

The background of the cover is a photograph of a winter mountain scene. A snow-covered slope is dotted with tall, thin, bare trees. In the middle ground, a small, rustic stone cabin with a dark roof sits on a small patch of ground. The overall atmosphere is quiet and isolated.

theJournal

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Living Alone to
Moving In

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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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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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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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*.

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Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

As I write this, most of the country I live in has been told to stay home and maintain social distancing. Many of my fellows are struggling to find self-care alone time while living in an apartment with a partner. My boss made a joke that an employer said to his employee that he had two options: A) He could work from home with the wife and kids or... and even before the employer said “B,” the employee yelled out, “B, I’ll take B.”

I’m grateful I don’t feel that way. I’m grateful for teleconference and face-time meetings online. I’m grateful for the stories in this issue of *the Journal* that remind me of sober ways to handle intimacy and commitment even when times get rough.

I pray that everyone stays safe and sober and like a fellow said to me: “This too shall pass. It may pass like a kidney stone, but it will pass.”

Higher Power will hopefully carry us.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Have you gone from living alone to moving in with a partner? Please share about the challenges you faced and how you dealt with them and/or any special stories about moving in.” Here are some insights that were submitted in service from fellow S.L.A.A. members. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #185 — July/Aug. — ABM Issue** Dealing With Fear — “How do you deal with fear in recovery? Have you had a particularly fearful situation that Program tools helped you overcome? Please share your experience, strength, and hope and any coping skills.” — Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2020. And #186 — Sept./Oct.— Tools for No Contact — Have you ever gotten through the pain of a no contact rule to come to some new revelation about yourself, clarity, peace, or mindfulness? Please share any tools that make no contact easier.” — Deadline for submissions is July 15, 2020. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

“HAVE YOU GONE FROM LIVING ALONE TO MOVING IN
WITH A PARTNER?”

After several years of living alone, my partner moved in with me. I loved living alone and thought I'd never want to live with anyone again. But through the grace of the Steps and my H.P. I've been able to grow and heal.

My biggest challenge was our differing work schedules. I worked many hours in an office every week while he is in sales and is able to go to the gym or nap whenever he wants. This used to make me crazy! But most times I recognize it as my problem. It's gotten better over time.

Progress not perfection.

— CHRIS D., SAN DIEGO

Question of the day

I remember the day my husband and I moved into our home. It was the end of an era - or at least that's what it felt like at the time. I was so overwhelmed and sad, yet this was one of the most beneficial things I've ever done in recovery. It was the culmination of recovery work, looking at myself in inventory, identifying instincts gone awry, beginning (remaining) awareness, striving for the middle way — the way of intimacy vs. isolation. I'm so glad I have the program to help me continue to grow, be happy and have peace.

— SUSAN G.,
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA

No. I was living with my girlfriend (committed relationship) before joining the Program. I still am with her. My challenge is that she doesn't agree with the existence of our disease or with the efficacy of our Program in dealing with it.

— SAM E., N.Y.C.

French:

Avant de rencontre ma femme, j'au ete 6 mois seul pour faire le plein et ensuite rencontre ma femme et depuis 13 ans que je suis sobre et je suis heureux, safait 7 ans member de D.A.S.A. (Dépendants affectifs et sexuels anonymes)

English:

Before meeting my wife, I had 6 months to fill up spiritually. Since meeting her, I've been sober for 13 years. I am happy that I have been a member of D.A.S.A. (S.L.A.A. Montreal) for 7 years.

— MARC L., MONTREAL (QUEBEC)

Moving In: An Interview



Lisa: So, I just wanted to start out with your time in program, years of sobriety, and a little bit about your S.L.A.A. story -- what brought you here.

Kirsten: My sobriety date is November 30, 2015. So, I have 4 years and, God willing, will have five by the end of the year. I consider myself an

anorectic but also a sex and love addict. When I came into Program, I was really obsessed with a male friend of mine that was in another program that I attended. And I was really powerless over the relationship to the point where I was engaging in stalking behavior. It was a very inappropriate

person for me as a romantic partner and I just couldn't stop calling and chasing him. I got suicidal behind that obsession. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. A friend of mine in Alan-Anon who observed my behavior, shared about her experience with S.L.A.A. I related to the part of her story where she talked about powerlessness over obsession with a person. All the characteristics that she was describing, I really related to. So, I decided to check out a women's retreat that was happening in the valley. I feel like that weekend got me immersed in S.L.A.A.

I got a real idea of what it was and the intimacy that happened at that retreat with the women there -- they just kind of embraced me. And then from there I started attending regularly and getting involved with the Steps and service, going to meetings and identifying and it really changed my life.

Lisa: That's great. Thanks.

So, the theme of this issue of *the Journal* is, "From Living Alone to Moving in." Can you talk about the years that you lived alone, your journey with sober dating and finding your partner and moving in? Were there any challenges to moving in?

Kirsten: Okay ... and to back up a little in my story, part of my disease as an anorectic was that I avoided committed relationships, but I would chase men who were unavailable, including married men and men in committed relationships. In my diseased mind, that was safer than the actual commitment itself. The progress for me is that in S.L.A.A., I became willing to be in a relationship, to sober date. I did sober date and it was uncomfortable to do it in a sober way. I was used to the high, the addictive feeling of dating and just getting caught up with that as opposed to actually getting to know someone as a person. Actually, meeting people and getting to know them felt strange.

Going through that process was uncomfortable. And there were several disappointments because of a few different times that I followed my dating plan with regards to the physical contact rules that I agreed to follow. I had to get to know someone first. Some of the men that I was dating weren't willing to wait for developing more of an emotional connection before getting physical. So, it was a little discouraging. I was thinking *Well, maybe I'll never find someone with my dating*

plan the way it is. Maybe I'll be single forever.

And looking back, I'm so grateful that I wasn't able to physically connect with those particular people because they weren't the right ones for me.

I also attend A.A. and had a male friend whom I had known for years in that program. The progress that I've made in S.L.A.A. and the work that I've done helped me to recognize my patterns and turn them over. I let go of some of the things that I had been clinging onto, including using men as friends that were pseudo-emotional partners instead of being a true partner. They would take up a lot of my time and energy. Being willing to let go of that I think with the shift inside of me made everything more open. And around that time this friend from A.A. did pursue me. He asked for my number and asked me out. He just let me know his intentions were to pursue me romantically. I think I was plainly ready to receive that at the time because of the work I had done. So, he and I did follow my dating plan. It wasn't perfect. But enough to where I felt like there was a good foundation and there was integrity. We built a relationship on integrity. He was willing to honor what the program was that I was

following. So, I've been in this relationship for a year and a half. We're engaged to be married in June. To me, that is a miracle. We did decide to move in together, so we've been living together about 9 months. We decided to join households. He'd been renting a room from a friend and it was becoming more uncomfortable because his friend relapsed, and it was time I think for us to join together. It was a big decision. I was scared because of my avoidance of commitment. I had always really been on my own as an adult and I was afraid of losing myself. I had been through the withdrawal process in the program and become more intimate with myself and I had really learned to enjoy my solitude and kind of cherish my time alone.

So, moving in, I wasn't sure how I would protect that. And it was a little challenging when we first moved in together to have another level of intimacy and to be in each other's space. I felt like it brought up more opportunities for conflict -- not being able to put on that face for each other because your just more real when you're around each other all the time.

So, we had a chance to work on a deeper level, I think. We've been using some tools from another program as well.

We are in Recovering Couples Anonymous. That has helped us learn how to listen to each other and communicate when issues do come up because I do get triggered sometimes. And so does he because we both have our childhood wounds and sometimes the other partner's behavior will just bring those memories up even though it was not even intended. It's not even about anything abusive or inappropriate but still brings up those memories.

We've learned how to pause when that comes up, identify it, share it with each other and own it so we're not blaming the other person.

I really noticed the change in our ability to work through anything that comes up as well as enjoying each other more than ever. I'm really grateful to have a partner in my life. My original fear of losing myself -- I think I can because I enjoy having a partner so much that I forget to protect that.

But as part of my program, I'm intentional and I continue to go to my meetings, my personal Step work, my time alone, and meditation so that I continue to have that foundation with my Higher Power.

I don't look to my partner for that because I think that when I get a little off base is

when I expect my partner to fulfill those needs like for validation. It's not his job to validate my spiritual practice. We do share our values together. But I'm learning that interdependent feeling like when to have my roots and my Higher Power separately and then when to be able to lean on him for support -having a good balance with that.

Lisa: That kind of leads to the next question which is - the basic text talks about closed - system relationships, about only being with your partner and pushing out other friends or hobbies. All of those things fall by the wayside in a closed relationship and it becomes very addictive. But in an open system relationship each individual has different interests. They go to events separately or don't feel uncomfortable if they have interests outside the relationship. Have you found that balance with your partner or can you talk a little bit about your hobbies or your interests outside of the relationship?

Kirsten: That's a great question. It has been easy for me to sometimes fall into thinking of him as a Higher Power or having kind of a closed relationship because it is so fun. But I think we've both been able to correct that when it comes up. I go to my

12-Step programs still and stay close to women there and he stays close to the men in his 12-Step program. We also made a conscious effort to include and invite other couples into our life together. That can also provide support for the relationship itself - to have that interaction from other couples. We've invited people over to the house. We're making an intentional effort to continue to expand our network of other couples.

That part in the book about the closed-system relationship versus the open-system relationship is really important.

In the excitement of a new relationship and how wonderful it feels --sometimes it's tempting to just be happy with just the two of us, but knowing that that really doesn't last and ultimately that we need to have a support system for both of us to stay healthy and we have been able to do that. If I didn't have Program and a Higher Power in my life, I wouldn't be able to maintain balance in a relationship.

But I really lean on the 3 sides of the triangle -- being of service, going to meetings, doing Step work, sharing myself with others in the community and listening to them and continuing to get

that support and growth through the community of the Twelve Step programs.

If either one of us gets off base, we have that as a resource.

Lisa: You know, when I moved in with my partner, I had to decide whether to give up my cat or not. My partner asked me to move in and he already had two cats. The landlord only allowed two pets and my cat really couldn't get along with anyone--people or other cats.

I struggled with that decision for 2 months over whether to move in with my partner and give up my cat or to just stay in my apartment and keep her. I ended up giving her to my sister- in-law. My cat was actually much happier in the desert with my sister-in-law than she was in my tiny little apartment in Hollywood. Was there anything that you needed to compromise or work out with moving in?

Kirsten: I appreciate what you shared. Thank you for that. For me, not having children of my own, my animals are like my kids and so it feels really personal.

I had cats, but they did pass away prior to getting together with my partner. We've been able to adopt a cat since getting together, he just showed up on

our doorstep. So, that worked out really nicely for both of us. But, as far as other compromises, I had shared about my fears about my time alone. A lot of my time at home is with him and so I do have to carve out and protect some time for myself. I'm intentional about that, even putting it on the calendar because I am an introvert. That is part of my spiritual growth — having some down time and some meditation time. I did find that changed when we moved in together, that I had less alone time.

We enjoy different activities, like I really enjoy using the pool where he doesn't like it as much. He likes swimming in lakes and rivers but doesn't really enjoy the pool. So, we are adjusting activities to things we both like. It is a compromise, but for me it feels like a lot of growth. As an anorexic, I lived in a world by myself and I was really good at figuring out what I liked. But now, being with another person and being able to be open minded and flexible and still say what I want but be okay with the compromise feels good. It feels like being part of a team and belonging and I am enjoying that process.

Lisa: I heard a fellow share that their partner was sick. They had the flu and they were

sleeping in another room because it was self-care. The first instinct is to take care of them and get sick yourself, but they needed to engage in self-care. Are there any self-care practices that you engage in even if you're scared of hurting the intimacy in the relationship or maybe upsetting your partner?

Kirsten: Yes. I know that I still need to H.A.L.T. sometimes. When I'm, like they say, hungry, angry, lonely, tired. We were traveling recently. It was kind of a short turnaround trip and we ended up traveling most of the night. I knew that would be difficult, but it was a compromise I agreed to make. And I found myself just really at the end of my rope, so to speak, emotionally. So, I took a break. Directions I had gotten in the past were to take myself to self-care dates. When we arrived at our location, I went and got a massage for myself. I wasn't feeling too well and got the medicine I needed. I took care of myself in a way that helped me feel nurtured and more balanced. I was a little worried that he would feel abandoned by me because he also was tired and wanted my presence and comfort from me. I was glad that I did take that time because I was able to come back more centered and able to

contribute more than I would have been otherwise. I think I kind of modeled that behavior for him. He's not in this Program and he was like, "Oh maybe I can go do that." And so, he went and got himself a massage afterwards.

He hadn't thought of that idea and it just opened that up for both of us. He realized that he was okay to take a break, get some rest and regroup. I'm conscious of that. When I'm feeling a little off, I need to pause and check in because the principal of the Program is that we take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others. It helps me sometimes to remember that and take care of that first so when I do engage, I'm doing it in a supportive way.

Lisa: Anything you'd like to add about this topic?

Kirsten: It was scary for me identifying as an anorexic. I was afraid of allowing someone in my space and afraid of that level of intimacy.

People talk about walking through your fears to the other side and the blessings that come. That's been true for me. I've been willing to take those risks and to live a deeper and fuller life. That's been part of my journey.

Now we're going to be getting married in June and that's another fear that I have

of that level of commitment. When those fears come up, I acknowledge them, walk through them and don't let them keep me from the better ways that we're learning in recovery -- the deeper, richer ways of life. It's been a good journey for me, and it's been worth it.

Lisa: I'll share with you a little something that I've shared with other fellows in S.L.A.A. I was getting ready for our wedding and I got into my gown. My dress started feeling like it was constricting my airway. I couldn't breathe and it kept feeling tighter and tighter. I told my sister-in-law who is also in 12-Step programs and she immediately yelled out, "Serenity Prayer." All of my bridesmaids were program people and they all got into a circle really fast. We were like yelling the Serenity Prayer. My friend said a prayer for healing and happiness. That totally centered me and made the day beautiful. Everything was joyous after that.

So, ever since then, I started prayer circles with my friends right before their weddings. We all got together in the dressing rooms and said prayers and talked. And, you know, it was just like really healing moments right before the big day.

So, if you wanted to do something like that, I would highly recommend it.

Kirsten: I will keep that in mind. My sister and my cousin are standing up with me and

they're not in Program but there will be several other people there that are.

Lisa: Thanks so much for doing this. Okay, I'll turn off the recording.

Dating Plan Reminds Me to Slow Down

Editor's note: The following is a recorded and transcribed share on this month's Journal theme: Living Alone to Moving in.

My name's Nicholas, I'm a recovering sex and love addict.

The theme is about living alone to moving in and basically, getting sober was crucial. When I first came into the program almost 6 years ago, I was living in a studio apartment. And I remember being in the abandoned parking lot next to my building and just swiping on the dating apps-- just swiping until there was no one left to swipe on and feeling so low. I don't know if demoralized is the right word, but I felt so hopeless and a lot of self-loathing. It was like -- see how much of a loser you are, like you can't even find somebody on that app in Los Angeles.

Not long after that, I had had sex with someone that I didn't want to have sex with one too many times. And I was tired of that unmanageability too.

But thankfully, once I came into S.L.A.A., I had been committed to not dating for 90 days which felt like an eternity and felt impossible. And it also felt like I was lying to my new sponsor at the time, you know like, Yeah, sure, I'll say that. But it's not really possible. But there was a willingness there and I think that was a big part of the magic that was created.

I didn't date for a couple of years and just focused on the Steps. I did a really thorough Fourth Step and fear inventory. That took a while and it took a while for my Fifth Step as well.

Then Steps 6 and 7 were also really involved. A lot of

time went by. And by the time I got to my amends, it had been a couple of years. That's when I made a dating plan. At the time I had moved into a larger apartment because I was sober in all areas of my life, sexually and from substances. I was able to start taking responsibility for my life and stop avoiding responsibility. I definitely had not done that prior to this. My whole life strategy was to try to have as much sex as possible while looking for "the one."

My life had gotten bigger. I had found an apartment that felt really clean and that I hadn't acted out in and hadn't gotten high in. I was starting to really lean on my top-line behaviors which included reading, writing, praying, meditating, cleaning, organizing, making art, performing, listening to music, dancing, exercising, sports, surfing and stretching. I put all of these things into my life that would lead to self-care and the joy of living.

I was challenged well into making my amends when my sponsor wanted me to start dating because it had been a couple years. After a while, I probably dated 25 different women and had the beginnings of a relationship with 3 or 4 of them. None of it really stuck. I definitely took my will back

here and there to re-investigate what doesn't work as far as casual relationships. I realized that I did want a committed partnership because I never really had that. So, when my girlfriend and I started seeing each other and using the dating plan, she was really happy that my dating plan reminded me to slow down. If I think I'm going too fast, slow down. And if I think I'm going too slow, slow down.

That was really helpful to both of us because we got to have the space to get to know each other without sucking on the dopamine pen too much. So, we decided together after a few months to be exclusive and follow the dating plan as best we could which was pretty dang good if you look at it. ...

We dated for a year before she got a copy of the keys (my apartment keys). Just like the dating plan was really slow --so was our intimacy. We call them hashtag intimacy games, where there will be a new level of intimacy that we'll arrive to, like getting her a set of keys or sharing/doing something vulnerable.

What was nice about this relationship and having space was that it didn't bleed together. I remember when I gave her a key. I also gave her a little haiku and I put it in a funny place. Nothing was

rushed. I feel like that was the same thing when we moved in together. It was thoughtful. We had been talking about it for a few months just as a possibility. It started with us saying like, "Oh yeah, I would live with you. I guess in theory." It wasn't like, "Do you want to move in tomorrow or do you want to get your stuff right now and be here forever!" It wasn't like that. It was like what the promises or the Signs of Recovery say that love was a thoughtful conversation that we work for.

It took us a month to decide that. And then we just talked about how it could look—whether it be in my apartment or whether it would actually be in the house that she lived in. We talked about a lot of different scenarios. And one scenario came up of, "Do you want to live in the Valley?" And in my head, it was like No F'n way. But I said, "Well, let's give that some thought." Hitting the pause button was important. And I'm glad that I had that. So, when it became clear that what made the most sense was for us both to live in my rent-controlled apartment, we had time. We didn't let ourselves get to a point where it has to happen this weekend. Nothing felt like we had to pull the trigger. It was calculated. We made the decision, thought

about it and she went back and forth a little bit (probably because I'm a big personality). When she had her "back and forth" moment about deciding to live with me, she was able to make the decision, and I was able to give her space to come to her decision. And I was going to be OK either way!

Since we gave ourselves time, we spent another month de-cluttering my place together. The place was already in really good shape, but we were able to go through the whole apartment together so she could see where everything was and what everything was. Talk about hashtag intimacy games around that. Like, "Hey, here's my whole place. Here's all the nooks and crannies of me." My space is an extension of myself and getting to show her that didn't actually feel like a big stretch. It wasn't out of the realm of possibility or what was appropriate. And it was fun for us because it gave her a chance to get me to throw out some of my clothes. We made space for her. We talked about where we could put her desk and her meditation station. Then we talked about what I could get rid of. I got rid of some big old chairs to make space for both of us to live together. She moved in just before Christmas and then went out of town to go visit her

family. So, for fun, I took down all of the art off the walls and piled it up in the kitchen so when she got back, we could put it all up together -her art, my art. We also bought an additional piece together to celebrate moving in together.

Even though I've been in my apartment for 3 years, we decided to have a housewarming party to sanctify it together. The other thing that I really got out of moving in together through recovery is being honest and forthright with my landlord. I looked at my lease. Since it wasn't an impulsive decision, I had time to read it! And it was like, Oh, there's a 10 percent increase when an additional occupant moves in. I checked in with my landlord and he said, "We actually have to have her apply. Believe me we want you guys to live long and prosper. But we have to cover ourselves and put her through the process as if she were a new applicant."

So, that was another level of intimacy games: putting the application in. We both of had to bare our souls in different ways just to make it happen. But I think the fact that we did take 6 months total from the first conversation to backing the truck up and loading up her stuff created a container for the two of us. It's been a few months that we've lived

together now. We are both still negotiating, more so for her, but for me too. I've definitely found that the negotiations or compromises that I need to make are usually with myself and I need to try and not sweat the small stuff and def not harbor resentment. I just recently I noticed that I was afraid to ask her for some of the money for utilities, water, power and the internet. I don't know what I was afraid of, but I kept avoiding it. I kept putting it off.

I bookended that phone call with a fellow and then let her know about it, what the costs were. And she said send me a Venmo request and that was that. It was over. But, it's just so interesting because I think that I'm still very much a sex and love addict and I'm afraid of being abandoned or making a mistake. I go back and forth around my fears about now that I'm this intimate—she's seen me when I was sick with the flu and when I've been hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. I'm afraid she's going to leave me. And I'm also afraid that now I'm stuck with her. Granted, I love her very much. In the end, I'm happy to be with her. But, there's a part of me that's like, well this is it, now I have to be in this relationship forever. And I know that's not true. And I

know that I'm responsible for my life. When things bother me, I just adjust them. I also noticed how critical I can be towards her, like how dare she leave this drawer open or doesn't she see that this is crooked? Why would she leave it like this? And then I realized that a lot of that internal talk that I'm now directing towards her thinking, how dare she? is previously what I've been doing towards myself. Woah. I know that I've been very self-critical for a long time. Now I can see that because just like people say, when you live with someone, you have a mirror walking around. And having that mirror has been a spiritual experience because I get to lean on my practice while someone is doing their practice or not doing their practice on their own.

That's been very healing for how I talk to myself based on how I talk to her vocally as well as in my head, my thoughts. Lately, she's been having a challenging time having her own space. Neither of us have shared a room with anyone for a long time. I think the only time I ever shared a room with someone was in the dorms in college. And she's an only child is really artistic and expressive. It's challenging to share a room and then share an apartment, especially when

both of us are freelancing and working from home a lot of the time.

But I find that I can't be in charge of how she takes care of herself. I can only continue to take care of myself, give myself space, go work at a coffee shop, go make my morning meetings, make my exercise a priority. I can try to be considerate and say, "Would you rather I work with headphones right now?" I also need to be checking in to not be assuming. I'm ego-centric, if she doesn't seem happy, I think it's because of me. I notice I can have a tendency to only be okay if she's okay or to be waiting for her to yell at me, which she doesn't even do. I'll definitely project my mother onto her. I'll say, "I love you," to take her temperature by seeing how she says it back.

Instead, I just try to focus on being a good partner.

The money thing is challenging to navigate. I want to go 50/50 to the penny. That's just not realistic. If I'm going to bean count, I'm going to end up in a resentment. So, we have this other really fun game that we came up with when she first moved in which can we called, "Who can be the best partner?"

Sometimes when I'm back and forth on doing something I just lean towards generosity --

not spending more than I'm comfortable with because that still applies from my dating plan -- but focusing on how to be a generous loving kind partner. It can be really fun to play that game -to make it a game of, "how can I be a better partner?"

I think it proves well to us because we both like surprises. And it's nice to be taken care of. And to communicate what's important to us. She got the flu last month and I nursed her in a really good way without sacrificing myself. I slept on the guest bed in the living room for a week and managed to stay healthy. I think it's a really great metaphor for living with a partner. It's really easy for me to be distracted by her all the time. "Hey, you're still here! Oh my gosh!" It's like this joke; you know my girlfriend moved in so when I go home, she'll be there.

It's really is about learning to take care of myself while I am available to take care of somebody else and not sacrificing what I know to be best for me. It's about maintaining relationships with friends and having days out.

I keep noticing and I keep being surprised like, "Oh wow. That happened again!" She left or we both left, or I left. We took some space, whether it be she went for a hike, I went to a

meeting, I went to visit friends, or whatever. When we come back there's more love available. Love takes time and love makes time. But I feel like love also needs time and space in order to create a container that can allow more in. Lungs need to expand so that more breath can come in on the next breath.

Wow we should stop there. (laughing)

Update:

The two of us have been isolated together, co-quarantined, for two weeks now and boy-oh-boy are we playing intimacy games! It's been such a blessing to have built a relationship that can hold the space for stress, uncertainty, a hundred forms of fear. We walk through it on our own and together to arrive at the result of the work: joy, kindness, stillness, silliness and love. We are at home together, physically and emotionally. There is a safety and security that I've never experienced. I'm so glad I've done what my sponsor has told me to do, continue to show up and face reality. By making a decision to be where it is that I am, as a result, I open myself up to who she really is and who I really am. It is truly humbling to see and be seen, soberly. Without the fellowship, the steps, sponsorship, outreach

calls, prayer and meditation, reading and writing, abstinence, sober dating and the striving for a Higher Power, I know that this

relationship would not be possible. I am so grateful to be recovering and will continue to keep coming back.

— NICHOLAS

Blessed and Lucky

I am so blessed and lucky and grateful to share my experience, strength, and hope in living with a partner while in a sober relationship and working the 12 steps of S.L.A.A. The living together journey has brought great joy and growth to my life and to my recovery. I joined this program six and a half years ago. My first meeting was my sobriety date because I was smack dab in the middle of a deep, deep bottom. I spent my first year in Program abstaining from dating (in-person and online), as well as from porn, masturbation, and contact with my qualifiers. In place of these things, I engaged in lots of contact with my sponsor and my sobriety sisters, meetings, some serious Step work, meditation, and

lots-and-lots of top lines: painting, hiking, traveling, laughing, listening to music — all the things I thought I didn't have the time to do while I was acting out.

As soon as that one-year mark hit, my life had blossomed in such a big way. I was sponsoring, being sponsored, had so many beautiful friendships, and a strong feeling that I was actually doing really alright! I finally realized that dating would add to my life, as long as I followed a dating plan and did it super differently than before. I started the sober dating journey (SDJ). My sponsor and I decided that I should strive to characterize my SDJ with traits that were opposite of my dating before S.L.A.A. Thus, I strived to be

slow, intentional, thoughtful, kind, respectful, and patient with regard to physical intimacy.

The journey consisted of lots and lots of check-ins, book-ends, calls to my sobriety sisters, triggers, and more. I went on many little dates. And then I had a long 9-month stretch of an easy sober relationship, which ended when I realized that I was ready for someone more emotionally available (whaaaat?!). I took a break from dating, then went on a few more little dates. Then I moved, got a new job, and made friends at work, one of whom I felt a strong attraction to. With lots of support and meetings, I did my best to keep my emotional distance from this coworker (who I totally knew was into me also). After four months, to my surprise, this individual put in his resignation notice at work. After some stunned and quiet deliberation, my sponsor gave me the A-Okay, and he and I went on our first date.

How cool it was to date someone I felt genuine attraction to, especially with over three gosh darn years of sobriety in S.L.A.A.! After a few months of being friends and a couple months of dating each other, I confirmed that we shared plenty of core values,

had similar lifestyles and interests, and shared the right amount of physical chemistry - abundant but not enough to blind me. We went on a couple dates per week for the first month, and then a few per week after that. It was beautiful to get to know someone in a more intimate way after having a foundation of friendship - I had never done it like that in the past. Because of this, we had the monogamy conversation on date four. He always made sure I was home on or before my suggested time, which helped me stick to my own boundary. We waited about 60 days to have sex.

At six months, we both relocated so he could go to coding school in the Bay Area and I could live in my favorite West Coast beach town - a move I had dreamed about making but only now had the opportunity to do because of a new remote position at work. We both had lived in this town in the past (for college) and felt it was a second home. We didn't move in together at that point. In retrospect, this was super soon to make such a big life choice together (even if we didn't live together). But I move a lot, so I didn't think much of it at the time.

Guess what we did soon after? We moved again! When

we were together 10 months, I had gotten into a graduate program in the same town in Southern California where I had gotten sober in S.L.A.A. For about 2 months, he and I talked about the possibility of moving in together for this move down south. I talked to my sponsor SO much: "How would I know that it's the right time? I've only known him a year and two months! What about finances? Is there any going back after this? Ahh - COMMITMENT! Is it too soon? Give me writing assignments!"

The truth was that this relationship was serene as all heck with very few triggers. I definitely still believe that my HP provided me with a relationship that is totally a mirror: all the big feelings I have are always because of me and my character defects - there is no way around that. I just can't blame my feelings on anyone else if I want to in my relationship - my partner is ultra-chill and kind. It is very special to date someone who models the spiritual and upstanding behavior that I hope to portray.

After lots of writing, I figured out that the only reason I wouldn't move in with him was because of fear: fear of what people thought of me, fear of my addiction and

character defects, fear of commitment. However, these were fears that lived in my little brain and in my little character defects! In reality, there was plenty of evidence that this person and I could co-exist peacefully and happily in a shared space. We both speak up for ourselves and our needs. We both have jobs and comparable income. We both have spiritual practices. And above all, I have my program, my meetings, and my sisters.

So, we did it! We moved on into a big studio apartment in a quiet complex with a pool just 15 minutes from my school/work. There were three things that were notably hard for me.

1.) I missed my alone time! My partner worked from home and was around a lot. I would return home from school and/or work and I just wanted to light incense, be alone, and lay in bed. I began to respectfully ask for what I needed: 1-2 hours of alone-in-the-apartment time three nights per week. He understood and abided lovingly, heading to a MeetUp or a nearby Starbucks.

2.) His bodily functions, OMG! I won't get into details, but basically, I didn't realize how totally grossed out I'd get by literally being so close to another physical human body all the time (and disgust is a

major part of my avoidance). I am still learning that bodily functions are natural and human, we all have them, and I do not get to choose to be annoyed by or unkind to someone because I don't like how my emotions or physical reactions feel in response to their bodily functions. I have bodily functions too! Man, this one is still hard!

3.) I thought it would be snuggle city 24/7, but it so wasn't. He and I aren't always in good moods and we don't always want to snuggle or talk or eat food together. I had a fantasy that our shared life would look like a magazine or catalog couple's life (especially with how flippin' cute I decorated our apartment). This was quickly squashed. After all, I had to write long papers, meal prep for the week, and take walks through the apartment complex while talking with sponsees. He had to catch cockroaches and put them outside in the plants while I hid in the bathroom. We spent so much time apart, even while at home together. No snuggle city.

The first year was the most difficult, but I settled over time into the sharing of home energy. We've now been living together for 2 years and 9 months. These challenges have lessened. Mostly, today, I

struggle with not telling him what to do (really silly things, too... e.g., "Quit farting" or "Stop putting the groceries away wrong"), which is really enlightening for me and what character defects are present for me as I gain depth in this relationship and in my own recovery.

There are some incredibly beautiful aspects of living with a partner. One is that we get to "complement" each other's tasks. We agreed early on that he would do the dishes and I would put them away. I clean our room and common areas, and he cleans the toilet. And we always go grocery shopping together once per week. Because grocery shopping sucks and nobody should have to do it alone.

Another huge benefit is that I don't get to isolate myself into a shame coma. There is no way for me to lay in bed and eat chocolate chips while barely watching Parks and Rec and hate-scrolling through Instagram, because I don't want my partner to see me that way, just like I wouldn't want my sponsor or friends to! There is a built-in accountability-buddy at home. What I always used to ask myself in the beginning of my recovery is, "Would I want to date me right now?" so that I could give myself the gift of a full person

who takes care of herself and doesn't isolate. Now I ask myself for the whole team: "Would I be a gift to myself right now? Would I be a gift to my sponsees? Would I be a gift to my partner?"

I absolutely love what this program has turned my life into. I adore that service is at the fore front of my worldview, that meditation and daily contact with my HP are non-negotiables, and that S.L.A.A. was my first real commitment.

Truly, my relationship has added to my life, and living with my partner has deepened my relationship with myself and with my program. Because of my commitment to S.L.A.A., now I know how to commit to other things (such as places to live, lol, and partners!). Thank you, Goddess Mama HP <3

Big fat blessings to you all, and best of luck in your sober relationship journeys!

— T.U. IN THE BAY AREA

An Invitation For You

Enlarge your recovery by allowing others to get the same benefit that you get from reading *the Journal*.

It is a great way to carry S.L.A.A.'s message of hope and practice the Twelfth Step. The fellowship needs volunteers of all skills and levels of availability. Here's what you can do:

- Become a Journal Representative for your intergroup or home group, encouraging the use of *the Journal* as a source of topics, letting people know that there are Journals for sale, and ensuring that plenty of Journal subscription cards are always on the literature table.
- Visit a local organization that deals with sex and love addicts in your area, bringing copies of *the Journal* along with a few pamphlets. The institution may be a treatment facility, a judicial entity, a large recovery club that welcomes varied literature, or a hospital.

Contact info: <http://www.slaafws.org/contact/journaleditor>

Doing Things Differently

After 5 years of recovery in S.L.A.A., and 3 years into my current relationship, my boyfriend and I decided to move in together. I had lived with several people before. Prior to my recovery, I had two ex-husbands, plus an ex-boyfriend with whom I'd bought a house. And then there was the friend/roommate-with-benefits who I lived with – twice – in between my other failed relationships. But I'd never done it sober.

In the past, living with someone had meant chaos and drama, enmeshment and codependence, obsession and sex addiction. It had often led to isolation and the loss of relationships with family and friends. There had been manipulation, abuse, and sometimes violence. And more than once it had ended with somebody's stuff in garbage bags on the curb.

I had zero experience living with someone in a healthy way, so how could I hope to do it differently this time?

Well, the good news was that, by the time I'd reached that stage of my recovery, I'd

already gained LOTS of experience at doing LOTS of things differently. During my withdrawal, I had learned to be alone, something I'd never really been able to do before. I learned to identify and stay away from the people, places and situations that would put my sobriety at risk. I learned to start doing positive top-line behaviors and self-care and started connecting with women in the program. I learned more about my likes and dislikes and started developing interests and hobbies of my own. Eventually, with the help of my sponsor, I made a dating plan and I learned how to stay sane and sober while dating. I learned to have boundaries and maintain my own life, even while in a relationship. I did all of these things imperfectly, but in a much healthier, sober and completely different way than I ever had before.

A few months into my relationship, after I'd followed the dating plan, doing it slowly, checking all the boxes, getting to know my boyfriend slowly over time, and waiting until we were in a committed

relationship before getting sexual, I started to feel that I had “arrived.” I’d done everything I was supposed to do, and now I could relax and let my recovery run on autopilot, right?

Thankfully, my sponsor reminded me that the work doesn’t stop when the dating plan ends. In fact, she suggested that I should write a “relationship plan” next, to help me stay sober in my new relationship and avoid the pitfalls that had been so destructive in my past relationships. Today I am so grateful for that wise suggestion. With her guidance, I created guidelines around how much time my boyfriend and I would spend together, how often we would see each other, and how long we would need to wait before considering the next stage(s) of the relationship. Thanks to my “relationship plan,” I was able to avoid losing myself in this relationship the way I had done so many times before.

However, once we moved in together, I started to find myself slipping back into that way of thinking that “I’ve got this now,” that I’ve finally

arrived, and that now I don’t need those rules and boundaries anymore. I’m sure you can guess how well that worked out...

Slowly, I started to see some of my old relationship behaviors sneaking in. I started staying home more, passing up opportunities to get together with friends and missing my S.L.A.A. meetings, in order to “spend time” with my partner, sometimes even when he was busy or working late! I started staying up too late with him, skimping on my self-care, and waking up too late to do my usual daily prayer and meditation practice. I started focusing more and more on him, on what he was doing or not doing, getting more controlling, jealous and obsessive.

Thankfully, a fellow recently reminded me about my relationship plan, which I’d forgotten all about. Even though we now live together; I went back to only spending 3 nights a week hanging out with my boyfriend. On the other nights, I started making plans with friends again, rather than waiting around to see if he was going to want to do something

together. I told him I was going to start sticking to a set bedtime. I started getting up early enough to pray and meditate every morning, like I used to do before we lived together. Before long, I started to feel my serenity returning.

So, it turns out that I *STILL* have to keep working my S.L.A.A. program, even after 7

years in the program, even 4 years into my relationship, and even now that we live together. I'm so grateful, not only for my sober dating plan, which helped me stay sober while dating, but also for my "relationship plan," which keeps me sane and serene in my long-term relationship.

— ANONYMOUS

The Next Level

And then one day you decide to take things to the next level and move in with each other.

Yikes. Now it's really real.

I told my friend the other day that being in partnership with another person is way more challenging than being single. To be specific I said "I miss being single." I was half joking.

Being in a healthy, intimate, relationship with someone else is the hardest thing I've ever done.

Why? Because it challenges everything that I worked on during my sobriety and recovery from a totally different perspective. Being in partnership sounds great on paper but for those of us with

any sort of relational trauma it's where the rubber meets the road.

When we get into a relationship with another person we have the opportunity to take everything that we learned when we were single (if you took that time for yourself) and learn to practice it in our relationship and learn even more. It's about staying in a healthy relationship with yourself as you learn how to be in a healthy relationship with another person. We first do this through sober dating. We live on our own as we date someone and get to know them with healthy boundaries and healthy behavior.

Gradually we grow closer to them learning true intimacy

with another and not in the physical sense of the word even though that's part of it. We learn to open up and show our true authentic self to our now loving partner and we do this while not running away even though at times we really want to.

Then one day you decide to move in with each other. You're ready to make this amazing (and equally terrifying) move because you care for one another and want to take your relationship to the next level. Go team!

And just like that you're living with each other. Maybe one of you gave up your cozy apartment that you've been in for years or maybe one of you sold some of your personal belongings to make room for the other person. Regardless, it's change and change is a big deal for an addict.

But this is just the beginning. Living with someone is a doozy! For starters, every single day that I live with my partner something gets reflected back to me that I need to work on. Every day.

One day my needs are being met, the next day they're not. One day I'm being vulnerable and the next I'm not. One day I want to run away and be single again and the next I'm over the moon in love with my partner. This is what it's like to live with

someone when you're in recovery. Having done it for the last six years here's my advice to you. Be authentic. Be vulnerable.

Being intimate is sharing our reality and accepting the reality of another. Intimacy, erroneously for many of us, is only viewed as closeness and feel good and that's not accurate. Intimacy is also discomfort and disagreement and for a couple to be able to navigate that.

Trust me, there will be disagreements and discomfort. It's natural and normal in a relationship. When it happens, because it will happen, rise above the discomfort and be intimate. Bring to the relationship what you want your partner to bring to the relationship.

Also, keep taking care of yourself. Keep meditating, making outreach calls, going to meetings, being of service, and praying. In fact, double down on all of these because it really is that much more challenging when we are in partnership and living with someone.

People want to feel safe and regulated in a relationship but how can we if we bring a version of ourselves that doesn't feel safe in the world? I worked toward this my whole recovery and got there when I was single. I got to a place

where everything aligned perfectly around me and I felt safe and then I entered a new developmental stage, being a partner and living with

someone. I wish you all the best when this time comes for you.

— ZACHARY

Knowing Myself and My Partner

I'm addicted to relationships and sex. My history living with boyfriends includes a lot of obsession. Whoever it was, I wanted us to move in together quickly – getting to know someone was not a requirement since I did not really know myself.

I lived with roommates for approximately two years after I got sober and joined our program. I then lived alone for six years before meeting my boyfriend, who is now my spouse. What is particularly memorable about living alone was that at some point I thought that I'd never want to live with a boyfriend again – I learned to love living alone.

Gordon and I started dating in February, 2000. I cannot recall the exact timing of events but he and I did not start living together full-time until November 2002. We took it very slow. Now that's a gift of this program!

Although he hadn't even heard of S.L.A.A. prior to me,

we specifically adopted a tool from meetings: “getting current.” We use that regularly to recognize what's going on inside of us and share it.

One of the greatest challenges that we've had living together is our different work schedules. My job had an extremely heavy workload all day/every day (I retired from this job last month). His schedule is far more flexible. It drove me crazy! I would be very jealous and passive/aggressive with him and sometimes not recognize why. Living with someone really brought out a lot of my character defects that were not as obvious when I lived alone.

I'm very grateful to live with Gordon. My semi-retirement is a new challenge/adventure for us because our condo isn't that big. Now we're actually going to be working together in addition to living together! One day at a time!

— ANONYMOUS

7-Plus Years in the Making



My partner and I have been together for more than seven years. When we first met, I was adamant that I didn't want to ever live with anyone ever again, but knew that my Higher Power works in mysterious ways. She has softened my heart before and has surprised me with her vision for me and my life.

Taking my relationship with my partner one day at a time, we have built a loving and intimate bond full of laughter and honest talk. This partnership is a gift from my Higher Power. For the majority

of our relationship, we spent two to three nights a week together, but mostly had our own space in our own apartments.

Two years ago we started talking about moving in. The first time we approached the topic, I wasn't sure what was best for me, and ended up letting my sweetheart down when I told him I wasn't ready. But HP began her work on me, and 18 months later I was the one raising the topic.

We spent months talking about where we would live, how we would merge our

belongings, and – most importantly – how this move would deepen our commitment to each other. We composed a mission statement, which hangs inside one of our kitchen cabinets today. This document is comprised of our key shared values, and the ideal behaviors we each will bring to the relationship. It guides us in times of conflict, confusion, and other challenges.

So far, after three months, we have been able to sort out issues with quick check-ins. We had one argument where we each were very angry, and I

was in H.A.L.T. I quickly asked for a moratorium – we ate dinner across from each other in silence! – giving us each the chance to calm down. The next evening we came together, made amends, and were able to smoothly find a way forward that worked for us both.

I have already felt our intimacy deepen as a couple, and imagine that will continue in the months and years to come. I am grateful that HP softened my heart about sharing a home with my romantic partner.

– T.K.



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Share space

Good to Be Sharing

It's good to be sharing with you all. I have come to realize more and more lately, that I am very insecure. I started to think I'm paranoid, but actually I think I'm really just insecure and discouraged — maybe even a bit depressed. I don't like to share this, but it's what's really going on with me. I have to be real here, or I begin to slide down that slippery slope of insanity, and/or death. You all are going to make me cry. I'm so glad I have a place to come and be real.

In the last year, I've really begun to feel that I'm losing my partner; he acts like he doesn't love me anymore — like there might be someone else. I keep letting him know I don't feel loved, and he tries a little bit, but then I can tell his heart isn't in it. Then he lapses

into the usual, distant, rarely emotionally present, and zero physical intimacy. It's been like this for a long time now. My drug is being wanted, being sought after and desired. But, I realize in recovery now, that if I take that piece out of the equation, what I am left with is asking myself, "How do I feel about my partner?" I had to ask myself, "Am I in love with my partner? still?" and surprisingly, the answer is, "Yes." So, today I will act like a woman in love, and send out that love full force whether it comes back to me or not. It's very self-involved of me to only be thinking about how I feel, and what I want; that's my disease talking. Today, I'm going to reach out in love, and fight for my partner! Because I can today.

God has filled me up with

love overflowing. It's no longer about getting love, and feeling loved it's about giving love, and being loving. It's no longer about that feeling of low self-esteem. Now, it's about God-esteem. My security comes from a higher source. Really, it's all I need. He fills me up to

over-flowing and I can spill over lots of that love onto others. That's all I need to remember. The rest is a bonus. So I'll keep coming back! There's so much more to learn. Thanks for listening.

—ANONYMOUS

Nothing Communicates Care Like the Gospel According to Birds

I'm writing at 5:02 a.m. on the East Coast of Australia. The air is smokey from distant bushfires, but that hasn't kept the kookaburras from their laughing round of song. It feels almost silly to admit it, but birds have been seriously important to my recovery. Down here, at this old flat by the beach, birdlife is abundant. And loud.

Sometimes I'll be taking an early morning phone call from a friend in recovery and the caller simply won't be able to hear a word. After the kookaburras, the still-louder yells of the Sulphur-crested cockatoos start, then comes the racket of the rosellas, then the

morning koels — a kind of cuckoo with a sad, rising song — they migrate here every summer from south east Asia. Together, they interrupt every morning conversation and most of my thoughts. But they care for me too. Wordlessly moving me to prayer; inviting me to trust God when I am stuck.

“Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. — The Gospel of Matthew

Somehow birds have been better at persuading me to hand my life over to the care of God than the best-intentioned of friends. And my experience

today in Sydney isn't so different from that recovering man in 1953, as he considered the birds of St Petersburg Florida:

"In my view, some of the evidences of a spiritual awakening are: maturity; an end to habitual hatred; the ability to love and to be loved in return; the ability to believe, even without understanding, that Something lets the sun rise in the morning and set at night, makes the leaves come out in the spring and drop off in the fall, and gives the birds song. Why not let this something be God..." — St Petersburg, Florida, in "Came to Believe," p46.

It's full morning light now, and the cockatoos are starting up, along with those funny wader birds. Their foghorn songs, according to the old book, are not just trying to teach me, they're pushing me, asking a question, "Don't you know you have value, even more value than me?"

Listening to these birds now — I think I can hear the sing song of a magpie, though there are some Indian myna birds in there too — I'm just struck by their joy. They are simply being birds, alert at the start of the day, and they have some kind of undeniable happiness. They are not worried. They're not anxious. They are glad to be as

bird as they can. Today marks two years and one day since the separation. It was really my anger, the wearing, joyless, air of disappointment around me, that meant I had to leave. I've worked on a lot of aspects of character since, especially gentleness, but the greatest teaching comes from these birds. They remind me that I am loved, that I am okay as I am, and that all God wants me to do is to be the human he made me to be.

"Something lets the sun rise in the morning and set at night". I've believed what the addict in St Petersburg believed, but only in my head, not my heart. I haven't really allowed myself to feel loved by the one who brings light to the world. A spiritual connection has begun. It's painful to admit that's come with the separation. I know that I need to let that spiritual awareness go deeper yet. I need a deeper surrender. My ego must shrink a good deal more. When I allow God to be God, rather than my ego (who only ever wants me to enjoy the next simple comfort) I feel sure I will be able to do more daring things because I won't be controlled by my sense of being unloved. Who will persuade my soul that I really am loved? So far, it hasn't been preachers or self-help book authors. Maybe

it will be the birds. Becoming more or less religious doesn't seem to help one way or the other. I come from a non-religious home, though I became a believer in my teens.

Still, the message of God's care for me didn't seem to have sunk in. I loved to argue about God, but I didn't allow God's love to win me over. As I look around my 12-Step friends, I see that some people have amazing recoveries, and some people don't. I know religious people who keep acting out and find it impossible to stop. Another mate is viciously anti-religious, but that doesn't seem to help him recover either. The one guy I do see making a long stretch in recovery now is the one who has simply surrendered to God in prayer — and he is not a religious person. So, there must be more flourishing for me if I go deeper with my surrender too. I feel that the appeal Bill W. makes to newcomers is the

calling that is being made by God to me:

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the fellowship of the spirit and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the road of happy destiny. — “As Bill Sees It,” p331.

Once, God was so much a part of my thinking, and, frankly, my pride, that I couldn't experience God's care for me. I couldn't connect with God emotionally, and so my heart was still starved of God. I had to be broken and come to the place where I would let the birds speak to me about my worth. If anything, that's the message I will take forward. My brokenness, and the message of our value to God, as given by the birds.

— MATT A., SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

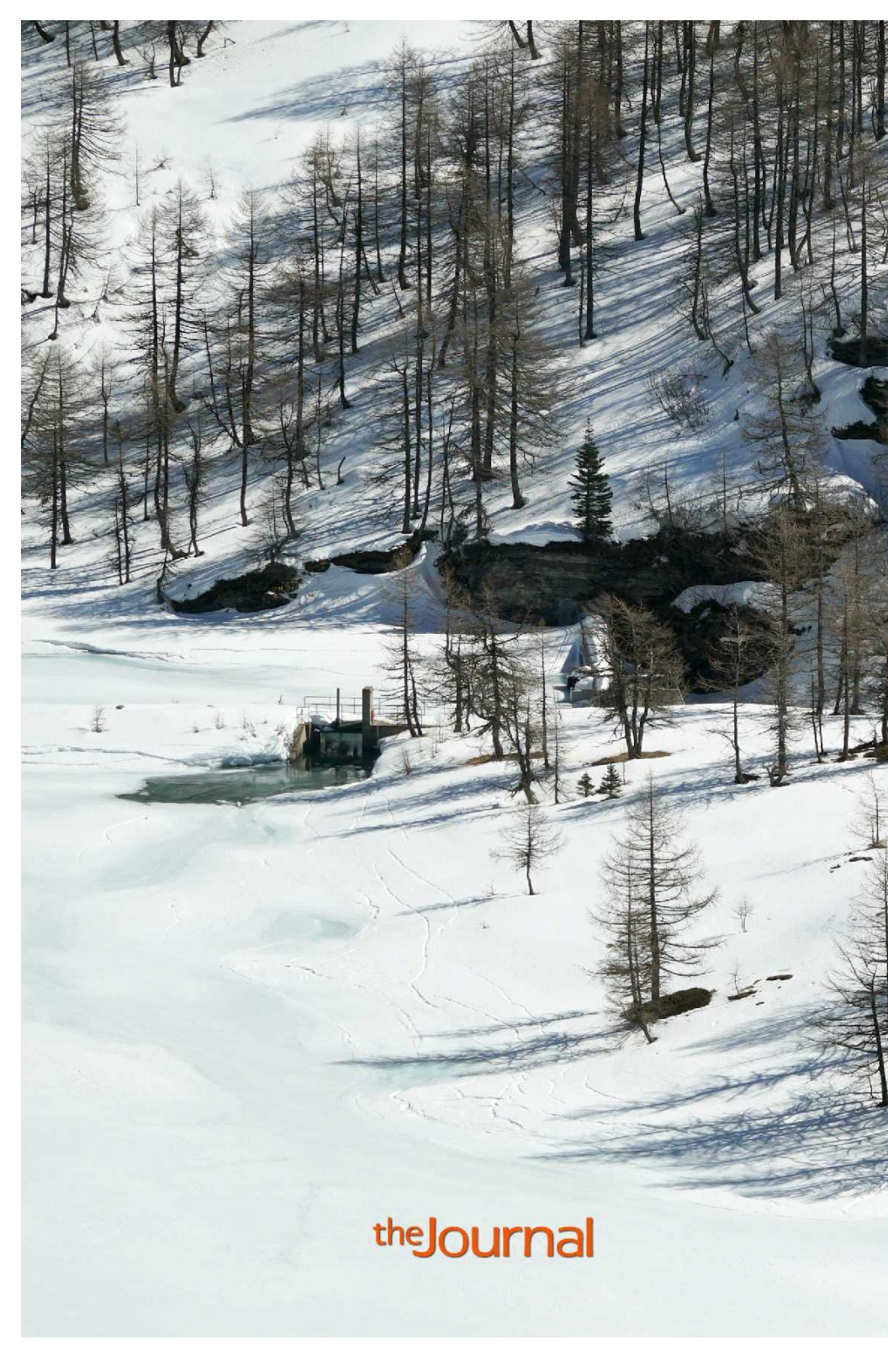
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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

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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