.

But I do what I can to carry the message. I stay in touch with my many recovery friends. I read the Big Book. I share my experience, strength, and hope. And some are listening. The message is taking root here. Once again, I'm humbled with the realization: "You are not alone."

There are good days and bad days. Honestly, it's more like "real

life” on the outside than I’d imagined. I yearn for a girlfriend one year “in” the same as my first year of sobriety under house arrest. I get overwhelmed by shame and regret in here just like I did out there. I can still “act out” and “act in.” My addiction is nothing if not resourceful — despite being surrounded by razor wire.

There are ways. But I’m coming up on two years in this Fellowship and I prefer life to death. And make no mistake: my addiction

plays for keeps. Mine is not just some petty vice, some peccadillo. Mine is based on the “whole life strategy” and it WILL destroy me if I indulge it.

My conduct has proven that I have a progressive disease. And I’ve had to learn, the hard way, just what my secrets and shame can do to me, and to others.

The Big Book says “you need to meet yourself” and my arrest finally gave me the room and time for that to happen. I am grateful for this fellowship and relieved to

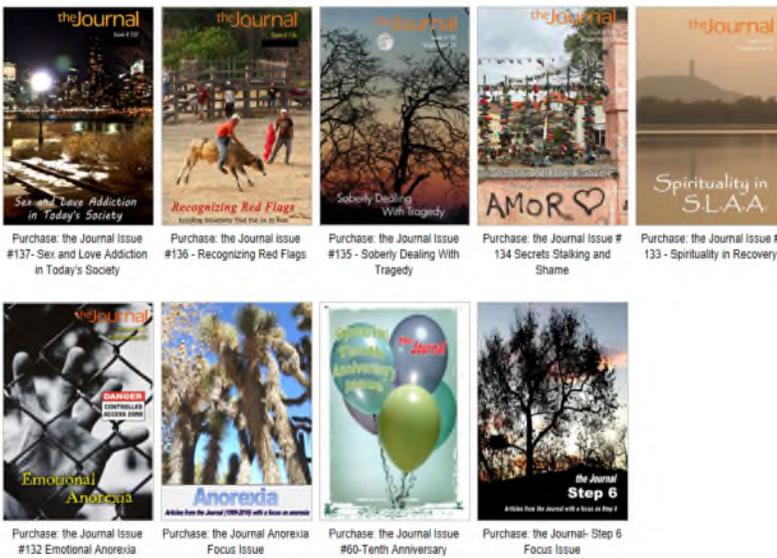
know there is a Power greater than myself, that there is always hope, no matter how far down I’ve sunk.

I’m finally growing up. Living life on life’s terms. Focusing on what is, rather than the “shoulds” and “oughts” of my delusional fantasies. I have realized the truth.

S.L.A.A. has shown me a way out. I’m creating a new life for myself. It is now safe to be me.

— Anonymous

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