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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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## **First Things First**

### **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 that renders any personal differences of sexual or gender orientation irrelevant.

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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.

The above version of the Twelve Steps was adapted from the Twelve Steps first published by Works Publishing Company in 1939. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, New York, granted permission to Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous to reprint the above version in 1986. The forward of Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., New York, 1952) states, "... the Twelve Steps can mean more than sobriety for problem drinkers." The fellowship of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is grateful for the early contributions to recovery made by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous through the gift of these twelve principles to the public in 1938.

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader:

In this issue of *the Journal* we focus on the theme of Step 4. During my recovery, my Step 4 work was really the very first time I made a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself. My compulsive lying and deceit had led me to Step 1 when my wife found out about yet another intrigue with a woman, despite my telling her that I was a reformed husband. Step 2 was difficult, but I was assisted by a fellow SLAA member who noted that none of us had come into the meeting without trying to control our addiction on our own. Step 3 proved to be most challenging because of my mother's religiosity that took her to church nearly daily, but prevented her from leaving my violent and abusive father. To help with this step, I initially made my SLAA group my higher power. This was based on the belief that something greater than all of us had brought us into this room of healing! When I arrived at Step 4 (along with its companion Step 5), I was feeling the healing of the program working in my life. I looked forward to the work. I was also blessed to have an outstanding sponsor who reminded me that Step 4 is about a **complete** moral inventory which includes not just those thoughts and actions that shamed me, but those thoughts and actions that I respect in myself. After weeks of journaling, I met with him privately and told all that I knew at the time. There were a few very shameful secrets that I had carried most of my life. His acceptance of me after my share was the first time I felt completely whole. I had told all that I knew of my pain and shame and was rewarded by his steadfast friendship and love. I skipped to telling of my Step 5 to point out the need to be completely honest and thorough in this step as the release from shame that comes from Step 5 is remarkably healing. I also want to point out that the joy I felt from my Step 4 work has served me twice again when I returned to my sponsor with more revelations gained through continued work in the program. As with all the Steps, repeated visits bring further growth when led by my higher power. Finally, I know that Step 4 and its companion Step 5 are the most personal steps. This honesty and intimacy makes the willingness of our contributors to write about this Step even more gracious and healing. I am honored to have received such remarkable contributions and I hope you will find them inspiring to you as well.

Charlie D.  
Managing Editor, *the Journal*

## **Other S.L.A.A. Resources**

In addition to the many S.L.A.A. meetings and *the Journal*, resources are now available through the Internet and Phone. Such email and phone communities provide S.L.A.A. members with positive options to personal meetings. Some S.L.A.A. members hold positions in their communities or in the world that makes them easy targets for public scrutiny, criticism, or sensationalism. Some just like writing, reading or listening as a part of their recovery experience or want to supplement their current meeting schedule with such a meeting. There are also members who are not located near any S.L.A.A. meetings or do not find the twelve-step fellowships available to them to be helpful. In the spirit of the 12th step, we are happy to share this information with our readers

## **On-Line Resources**

**#SLAA Online Group:** [www.slaaonline.org](http://www.slaaonline.org)

**#SLAA-ALT Group:** [stopover.ky.us.starlink-irc.org/cgi-bin/irc.cgi](http://stopover.ky.us.starlink-irc.org/cgi-bin/irc.cgi)

### **International SLAA Online Group:**

[www.internationalslaonline.org](http://www.internationalslaonline.org)

**SLAAsupport Group:** <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/SLAAsupport>

**South Florida Intergroup e-Group of SLAA:** [www.e-SLAA.org](http://www.e-SLAA.org)

## **Phone Meetings**

There are numerous phone meetings. A good place to start is the SLAA FWS website: [http://directory.slaafws.org/intl\\_phone](http://directory.slaafws.org/intl_phone)

## **Upcoming Events**

### **Summer 2010 Healthy Relationships Telemeeting Series**

Presented by: Conference Healthy Relationships Committee

Where: Telemeeting

Event Date: Saturday, May 8, 2010

Event Date: Saturday, June 12, 2010

Event Date: Saturday, July 10, 2010

For Inquiries: See Flyer

TOPIC: CONFLICTING RELATIONSHIP NEEDS

May 8: Accepting Our Partner As Is vs. Getting Our Needs Met

June 12: Need for Space vs. Engaging and Togetherness

July 10: Opposite Sex or Threatening Friendships: Trust vs. Boundaries

These 3 one-hour teleconferences will be on Saturdays, at 9:00am Pacific / 12:00 PM Eastern / 5:00pm London. SLAA members may attend any or all meetings without RSVP. Calls are recorded for later playback

SEE FLYER FOR US AND INTERNATIONAL CALL-IN NUMBERS AND ACCESS CODES: [http://www.slaafws.org/files/Healthy Relationships Telemeeting Flyer Summer 2010.pdf](http://www.slaafws.org/files/Healthy%20Relationships%20Telemeeting%20Flyer%20Summer%202010.pdf)

## **12-Step S.L.A.A. Weekend in Chester, Vermont**

Presented by: New England Intergroup

Where: Chester, Vermont (2 1/2 - 3 hours from Boston)

Event Date: Friday, July 23, 2010 - Sunday, July 25, 2010

For Inquiries, see Flyer [http://www.slaafws.org/files/vermont\\_july\\_2010.pdf](http://www.slaafws.org/files/vermont_july_2010.pdf)

During the weekend we will review the steps from the S.L.A.A. Basic Text. There is also ample opportunity for "down" time. The weekend also provides an opportunity to get to know ourselves, as well as other S&L addicts in a safe place. The retreats are not only about sharing experience, strength, and hope, but also a chance to have lots of fun and laughs as well!

## **All Day Workshop for Women & Men**

Presented by: Los Angeles Intergroup

Where: IHM Retreat House, Los Angeles, CA

Event Date: Saturday, July 24, 2010

For Inquiries, see Flyer: <http://www.slaafws.org/files/MenWomenannouncement7-2010.pdf>

Two workshops - a workshop for women and a workshop for men - held simultaneously. Open to women/men of any sexual orientation. Focus of both workshops is on topics of interest to women/men.

## **Eleventh Annual Maine Fall 12-Step Weekend Retreat**

Presented by: Southern and Mid-Maine Intergroup

Where: Living Water Spiritual Center, Winslow, Maine

Event Date: Friday, October 8, 2010 - Sunday, October 10, 2010

For Inquiries: [SLRetreatME@gmail.com](mailto:SLRetreatME@gmail.com)

This weekend will be devoted to an intensive study of the 12 Steps. If you have worked on the Steps in this type of format before, you already know its value. If you have not done any study of the Steps, intensive or otherwise, this is a great way to do it, especially for the first time. Regardless of where you are in the Step study process, we are able to learn from sharing our experience, strength and hope with each other. Held at the Living Water Spiritual Center is a Retreat House located on 61 acres bordering the beautiful Sebasticook River in the small town of Winslow, Maine.

## **Service opportunities for *the Journal***

*The Journal* is a basic recovery tool for S.L.A.A. groups and individual members, and it is a key outreach tool into areas that do not yet have an S.L.A.A. presence. Tradition Nine states that each S.L.A.A. service entity is directly responsible to those they serve. In the spirit of Tradition Nine, *the Journal* recognizes its responsibility to both its



current readers and potential future S.L.A.A. members seeking recovery.

To reach more sex and love addicts that do not yet know of recovery, we're stretching further than ever before. We're looking for people with writing, drawing, editing, layout, outreach, web design, production, and printing skills to assist in the creation of the new, deeper, more refreshing publication. Please assist us in creatively carrying the message of recovery.

We are pleased to announce that many of the service positions for *the Journal* are filled, but we continue to seek the assistance of a fulfillments manager. In addition, if you are interested in the organization and duties of the individual staff, please go to <http://www.theslaajournal.org/> and click on service structure.

## **Fulfillments Manager**

The Fulfillments Manager oversees the printing and mailing of each of the six annual issues of *the Journal*. The Fulfillments Manager also ensures the legibility, aesthetic quality, and durability of the finished copies of *the Journal*. The Fulfillments Manager will evaluate the handling of subscriptions and help execute subscriber retention policy. Candidates must have at least six months of continuous bottom line sobriety.

Interested?

If interested in one or more of the above positions, visit [www.theSLAAJournal.org](http://www.theSLAAJournal.org), select Contact *the Journal*, and send your contact information to us using the web form. We will treat your information confidentially in accordance with *the Journal's* Privacy Policy. If you do not have web access, you can call the F.W.S. Office at 210-828-7900.

## **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

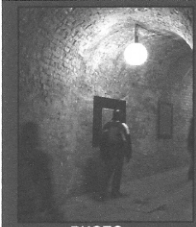
willing volunteers of all skills and levels of willingness and availability.

Some sex and love addicts have no meeting in their area or the meetings in their area have become stale and repetitive. Through the variety available in *the Journal*, you can breathe new life into the groups and individuals that need refreshment. *The Journal* also fosters international unity, the core principle of our First Tradition. Here's what we can do together.

- We can formally or informally become a Journal Representative for our 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.
- We can visit a local organization that deals with sex and love addicts in our 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.
- We can work with others to design and oversee outreach projects.

### **Publish Your Event**

Let us know about your group or intergroup sponsored events. We will help you get the word out to our readership. You can email [editor@theSLAAJournal.org](mailto:editor@theSLAAJournal.org) or submit a press release just as you would a story through [www.theSLAAJournal.org](http://www.theSLAAJournal.org), preferably several months in advance so participants have time to plan to attend. Event notices must be received at least one month prior to the issue date. Please see [www.SLAAJournal.org](http://www.SLAAJournal.org) for details



PHOTO



PAINTING



DRAWING



CARTOON



MIXED MEDIA

Make Artwork To Share  
Your Recovery Through

theJournal

MAKE A  
WORK  
T

**HOW CONTRIBUTING ART CAN HELP YOUR RECOVERY:**

1. **REWIRE.** Create healthy imagery to create a new pattern for your life.
2. **BALANCE.** Reading & writing work the left brain. Work right brain recovery.
3. **TRIUMPH.** Confront the common fear of "not being good enough."
4. **REVEAL.** Communication is 93% non-verbal. Show your truth unknown.
5. **IMPACT.** Sharing at local meetings induces perspective. Share worldwide.

*the Journal* encourages creative contributions!

You may submit original artwork online at  
[www.slaafws.org/journalsubmit](http://www.slaafws.org/journalsubmit)

or

E-mail original artwork to the Art Director  
[creative@theslaajournal.org](mailto:creative@theslaajournal.org)

(btw: we need an Art Director.)

## **Question of the Day**

### **Answers from Yesterday**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, "What is your favorite recovery slogan, and how do you use it?" Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment and edification. They are not presented in any particular order.

"Progress, not perfection." or in Swedish: "Framsteg, inte fulländning." By taking baby steps in my recovery, I move steadily in the right direction. Over time, maybe even without my noticing that it happens, my recovery progresses immensely.  
-Fredrik L, Uppsala, Sweden

"Life's rejection is God's protection." I use it in terms of when things don't work out the way I want them to, knowing that my higher power has got my back.  
-Kate C., Los Angeles

"My best thinking got me here." Every time I let my brain "do its thing" and come up with thoughts, opinions, and judgments about what's happening in my life, I remember that

my best thinking often fuels my addiction. So I ask my Higher Power for help.

-Donn B., Los Angeles

"I can think until I'm ill, but not until I'm well."

-Carmen, Stockholm, Sweden

"If it's hysterical, it's historical." When I freak out or get over-sensitive about a situation, someone's behavior, or even my behavior, I understand that my reaction is also related to something that happened in the past.

-David M., Los Angeles

"Program asks me to be honest, not good." I suffer from the whole 'good girl / bad girl' thing. This slogan helps me see that I get to acknowledge and experience my "negative" emotions. I don't have to be happy all the time, nor do my opinions or feelings have to always be positive.

-Carmen G., Los Angeles

"One finger pointing out, 3 pointing back." It is a road map to recovery. I get to find out my character defects with what distresses me in others - what a gift. I get to grow in that area and recover deeper.

-H., Los Angeles

"Argument and fault finding are to be avoided like the plague." These activities poison my soul like no others. I kept this phrase on a slip of paper by my computer so I would see it every day. It has been really helpful.

-John B., Glendale

"It is all right to be jerks in order to keep our sobriety." I am not feeling guilty and shameful to set boundaries with unhealthy people (who can trigger me as well.)

-Aurora F., Sherman Oaks

"Just because I am in pain, does not mean I need to be one." I use it when I go about my daily routine and I am challenged. I try not to be

aggressive, rude or self-serving wanting the hit of a feeling of perceived power.

-Ned R., Los Angeles

"Let go and let God." When I can't stop obsessing, or put to rest that compulsive aching feeling, this slogan helps me. It helps me deal with what I can't control.

-Kate B., Los Angeles

"One day at a time." It makes sense to me.

-Will R., Los Angeles

"Progress, not perfection." This reminds me that inappropriate thoughts and physiological responses will still occur, in spite of my recovery; however these have become briefer and less frequent as I grow closer to God.

-Joanne, Hollywood

"HALT: Never get to Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired."

-Jennifer L., Los Angeles

"Don't just do something, sit there!"

-Chuck M., Santa Monica

I appreciate the slogan “take what you want and leave the rest.” I had been involved with strict religious doctrines where there was only total acceptance to all the doctrine, which led me to feel a lot of shame and guilt. I have learned what values I do believe in and uphold and which values I do not believe in. I can work my program to my comfort level with the support of my sponsor and guidance of my Higher Power of my understanding. This has allowed me to grow my instincts, grow my relationship with my Higher Power and sponsor in my time.  
-Elizabeth C., Alhambra

“Progress, not perfection.” Perfection has kept me away from my emotions. Perfection has kept me in fear, paralyzed. Perfection, forever, magical qualities... This program helps me to progress. My connection to my emotions, my

consciousness, my humility, love, kindness, compassion, and acceptance grow.  
-David M., Los Angeles

“If you slip in SLAA, at least you’ll fall forward.” Every slip in recovery is a learning experience. Today slipping is no longer about my shame — oft triggered from acting out of pride such as wanting to accumulate time to be respected (which is a fantasy.) Today if I were to slip, I’d be upset because I fully understand now how unhealthy it is for me to act out. If I’ve had the foresight to define bottom line behavior as a slip... it becomes a painful inner contradiction to indulge my addiction. It’s not just that I’ve got to get back to right action, I’ve got to get back to those rarefied moments where I have presence of mind, and to cultivate this all the time through the requested intervention of my Higher Power. Thanks to

working the steps, I now  
walk the path.

-Tom, Silver Lake

“Progress over  
perfection” is a great  
reminder when  
struggling with sticking  
to bottom lines.

-Carrie B., Los Angeles

“Feelings aren’t facts.”  
Instead of living in my  
head, I am reminded that  
feelings aren’t facts.

-Rory, Los Angeles

“Quit being so hard on  
yourself” frees me from  
self-obsession when I  
remember to use it.

-Allen, Los Angeles

“I can’t stay clean on  
yesterday’s shower!”

-Lynda L.

“Avoid the deliberate  
manufacture of misery.”  
9 out of 10 times my  
mind is telling me  
messages that are not  
very accurate. That the  
glass is half empty. That  
is simply, most of the  
time, not true.

-Anonymous

“One day at a time” helps  
me stop “faturizing” (to  
quote a program  
brother.)

-Rupert R., Los Angeles

“This too shall pass.” As  
a reminder that what I  
am experiencing is only  
what I am experiencing  
right now and this  
moment will pass — gives  
me perspective.

-Anonymous

“Praying only for the  
knowledge of God’s will  
for us and the power to  
carry that out.” I use this  
in all areas when dealing  
with every day and  
everything in life - both  
large issues and small  
issues. It keeps me in  
contact with my Higher  
Power both praying and  
in meditation, in work in  
dealing with the opposite  
sex and all things.

-John K., Los Angeles

“Don’t quit before the  
miracle.”

-Tania, Los Angeles

A slogan that recently became a  
favorite of mine a few weeks ago

is: "I am not a sex and love was addict. I am a sex and love addict."

-Tara, New Jersey

"Stay sober just for today." I use it when I say goodbye or when I sign off in an e-mail. I sometimes need it as a reminder to myself and I like to suggest it to my friends in recovery because I am praying they will stay sober just for today too. Today is the only day I ever have to stay sober.

-Eric EE, Dallas/Fort Worth, TX

"An SLAA member brought me the message and I was released unto hope. I'm still there, one day at a time."

-Manny M., Los Angeles

"The known is the prison of the past." Step into the unknown. Take God with you.

-David M., Los Angeles

### **Next Question of the Day**

#### **How are you being of service in your life, and how does this help your recovery?**

A response to the Question of the Day can be a personal story or just a short sentence. Please send your responses to [question-of-the-day@theSLAAJournal.org](mailto:question-of-the-day@theSLAAJournal.org) or use the Contact Us page at

[www.theSLAAJournal.org/contact.html](http://www.theSLAAJournal.org/contact.html). Responses that are appropriate for publication may be published in the next issue of the Journal.

### **The Theme**

#### **Step 4**

#### **The Slow, Gut-Wrenchingly Painful Road of Step 4**

I have a tendency to whip through projects, assignments, or even life too swiftly. My therapists at a mental health facility I stayed at to recover from a suicide attempt upon learning my husband had been living a double life and was filing for divorce were amazed at the speed of which I went through the stages of grief over the loss of my marriage. They saw Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance literally pass before their eyes from one therapy session to the next. I was a classic over-achiever, even in therapy, or so I thought.

But, as one might guess, emotional recovery is not the kind of thing one should whip through quickly. I was warned by one therapist, "Just because you have felt all these stages of grief, doesn't mean you won't go through them again...and again." And, those therapists were right, but I wouldn't know it, or feel



it, until I started my own step work in SLAA four months after being discharged from the hospital.

When I entered SLAA in February 2010, it wasn't over the break up of my 9-year marriage/11 year relationship, but, it should have been. Instead, it was over the rebound boy I fell madly "in love" with for three months (key word: madly) just one month after my discharge from the hospital, two months after the break up of the marriage, and two months after my suicide attempt. When I had my final flip-out on the boy (the details don't matter), I marched straight into SLAA instead of running to another man for comfort as I have done after every breakup since my first heartbreak at age 15. This was progress. This was already breaking a pattern of mine. This felt good. This made me ready and willing, and frankly giddy with excitement, to take on SLAA and everything it had to offer. I committed to 90 meetings in 90 days, bought all the literature and books, got a sponsor, took commitments, and attacked my step work like the homework assignment of all homework assignments. I was determined to pass with flying colors.

I am a writer and journalist by profession, and I always loved school

and class work, so SLAA's step work was like my higher education in emotional maturity for me. That said, it was no surprise that I got through my first three steps in SLAA in just two months. I read, wrote, and prayed on steps 1, 2, and 3 every day until they were done. For me, the first three steps were simple. You just need to be ready to admit, believe, and make a decision. I readily admitted, believed, and made that decision. I knew my way of thinking, of loving, of living, of relating was not working for me and was causing me a lot of pain. How could I not think someone, anyone, else could do better than me? I gave it all over to God as willingly as I've given myself over to men in the past.

I soon learned, however, why those three steps came so easy and swift for me. It wasn't because I am a stellar student. It was because what was lurking in Step 4 would knock me off my feet and send me back to square one on my emotional recovery from the demise of my marriage, my life, and my whole sense of being. It was God's way of slowing me down enough to really feel the pain of my breakup properly, since I clearly breezed through those feelings too abruptly without ever really letting myself live in the pain, hurt, and

sadness of what happened between me and my husband.

I was a bit overwhelmed by the work I had to do for Step 4. I thought “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves” simply meant to list my flaws and wrongdoings. Easy, I thought. “Wrong”, my sponsor told me. Instead, it meant to write a list of every resentment I have and look at it from every angle possible — Why am I resentful? Who am I really resentful at? What is my part in it? What did it affect in my life, in myself, in my soul? That was not all. I had to list all of my fears and write a sexual and emotional inventory of every lover, boyfriend, or husband I ever had.

It was a daunting task at the very least. I decided to tackle the easiest piece of this puzzle first: the fears list. Truth be told, I did this in the wrong order. It goes: resentments list and subsequent columns first, the fears list second and sexual/relationship inventory last. I could not help myself and headed straight to the fears list, which I wrote it in one feel swoop, stream of consciousness style, so that I could get my immediate and raw fears down on paper without overthinking them. When I read it back to myself, I was surprised at how many different ways I expressed

my fear of abandonment. No. 1 on my list was the fear of being alone. Second on the list was pretty much the same thought to not be married again until “death do us part”. No. 8 on the list was dying alone. No. 17 on the list was never finding marital bliss. No. 29 on the list was marrying Mr. Wrong again. I mean—really—how many times can one write the same thing in a different way? Despite this, it was a good exercise. I knew I do not do well being alone. I have been a serial monogamist since age 14 and I am 39 now. I have only gone two months without sex or a boyfriend or husband up until this program. That is why I am in this program, but to see it in black and white like this further planted the idea in my head that I truly need to be comfortable on my own before I can form a relationship with anyone else. I always knew this, but this time I really “got” it and this time I really committed to working through it.

The fears part was not painful. So onto the list of resentments I went. In my first 10 minutes of writing the first column, which is to simply list who you are resentful toward and over what, I came up with 40 resentments right away. I had no idea how resentful I was toward

my parents until the words flowed out of me in rapid succession: emotionally unavailable, emotionally immature, alcoholic, self-centered, latchkey kid, hit me, emotionally abandoned me, and so on. By the time I was done writing the list of 90 resentments, my blood was boiling, my fists were clenched, and hatred ran through my body. That feeling lasted about a month, which is how long it took just to write the first column of resentments.

During this part of Step 4, my shares in meetings would often go like this: "I hate this program. I am so filled with anger right now I can't even see straight. Really, does anyone survive Step 4? Will I ever be done with it? I mean, really, I can get a new resentment every day so this list can be never-ending. This is AWFUL. AWFUL! I just want to hit someone. UGH!"

But as I diligently wrote out my fourth step, I started to realize the true purpose of the fourth step. I started to see patterns. Other than learning how deep my fear of being alone was, I learned that I always fell in love too fast with men I did not really know or even have much in common with. For whatever reason, they also fell in love with me and onto an unsatisfying long-term relationship I went - one

after another, 10 in total and 10 in a row. I learned that I often adapted to their likes and dislikes, changing myself for each man. I learned that I always broke up with them because I felt I was not loved enough. I learned that respect was a big issue for me. I learned that the fear of abandonment started in childhood and followed me to every relationship. I learned that these were the real issues I needed to look at in my step work, my individual therapy work, and in my spiritual work. I also learned how my disease permeated every aspect of my life, including work, family, and friends.

About halfway through the writing of this step, my anger subsided and I fell into an odd sense of calm. I was actually grateful that I was getting to know myself better because knowing the problem is step one to solving the problem. And this serial monogamy—this inability to be alone or feel self-worth without being in a relationship—was a big problem for me. I decided to slow down working this step so I could truly feel it, instead of just blazing through it like I did steps 1, 2, and 3.

In taking my time, I started feeling my feelings a bit more, especially about the death of my mar-

riage. I cried over the loss of my marriage for the first time in months, and that felt good. I sobbed in my bed every night for a week. Just like my Las Encinas therapists warned, I was going through some of the stages of grief over again. And, I knew I needed this. I knew that the rebound relationship was just a Band-Aid over my broken heart and that it was time to get back to what truly needed to be healed. I knew that if it weren't for the slow, gut-wrenching painful process of Step 4 that I wouldn't have gotten in touch with those deep feelings of betrayal and anger toward my husband. And for once, I was grateful to be able to feel this pain because I knew that tackling it head on was how I would get to the other side of it.

In a way, I am going through the stages of grief with Step 4 itself: Denial that I even had resentments, anger over the "newfound" resentments, bargaining with my Higher Power to get me through it and depression over seeing my part in my mess of a life, and finally acceptance that this program - as they say and I now believe- works if you work it and I'm worth it!

-Carrie, Los Angeles

### **The 12 Steps of Recovery: Step Four**

Four of the scariest words in the English language are "we need to talk"—especially when arranged in that order and spoken by our spouse. Similarly, the prospect of taking "a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves", evokes feelings of fear (more like *terror*), anxiety, dread, alarm, horror, and vulnerability, among others.

Because of Bill W's writing style, the Fourth Step is much maligned. A "moral" inventory! The very idea! Actually, most people contemplating this step misunderstand and misinterpret Bill's words, believing that the Fourth Step should be, at best, an *amoral* inventory, and at worst, an *immoral* inventory. Nothing can be further from the truth!

Bill often taught *new* concepts or ideas by comparing them with commonplace, well-understood concepts and ideas. Thus, Bill compares our *personal* inventory with a businessman who takes a *commercial* inventory of his merchandise. He further describes this physical inventory as "a fact-finding and a fact-facing process" in an effort to "discover

the truth” about the “stock-in-trade.”

Bill eschewed using the same descriptive word twice. Knowing this quirk about his writing style allows us to compare this *physical* inventory with our *self*-inventory. Our Fourth Step should be a:

- searching – or “fact-finding”
- fearless – or “fact-facing” and
- moral – or truthful

“inventory” or accounting of our nature or character, which is our “stock-in-trade.”

“Moral” as used by Bill W in the Fourth Step simply means that our inventory must be *honest*—“truthful.” It includes both our oft-neglected good points as well as those pesky character defects (“damaged or unsalable goods”) that we will uncover in the Sixth Step and will ask our Higher Power to remove in the Seventh Step.

By accepting Bill W’s invitation to be rigorously honest with ourselves in the Fourth Step, we can come out of denial and admit “the exact nature of our wrongs” first to the God of our understanding, then to

ourselves, and finally to another human being in our Fifth Step. By honestly facing ourselves—both our positive traits and our shortcomings—we **can** be free from the chains of our past and have a True Connection with our Higher Power. As promised in Step Eleven of the SLAA text, “Thus we came to find intimacy with ourselves, intimacy with God, and then intimacy with others.” What a gift!

-Robert H.  
Santa Clara, CA

**The Fourth Step: made a searching and fearless (as in no False Evidence Appearing Real and in this case Face Everything And Recovery) moral inventory of ourselves.**

The big book of AA suggests making three lists one on Fears, one on Resentments and one on Relationships. Each list is made up of four columns. The first column just lists the item, person, institution or rule. The second column describes what happened to us. The third column describes how this affected us (particularly our plans, hopes, dreams, financial status, relationship status, our agenda public and our agenda hidden etc.). The last column, the

Fourth one oddly enough, describes our part in this event. I don't know who thought of doing it this way but I am eternally grateful to them. I have read dozens of books with suggestions on how to do an inventory but I have yet to find one that is better for me. This is a hard, no nonsense way of doing this project but it was and still is the very best for me.

Being an ego maniac, I do, of course, have some suggestions about how to approach this process. One thing I want to point out at the beginning is that this undertaking might be a bit depressing. Now depression is anger turned inwards, and being a good addict, I am an expert at beating myself up. Beating myself up, however, is not part of conducting a searching and fearless moral inventory. The objective here is to learn about myself, who and what I really am (and not who I have been thinking I am). There is a small chance that, being an addict, I might not feel completely flattered by what I discover through the process. I have to have done a good thorough job on steps one, two and three if I am going to make it through step four. Since I want to make it through all twelve steps and receive the promises of recovery, I have to survive step

four. Unfortunately, being an addict, making myself feel bad might make me want to medicate myself.

Depression kills people every day. So how about starting step four by doing an inventory of things you like and enjoy doing that are NOT addictive? I got depressed the first time I tried to make this type of inventory. My list of non-addictive things I enjoy doing was only three items and there is a limit to the amount of miniature golf I can truly enjoy! I think that as you schedule time to work on a fourth step you might consider scheduling and budgeting time to reward yourself for the good work you are doing for yourself as a re-parenting/self parenting training exercise. Try it, you might like it.

I have found that I need to set a bunch of boundaries on my formal fourth step work. I need to set aside time to do it. I need to be able to isolate a little while feeling comfortable with my choice. My time is just as important and urgent as anything else. I have every right to live life my way. Try saying these sentences out loud. Repeat as necessary until they become comfortable in your own mouth. They might just need a little breaking in.

As I mentioned I also need to set aside time to take care of myself while I am doing this work. There is also a limit to just how much fourth step work I can do in a single sitting. So, one of the first things I do when I commit to my fourth step is to commit to the fifth step. I allot a maximum of sixty days (some people say 90) to work on a fourth step. When I start, I circle a day in advance that I commit to finding someone to hear my fifth step within one week. This gives me a deadline and helps motivate me to sit down and do the work.

I suggest starting by doing a personal biography. In fact I tell my sponsees to start by doing a geno-gram going back at least to their grandparents (further if you can get the information). What physical attributes and conditions did you inherit? Does alcoholism, depression, eating disorders, financial disorders, physical abuse, verbal abuse, child molestation or incest run in your family? How far back can you trace it? The first few years of life we are highly impressionable and a lot of what we pick up on is nonverbal communication. Who were we learning from and what talents or disorders were they teaching us? One of the things I learned about myself with this approach was that

both of my grandparents married to seek wealth and position in society. That means both sets of grandparents were financial arrangements, not love or romantic relationships. Did this have an influence on my parents and through them on my siblings and me? I find it downright humorous when I look at it on paper it is so obvious in retrospect why some of the things happened. Although it was all chaos at the time it should have been something that could have been predicted if anybody had bothered to look at it.

A geno-gram doesn't excuse us or get us off the hook for what we have done and are doing ourselves, but it might highlight some reasons why we do it. When we understand our own programming we can take action to correct or change it. So do a geno-gram (there are lots of good books on this subject written by people much more qualified than I am about how to go about it).

Add a biography to the geno-gram and you may discover all sorts of interesting stuff. Just start by listing the years that have passed since you were born. Was it a natural child birth or caesarian section or premature? Were both

parents present? What happened in those first ten or twelve years? Go over each year and fill in the significant historical events of that year. Try to remember where you were and what you were doing when these things happened. What events happened in your own family and what part did you take in them or how did they affect your environment? Include birthdays, graduations, weddings, Christmas or whatever you celebrate. Get out old photo albums and do not just look at them, study the pictures, study the people in those pictures, try looking at them in a mirror and ask yourself what you can tell about this person just by looking at them. You do not have to analyze any of this right now, just start a written record and see what you can find out. You can always analyze it when you do your formal fourth step work.

Write up a resume. Write a functional resume, not a chronological one. It should be a long one, not for circulation among employers, just for you. List everything you can do for which anyone might be willing to pay you money. If you can use a hammer or a lawnmower, or a vacuum, or an iron, you have a skill for which people are paid money. If you can read and speak English you have a

skill, write it down. You do not have to be an expert, assistants, apprentices, and trainees are hired right along with journeymen and masters. An inventory is a list of both assets and liabilities. You want to become aware of all your assets. You can refer back to this when you feel less than good enough. You are a good, valuable person and you can do things that people are willing to pay money to have done or just need help with doing. We need to find ways we can be of service to other people. I personally find money to be a very sincere form of flattery and rather ego boosting (got to watch that trap!). If you are employed and paying taxes you are helping defend your country, putting kids through schools, building a better world for future generations, helping the poor, disabled, and elderly are some very nice qualities in a person. None of us is all bad and none of us is only saintly. We are not terminally unique. We fall somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of life and we have a lot of company. Allowing ourselves a place in the middle means we have room for improvement and something to lose. It helps us get a perspective on whom and what we are. A perspective based on facts, not our own egos.



I have other suggestions as well. I think they are more first and tenth step projects, but they helped me immensely with my fourth step. Early on in my recovery an older wiser type person in the program suggested I start keeping a list of things I was powerless over (this was supposed to be a daily project but when I started I was adding to the list every hour). Someone else suggested I add the time and place this particular bout of powerlessness took place and an estimate of how long it lasted. I soon discovered I was pretty powerless over just about everything and it was eating up a significant portion of my time and energies, not to mention my life and lunch. This helped motivate me to work my program pretty hard. I came to see that I was spending about half of my waking day lost in obsessions. This, of course, meant I was spending a lot of my life not acting out but thinking about acting out. So I concluded that obsessing on my bottom line just might be a thought worth further exploration (I hadn't thought of that before, that's where the being here now comes from on my bottom line by the way). Finally someone suggested that I start writing down what happened just before this bout of powerlessness. Some years later my therapist suggested I start

keeping a mood calendar. Periodically throughout the day I would write down how I was feeling. I added a small note about what was going on to see if I could figure out why I was feeling the way I was. Since a lot of my notes told me I was spending a lot of time depressed I finally got to see a medical doctor about that. I am now on medication for the depression and I am eternally grateful to have a prescription that actually works. This is not a short term project by the way. I maintain the list today in my day runner. By keeping it for several years now I have discovered several patterns of behavior and moods that are long term, seasonal or otherwise calendar based. Some of this is PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) but it is all workable or treatable now that I know it is happening.

Being just a little cross addicted over the years I have added a couple more daily lists. One started as a food diary for my doctor. I just happened to notice a slight CO-relation between my food diary and my mood diary. Nowadays I hit myself up beside the head for not figuring this out sooner. Of course if you put your body through massive amounts of work ingesting and digesting

food it will affect your mood. Either one can come first for me but eating is certainly a part of my acting out behaviors. I love pizza, but I have discovered that if I ingest pizza from some establishments I get very irritable. The other one that has helped me stay sober is to make a little note in my check book. Yes, I still use a checkbook for almost all purchases. This addict and his credit card are soon parted from serenity. Anyway I make a note about my mood in my checkbook. I also list in my check book if my purchase is 1) Budgeted (planned in advance and money set aside for it). 2) Shopped for (comparison shopping and bartering, did I make an effort to get the best price?). 3) Planned (when did I actually decide I needed this?). 4) Spontaneous or an impulse purchase or (addictive words coming) On Sale! Amazing how much of my garage is full of stuff I bought on sale because I would want to use it someday (the fact this stuff is in the garage is a strong indicator that someday hasn't arrived here yet). This approach has helped me make a budget and stick to it which adds a lot to my serenity.

Finally there is the inventory that none of the steps in any program I have found so far mention, the shame (Should Have Already Mastered Everything) inventory. What am I ashamed of? Why am I ashamed of it? Our inventory may reveal a lot of things we are guilty of and ... that's OK. Guilt is a gift we can do something with. The next five steps are all devoted to getting rid of that guilt. We trade it in for the promises of recovery, which are a good thing to get. We are guilty of the things we do that harm ourselves and others. We are shamed by what other people tell us we are. We can also do something about our shame. First we have to know that we are carrying it around with us. We may be regularly getting shame as a gift from friends, relatives, or even less than perfect strangers. Allow me to suggest that if someone offers you a gift and you refuse to accept it, to whom does the gift belong? I think shame is almost always an inappropriate gift, and I suggest returning it unopened. Maybe with a suggestion about our measurements and favorite colors, in case they want to get us a shirt or something useful instead.

Should have already mastered everything ... There's a clue here. I hate the word 'should'. Please do not 'should' on me or anyone else, it is never polite. 'Should' means we are invoking a 'rule'. Now just whose 'rule' is this and why are they not a party to the conversation? What exactly is this 'rule'? Spell it out please. If it's my 'rule' I do not need a 'should' I can stand up for what I honestly believe in. Shame is quite frequently based on rules. It may be helpful to note what our rule here is, who we got the rule from, maybe when and where, and decide if it is a good rule for us or not. For example, the saying "Money doesn't grow on trees". Well, where does money grow? That's a more interesting rule to practice and conjure with. This inventory is a list of our unmarketable goods for which we are paying storage. It can bankrupt us. This is like storing garbage for a rainy day. Some of us are not even aware we are doing it. When I first did this inventory, I made a number of personal discoveries. It is well worth doing.

Wow, look at all that work! I could never do that perfectly! Just a suggestion here but not being able to do something perfectly has stopped me from doing all sorts of

fine things in my life. I hate to quote advertisements but watch a Nike ad. Anything worth doing is worth doing as well as you can. It doesn't have to be done perfectly. A 'C' is still a passing grade, a 'D' passes but may leave some minor room for improvement. Even with a D you are learning something. Life is about progress not perfection. Climb the mountain, you may find the view to be breath taking.

Stay sober just for today  
-Eric EE

### **The Fourth: Be With You**

I made many futile attempts to scale the Fourth Step throughout my life. Unfortunately, the problem was that I was cruising ahead at full speed on a downward slope and had yet to reach the first step away from my addictive behavior. Nevertheless, every relationship into which I entered became a repository for my resentments and, sooner or later, part of that inventory.

Love was like a game of 'hot potato'. The role of my many lovers was to process all pain. The way I conceived it, being in love meant sharing everything about your inner workings with another.

Little did I know how damaging it could be to lovers, family and friends when I heaved upon them the burden of my indiscriminate and unexamined history. Was I seeking redemption or telegraphing fair warnings in order to escape personal responsibility?

There was the boyfriend whom I resented for disbelieving that I had been faithful to him, his jealousy and paranoia eventually drove us apart. Only now after working a fourth step do I realize: how could he have trusted me after regaling him with uncensored tales of my every past infidelity?

The last lover was a learned, compassionate listener. When we broke up, I did not take it well. After all I had revealed about myself, how could he not understand me now when I most needed it? I wanted to destroy him for not loving me. It was horrifying when the will-to-revenge that plagued my early break-ups returned after 20 years.

For the first time, I confessed this to friends who feared for my sanity. My resentment did not go away. I meditated and read self-help books. My resentment did not go away. Finally in desperation I

turned to the last person alive whom I would want to have proof of my ruthless insanity. I wrote the ex-lover an email explaining these constant trespassing thoughts of vengeance, with the professed hope that in this last confession they be lifted. Ill-affected from grace to gall by such an admission, he listened at arm's-length with enough departing compassion to dissolve my inner fury. It worked!

Here's the thing. The ex-lover was not a trained therapist. My friends and family are not social workers. I may become momentarily free of my demons, but at whose expense?

Only a Higher Power has the capacity to transmute all the toxic effects of the untreated trauma evidenced in sex and love addiction. SLAA meetings are an appropriate place to reveal the shame, to share that burden. The Fourth Step is the means by which one's fragmented past—which is the filter and the lens through which one experiences life—through shared clarity sees the light of day.

Much of my own fourth step work revolved around such a need for clarity. There was so much

confusion with this step. I just couldn't understand the inventory columns, the correct order, the definitions, etc., and that was just on a practical level. On a psychological and spiritual level my personal history revealed itself a muddle of unformed impressions and unhealthy assumptions. Writing out my fourth step took me an entire year.

My original intent was to dredge up every bad memory in order to disarm their addictive emotional charge and purge their recurring effect on my life. The effort felt like sinking in quicksand, it was not long before a certain paralysis overcame me.

My sponsor directed me to identify basic themes instead of the minutia of each event. Rather than list every single insult so-and-so ever yelled at me and when, I merely wrote in the second column that they "verbally abused me." Next to this I wrote a brief account of one outstanding example of this behavior — usually the first memory that came to mind.

The second column for one particular family member for whom I felt resentments included "verbally abused me," "blamed me," and "manipulated me." I now

recognize that these particular behaviors are part of the family curse which I have inherited. Marie-Louise von Franz, the Jungian psychoanalyst, examines the meaning of family curses in her book "Psychological Meaning of Redemption Motifs in Fairy Tales." These fictional curses describe very real psychological distortions and deformities that are passed on by family members, often through generations. It takes heroic effort to overcome the mythic evil that might exist in any given family.

Of course, it's easier to recognize the failings of others in our family and around us rather than to locate our participation in life's conflicts. And this is not only because of egocentric pride that seeks to minimize our losses. There's also a question of limited vantage point which the 4<sup>th</sup> step works to expand.

Unknowingly, I have often hid behind these 'others' with their raging character defects. I remember working at an office job where one of my coworkers casually remarked that I talk about myself a lot. I was so indignant. "What?? You've got to be kidding. You should see my

friends — I'm the only one who *doesn't* talk about themselves constantly!" Of course, she knew only me. To my scale I kept myself in check, to her scale I was a raging narcissist! It's kind of like everyone around me is stealing a hundred dollars and I only steal one dollar, allowing me to act as if that is not stealing.

So it was with seeing my part that insidiously preceded most of my resentments. The 4<sup>th</sup> step is not really concerned with balancing the books for every painful interaction. It seems to me more about clearing away such clutter in order to realize the larger context of one's entire life. And this, in turn, often requires a careful recalibration of one's scale of perception.

Laid out in a line like this, column by column, let all the haunting experiences out of my head where they would ricochet off one another causing such an echo I could never fully listen. I thought I knew my trauma. I thought I knew where I screwed up. Laying it out in a line like this, it became evident how one event fueled the next, on and on. It took this fourth step for me to realize how I had not fully grasped the impact of my trauma. And it was only within the context of all

these life events that I could actually see how seriously I had screwed up at times.

How misguided it had been to engage in anonymous sex or dead-end relationships as if to compensate for low self-esteem and loneliness. I remember utterly believing I was being sexually liberated, reclaiming my rightful queer identity and overcoming all that gay shame growing up by hooking up with as many strangers as possible, going to bathhouses, and participating in orgies like these were all acts of empowerment. What a delusion!

I found in doing the 4<sup>th</sup> step that the gay shame I felt growing up was still there. How could it not be? I'd never dealt with it directly, only through numbing out and covering it up. There is no such thing as compensation when it comes to emotional experiences. You will never experience enough happiness to make up for the sadness. The only way to process pain is to sit with it like you would a dying friend and hold its hand.

So, to speak directly to the sponsor process, there is a common misconception that I often hear in SLAA about finding the 'right' sponsor as if this person can make

or break your recovery. We might as well still be searching for “the one” - that magic relationship that will one day complete us. My take is that anyone in this program can lead you through the first three steps. *So if you haven't yet — find a sponsor and start working the steps!* The fourth step can be complex and a certain level of trust and understanding is essential.

We, however, do nothing in and of ourselves. From the search for the right sponsor to all our struggles writing the fourth step inventory, such efforts are often symptomatic of sex and love addiction in the thought process that we must exert perfect control over external circumstances to achieve the ‘right’ kind of recovery. *Step 3: We made a decision to turn our lives and our will over to the care of God as we understood God.* We will not find lasting trust with any sponsor (or in any relationship) until we establish this trust in the Higher Power of our understanding.

To perceive your particular sponsor as God-given does not mean the interaction will not be messy sometimes, or triggering, or even unhealthy, or enlightening, or calming, or supportive. It does not always mean you should stay. It

does not necessarily mean you should move on.

Today I am working another fourth step with another sponsor in another program. This time I am going into greater detail dredging up my past. I am in a new place. That is what is so great about this program. I have heard members tell of incredible stumbles and mistakes on their 4<sup>th</sup> step, of feeling woefully inadequate and imperfect, and still all experiencing the stunning realizations, transformation and blessings that this step offers in particular. There is a Higher Power who brings us each the lessons we need to learn just at the exact moment. Always!

While working the steps, whether in a second program or a third program, it is easy to think there is not enough time in the day. What is remarkable is that when you finally move in the direction of facing your issues it creates *more time* in your life. Time is a truly psychological substance. The need for more time is basically a need to have a presence. Thanks to the Fourth Step, I'm no longer hiding from myself. For what feels like the first time, I am showing up

for the most passionate and personal affair: my life.

-Tom B., Los Angeles

## **Share Space**

### **Me and Mrs. Jones (woo woo)**

An excellent piece of all-around advice I once got was: "Never kiss a married man." I found that much harder to follow than the advice about not making important decisions with a head full of snot. Married men are catnip to your basic love junkie.

For one, it's all so tragic and dramatic. If only he had met you first! You two were fated to be together, had not cruel fate intervened. Yes, I know that's contradictory on its face. Don't argue with someone in love. It's dangerous. Married men are like unappreciated artists, or suicide survivors, or vampires, and relationships with them are similarly doomed, beautifully, romantically doomed.

This, of course, is the point. Because deep down, what a love junkie is terrified of is actual intimacy. The illusion of relationship beats the hell out of "What do you want for dinner tonight, honey?"

Next great thing about married men: They are incredibly affectionate and forthcoming about their feelings. They can ADORE you unreservedly, because they have no fear of commitment to get in the way. There's a simple reason for this: They are already committed, to someone else!

Third – and we're getting down to stuff you should be talking to your therapist about, now – married or otherwise unattainable men are a self-fulfilling prophecy for women with zero self esteem. You don't genuinely believe you deserve someone your life. Guess what? You don't have to worry about that any more. Plus, if you can snag some other woman's man, even for a little while, you must be better than her, right? Your desirability has been confirmed for one more night. You can breathe again.

Then there's the whole Forbidden Love aspect of it. It's taboo and rebellious and edgy. Admit it, that's just plain sexy. In a world where age, race, religion, social class, geography and even gender are no longer barriers to relationship, it is hard to find a good obstacle to bang your head against. Some of us like banging our head against things. Helps drown out the voices inside.



It was harder and took me longer to get off married men than to get off cocaine. What I didn't know at the time was that, neurochemically speaking, they were pretty much the same thing. Married men are cheaper, easier to come by, and generally legal. That does not, it turned out, make them a better idea.

By the way, if any married men I've slept with are reading this, I apologize for taking time away from your family and career. It was a selfish, jerk face move on my part. You were and are a lovely person. I just should have taken the advice I was so freely given and never kissed you in the first place.

-Ethlie V  
Beverly Hills, CA

### **Recovery Takes Time**

I came to SLAA not knowing what to expect. My first meeting was in a room with three other people. I was scared out of my wits. I couldn't wait to get out of there. I listened as people admitted aloud that they were sex addicts and love addicts. I thought I'd never be able to admit that to a bunch of strangers. Now one year later I am so much more confident walking into that room. I see those people at the meeting as friends, and I am much less quick to judge them or

myself. I still struggle everyday with my sex addiction and when I feel out of control or something unexpected happens in my life, I turn to my drug of choice, internet porn. But going to meetings has settled me down and hearing how other people struggle with similar issues in their lives gives me hope. When I started my recovery "hope" seemed very far away. I didn't believe other people when they said that they had hope. But now I feel hopeful. Every day I try to remind myself that I am not alone in this process and that when life feels chaotic I can always reach to others. I am so grateful for SLAA and what it has given me in such a short amount of time. I love to hear other people's stories of recovery, and although it still feels scary, I am learning to find joy in sharing my own.

Thank you!  
-John W  
Brunswick, ME

### **Healthy Dating**

I have been in the program for close to six years. All of my life dating had consisted of having a drink or two and moving toward sex. I had no idea how to be intimate without sex. To me intimacy was sex.

As I worked my program I began to see just how terrified I was of intimacy. It was clear to me that I was not interested in dating without a drink or two. I went on a few dates where alcohol was involved. An interesting note is that I am not a drinker. It was clear that I connected dating with alcohol. There was a ritual involving drinking and having sex.

Once I began dating while in recovery, by the grace of my Higher Power, I was with gentlemen that knew me and cared enough to not take advantage of what was clearly unhealthy behavior.

The longer I worked my program the more interested I became in sober dating. I had the first sober date of my life five years into my recovery from sex and love addiction. It was a life changing experience. I was able to be present with the man I was with. I turned down alcohol because I wanted to be sober. It was not difficult for me to make that choice. I knew early on that this relationship would not progress, but I will be forever grateful for the experience of self respect I gained that evening.

Through the program of SLAA I have learned how to value myself

and I now realize I am worthwhile and must take good care of myself. I also believe that the men I date deserve to be valued and not used to meet my selfish needs.

I would very much like to be in a long term relationship, but I am not willing to sacrifice my recovery today for a romantic relationship with a man. Because of this I have not done a lot of dating. It has taken me many years to learn how to relate to men in a nonsexual way. I have worked hard on learning how to be a healthy woman in all of my relationships. This has not been easy or quick for me, but it has been well worth the slow hard work.

The most important aspect of recovery for me has been learning how to take good care of myself. There was no way I could date in a healthy manner without learning good boundaries and gaining self-esteem. This all required working the program using the steps, meetings, getting a sponsor and patience. I am so grateful for SLAA and all that I have learned from fellow members.

-Teri D