

theJournal

September-October 2010

Single Issue \$3



The Joys of Recovery

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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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:

The topic of this month's issue is the joy of recovery. While this seems like an obvious theme choice, it raises many questions for me. What is joy? Clearly my compulsive pursuit of happiness through my addiction was not joyful. Quite the contrary, it was painful. As I have heard in meetings many times, pursuit of my addiction to fill the emptiness and pain in my soul was like drinking saltwater to quench my thirst. The more I pursued my addiction the more ill I became. Now that I am in recovery, I ask myself different questions. How do I, as an addict, view joy? Is joy the emotional high of a new phase in my relationship with my wife? Is it the satisfaction of work successfully accomplished, money earned or material positions obtained? I am beginning to understand that, for me, it can be none of these things. I am coming to understand that true joy begins in the silence of serenity when my obsessions and compulsions ebb and I have space in my mind to contemplate other things, time to see the small things of reality in the absence of attachment to my addiction. I find that true joy also comes from learning to open myself up to the world and others within the world, to take the risk to see myself and others differently. Letting go helps me to allow joy to fill the emptiness. Letting go helps to finally hear what others are actually saying and own my own feelings. Joy for me is walking the path of recovery, not fully knowing where it will lead me, but having faith in my higher power that the road taken in sobriety will be the best possible road I can ever walk. May this issue of the *Journal* and words of those who express their truth for all to read, bring you joy 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 experi-

ence 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

SLAA-ALT Group: stopover.ky.us.starlink-irc.org/cgi-bin/irc.cgi

International SLAA Online Group: www.internationalslaaonline.org

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

South Florida Intergroup e-Group of SLAA: 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

In addition, there is a special telemeeting series, **Skills for Healthy Loving**

2010-11 Telemeeting Series - Skills for Healthy Loving

Presented by: Conference Healthy Relationships Committee

Event Date: Saturday, November 20, 2010

Event Date: Saturday, December 18, 2010

Event Date: Saturday, January 15, 2011

Event Date: Saturday, February 19, 2011

Event Date: Saturday, March 19, 2011

For Inquiries: <http://www.slaafws.org/files/>

[Healthy+relationships+flyer%202010-11%20series.pdf](http://www.slaafws.org/files/Healthy+relationships+flyer%202010-11%20series.pdf)

These 7 one-hour telemeetings 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

Upcoming Events

14th Annual Spiritual Renewal & Recovery Retreat

Presented by: Los Angeles Intergroup

Where: Malibu, California

Event Date: Friday, November 26, 2010 - Sunday, November 28, 2010

For Inquiries: <http://www.slaafws.org/files/>

[14th%20Announcement.pdf](http://www.slaafws.org/files/14th%20Announcement.pdf)

Join members of the SLAA fellowship at the magnificent Serra

Retreat Center in Malibu, California, for a week-end of spiritual renewal. Workshops, speaker meetings, recovery panel and keeping current meetings help members recommit to their personal recovery. And there is plenty of time scheduled for quiet walks and conversation. Serra Retreat Center is in the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains and overlooks the Pacific Ocean.

Annual Pocono Step Retreat

Presented by: Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup

Where: Mt. Pocono, PA

Event Date: Friday, December 3, 2010 - Sunday, December 5, 2010

For Inquiries: Contact: dvicorrespondingsecretary@comcast.net or 856-745-4844

Guided Meditations

Seeking original writing contributions of 10-minute guided meditations on the theme of “Power in Surrender” (or any theme of your choice) that represent the principles of recovery as expressed in the SLAA basic text. Pending group conscience, selected guided meditations may be published in the Journal and read aloud* during meditation meetings and possibly recorded for a CD of SLAA-related Guided Meditations for sale through the FWS store, all proceeds benefitting SLAA. Guided meditations are simple meditative instructions read aloud asking participants to focus on breathing, visual imagery, ideas, prayers, affirmations, and/or creative visualizations. The result is usually to bring participants to a relaxed and receptive state ideal for silent meditation.

To submit your original writing, please visit <http://slaafws.org/journalsubmit>

*Selected material will be read, and possibly recorded, by individuals selected by name submission followed by group conscience.

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 an internet technician. 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.

Internet Technician

The Internet Tech manages the Journal website, and works with the Marketing Director to update website content. As the CJC has voted to offer online subscriptions in the future, we need someone computer literate with proficient web design skills interested in developing the e-Journal. There is no sobriety requirement.

Interested?

If interested in one or more of the above positions, visit 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 or submit a press release just as you would a story through 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 for details

Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

responses for your enjoyment and edification. They are not presented in any particular order.

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, "What are the joys you have experienced in your recovery so far?" Here are some wonderful

WHAT ARE THE JOYS YOU'VE EXPERIENCED IN YOUR RECOVERY SO FAR?

I've learned to laugh, often.

-Marc S., Pittsburgh PA

Hope for a beautiful life full of love and serenity – becoming the person I truly am.

-Martin, Mannheim, Germany

The greatest joy I have experienced is this: after going through an extended but sober withdrawal, a deepening awareness of my Higher Power's love has revealed a particularly precious quality within me which has helped me to build true intimacy with others.

-Suzanne T., Asheville NC

The greatest joy is not a joy at all. It's a much simpler item on the feelings agenda. Just peace with me and a degree of serenity to enjoy a life that is actually worth living. It beats the heck out of my old daily efforts at various slow forms of suicide. And it lasts longer than the old momentary rushes of euphoria.

-Eric EE, Dallas Fort Worth, TX

I am finally experiencing the freedom from attaching magical qualities to others. I am allowing people to be themselves without having to meet my needs, but rather encouraging them as they pursue their own life goals. Sharing humanity rather than demanding humanity has been the greatest gift for me.

-Debi, Sherman Oaks CA

I am more aware of myself and getting integrity. I concentrate less on the needs of others or serving more than necessary. I am being here and now, every day.

-Luciano, Warsaw, Poland

No more Emotional
Terrorism.

-Richard, Los Angeles CA

When I emerged, I was in denial. Now I thank God every day for bringing me here. I see my patterns and so, I avoid them. In return, my home is peaceful and far more joyous.

-Audrey, Hollywood CA

I am being present for my daughter and my family. I am living the promises. I have been in the program since 1997. I had lost everything when the program helped me to see that I am a worthwhile person. I have rebuilt my life mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally. I am happy to be in service.

-Kurt M., Hartford CT

I have improved relations with my family. I have more friends and more life activities.

-Teri B, Oklahoma City OK

The biggest joy for me is to finally learn to enjoy life without a significant other. I've finally learned to be happy in solitude. I never thought I'd achieve that, and feared it would be something that would take me a lifetime to get to, but five months into this program and voila!

-Carrie B., Los Angeles CA

Since I walked into these rooms, I have been on a journey to discover myself. I was always so caught up in whomever I was dating - and trying their beliefs and values on for size - that I never knew myself. I love this new experience. Even if it causes me pain, I know it is growth.

-Alissa M., North Hollywood CA

I now have the freedom to make choices about what is best for me rather than reacting to feelings and impulse. The discipline during withdrawal has given me the faith and hope that with the help of my Higher Power and the fellowship I can be a valuable participant in the world to be trusted and am on the track to being the woman I want to be.

-Kate K., Los Angeles CA

I am becoming present with love and acceptance for relationships with loved ones and recovery friends.

-Susan L., Houston TX

On the top of my list is being able to experience peace. I've also learned to channel my energy into healthy, creative endeavors developing talents I didn't know I had. In addition, I've learned to be present with friends and develop true intimacy.

-Yi L., Studio City CA

I am joyful for clarity, just the ability to drive without 'waking up' in another city. I am joyful for being able to remember what to do next. I am no longer drowning in fantasy. Also working with newcomers and sponsees is a great joy in that I am reminded where I was and where I would be if I stopped working the program.

-John B., Glendale CA

Today I am so grateful to let go of outcomes. I am a controlling person - I want to control everything. Because of the program, I am learning to do the work (inside program as well as my professional life.) I need to do my work and put out what I want and release. This is all I can do, the rest is up to my power greater than myself.

-Marc P., Culver City CA

While sponsoring I got to see my sponsee work the steps and have a spiritual awakening. Seeing God work in her life was like having a front row seat to God's glorious show of grace and love. All I had to do was show up and watch God's plan unfold.

-Monique S., Venice, CA

I am not lured to spend time "clicked in" to fantasy of romance in order to feel validated and numb my pain. I joyfully feel confident that I am connected to God, living in the NOW.

-Joanne D., Hollywood CA

I am joyful for having choice. I have more choices in my life today. It is challenging still and I have many temptations but staying sober I have many healthy choices.

-John K., Hollywood CA

If joy is 'a condition or feeling of great pleasure or happiness,' then the joys I've experienced in my recovery from sex and love addiction "so far" are: being sober, being sponsored, being in the steps, being of service, and being spiritual, but the biggest joyance is the enlightening delight I've discovered in simply 'being.'

-Brent T. S., Mar Vista CA

I am joyful for reconnecting with my family. I thought that I had lost my brother, but because of my work in this program I now have a loving relationship with him and I am able to be actively involved in my nephews' lives. This is something that wouldn't have been possible without the program.

-Nicole D., Santa Monica CA

Knowing that I have dreams, a life - my life, friends; knowing that I can show up for all this.

-Joe, Hollywood CA

One of the joys of recovery is finally knowing who I am and being able to be authentic in all of my relationships. I have learned how to take care of myself even around "unsafe" people.

-Cindy Z., Phoenix AZ

Reclaiming my own worth and acquiring the tools to take it slow and let love enter my personal and professional relationships.

-Mastin, Los Angeles CA

Next Question of the Day

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT IN SLAA RECOVERY THIS YEAR?

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 or use the Contact Us page at www.theSLAAJournal.org/contact.html. Responses that are appropriate for publication may be published in the next issue of the Journal. For future questions of the day, please check the Journal website.

THE THEME: JOYS OF RECOVERY

Thankful to God

When I met my husband, he was so sweet and so warm with people that I would have never guessed he had any problems. I remember that he looked at women, but we were very much in love.

Like most newlyweds, I soon built up resentments towards my husband. I would tell him right away how I felt in any situation. I didn't want to be "run over."

Next came 6 years of miscarriages and in vitro fertilizations.

After my husband and I were married for 6 years, he had an affair. It was then that we turned to counselors for help. Our counselor sent us to SA and SANON.

I learned about my husband's addiction to porn. We went through a lot. He moved out, but we were



reunited because he didn't have a place to live. I had never turned my husband down when he wanted sex before the affair, but after the affair I had so many fears. I didn't want to contract anything. We probably should have never reunited until we got help, but we did.

Next came 5 years of ... it's hard to remember. I was content because I loved God and enjoyed

our times together, but my husband didn't feel the same way.

I didn't think things were all that bad, so I was surprised when my husband walked out the door a second time, beginning a separation which lasted for 13 months. I kept praying to be reunited, but it was not happening. Our church helped a lot with counseling.

I was not in a 12-step program at the time. My husband returned to SA during the middle of our separation.

Then, he found SLAA, but the conflict inside him still told him to leave our marriage. On Christmas Day, he told me he just wanted to "be friends."

I then knew I was powerless over our situation. I hit my bottom. I went back to SANON and asked God to forgive me for my part in my marriage.

Now I was going to 12-step meetings almost daily. I would also go to AA meetings to hear people talk about their addictions. I was focusing on me and not on my husband.

My husband began following the advice of the 12-step program

and the advice of many other people - to not rush into divorce.

The "Love Dare" was another crucial part of our reuniting, something God put on my heart. Just 30 some days after Christmas Day, my husband said "I love you." God had done a miracle.

What am I like today? Now I wait before I make any comment to my husband. No one has asked me to do that. It's just an idea God gave me, I guess. I try to figure out what is going on before I speak. What about my controlling behaviors?

My husband always said I was so controlling in our marriage. So I looked into that.

I started asking people about control. I learned through my church that God does not even control us.

He gives us free will.

And what is the status of our marriage? Marriage is great when two people focus individually on their own lives. I am grateful for the direction from God, my church, and the 12-step program.

-Anonymous

The Joy Of Constant Faith

The topic “Joys of Recovery” ironically is playing out in my life right now. I have just finished Step Five.

One of the gifts — I didn’t see going into Step Four but I can look back and it is all there in black and white in the text for the AA Big Book and our big book — is the gift of faith. This gift was really given to me through working Steps Four and Five with my sponsor. I immediately had opportunities where gaining this gift became so abundantly clear to me.

For example, I had been unemployed for almost eight months. I had gotten to the point where all my savings was gone and all my credit cards were at the limit. I could not borrow money from people anymore and I was ready to just take any possible job.

I mean, I went to college so I sort of had this chip on my shoulder. I wanted more than a mundane job. I was pursuing a new career track and I had gotten to the point where I was almost giving up.

Instead of being faithful that it was going to work out, I started to let my old fears creep in and started thinking I should not stay true to my long-term goals.

I had a day or two of weakness where I was thinking that way. Then I woke up one day and just realized that I would be selling myself short again if I continued



to think this way. I suddenly realized this had been a pattern of thinking my whole life.

So I said “No. Wow, it does not work that way. You do not get the luxury of having these negative thoughts all the time. You are good at what you do. You are going to stay true to this new aim that you have and have faith that the right job will come along in time.”

Swear to God, I no more than make that mental decision in my head, when that afternoon I get a phone call from the old professor in the woodworking program that I attended. He is looking to hire someone and he wants me to come in for an interview. This is a great sign! In addition, that same day I got two emails about two more interviews.

So I quite literally made the decision to live in faith. My desire was genuine and my life changed.

More recently, my wife after a very inconspicuous and seemingly unimportant spat decides to tell

me that I have made her miserable from day one, she hates her life, and she wants a divorce. In the past, I would have just spun out of control.

But for some reason, because I was given this gift of faith, I was able to look at the situation in a different light. I immediately prayed to my higher power. As a consequence, I was able to tell myself "Oh, this is what's supposed to happen today."

When I did that, when that was my instinct to have that commentary with my higher power, I realized, "Wow, this is how my thinking changes when I'm living in faith." Everything seems purpose-driven, everything seems okay and right.

I am still in the midst of not knowing whether my wife is actually going to mail out divorce papers or not, but I am just showing up every day. I'm just living one day at a time.

There are moments when it is overwhelming, I am sad, and I cry.

Then there are moments when I just have the clarity to know there are other things I am supposed to be doing today.

I have a meeting to attend. I have intergroup to attend. The

ability to respond appropriately to what is going on in life is completely a gift of working steps four and five and earning this notion of faith.

It has been a huge joy for me. I mean, it is so ironic to me that in the midst of a possible divorce, I am so happy. And it is not happiness because I might be free of my wife it is just happiness because I really see myself responding differently than I used to respond in the past.

For me that is the most important difference. The word responsibility is really these two words. It is the ability to respond.

And when I was in my addiction, I had a very poor ability to respond to bad situations. And in recovery I am really seeing that I am gaining an ability to respond in a healthy way to bad situations.

For me, just seeing that change has been just deeply joyous for me and even further instills this faith that my higher power will take care of me until the day I die, whether that's tomorrow or that's fifty years from now. And that is just a completely new feeling to feel that way.

-Donn B., Los Angeles

The Joy of Relationship

The difference from when I first came in to where I am at now is like how night differs from day. That difference has brought joy to my life. I am now in a relationship since January 2010.

Before this, I had not been in a relationship in over 10 years. This relationship break was not due to just sex and love addiction, but general recovery.

I just needed a lot of time alone to heal. Looking back, I felt punished. I felt like I was going to be alone forever, never connecting with another human being.

The first two years of SLAA were a time to express my hostility. I spent a year in AA and then I started working in the sex industry, which for me, at that time, I thought would be a good way to talk to people.

So I did not see it as a part of sex and love addiction. I saw it as a coping mechanism similar to alcohol being a remedy to “fix” an alcoholic. As they say we are “self-medicating.”

I would say that my various acting out behaviors were self-medicating. I did not have the terminology for it at the time.

I did not really know I was a sex and love addict and there are

ways to heal this.

The value of going to meetings, sitting in rooms and hearing people’s stories helped me to see people as people. I was forced to listen to their experiences.

This was new to me, because until recently, I objectified everyone. When I say hostility, I mean I saw people as just cardboard cutouts who were getting in my way. I compartmentalized and easily judged others.

I decided who I would bother talking to or not, or who might be a friend, or who was interesting. I made these judgments before anybody opened their mouth.

So sitting in the rooms, I found myself relating to so many people’s stories that I never thought I would.

I started to soften and have compassion, especially with men. I had so much rage and so much anger and fear toward men, that I didn’t think men had feelings.

Listening to them in meetings revealed beliefs and experiences very similar to what I was experiencing – like trying to connect, and have love in their lives.

People ask me how I got into a relationship. Just like 12-step programs say: Get a plant. If it lives,

move on to a pet. If the pet lives, then try a human. So I did! I remember I got a plant, I think I still have a few plants alive around my home.

At the time I wanted to move. I was in an apartment but I wanted to get a house with a yard and a doggie door so I could get a little dog. When I got my little dog, the first thing I thought was he was going to get on my nerves.

He followed me around, he wanted and needed too much of me. I did not have the care to give him, I decided he wasn't cute, he was a brat, and how do I return him?

Then I called my friend—fortunately, she's in this program—and she said to me “I didn't like my dog either, I didn't think my dog was cute. They grow on you.” And I said, “Really? I've never heard this.” It was almost like a mom saying they do not like their baby.

So she says, “Yeah, they grow on you. He'll get cuter.” And I was really scared of him not doing what I say, bringing me back again to rage and violence, me hurting him if he does not listen to me.

My dog always wanted to be so close to me. His little face was right up next to my face, and I would complain for six months after I got the dog. During this time, all my

shares in SLAA were, “My dog this, my dog that...” I would come home and something was actually there to greet me. My life was getting bigger. It really was.

So the same thing happened when I started dating the guy I'm seeing now.

I said the same things. “He's too close to me. He always wants to be kissing me. I don't know if I like him. I want to get rid of him.”

There is a saying that I've heard from a sponsor, “Date 'em til you hate 'em.” Such an experience usually comes after the withdrawal process is complete, after you are fine alone getting your own interests and hobbies, and your life gets big and full and you like being in your own life.

This was not my experience. When I first came into the program, my life was black and white when I was not sexually active. When I was sexually active, however, it was in color, it was rich, and everything mattered.

It was exactly like the Big Book says, I was like a dazed animal waiting to be prodded into life. Sex was a euphoric. It did not matter the length of physical contact, whether it was in a relationship or just a one-time experience—I felt it just was somebody else validating me rather than myself.

That became terminology I heard, I didn't know that was how I was operating. It took a long time to have self value, self love, integrity and virtue, things I did not know how to put into place. I had to start with bottom lines, doing the steps in SLAA and doing the work.

I was in the program for about two years before I got a sponsor. Once I did, she ran me through Steps 1, 2, and 3 rather quickly. We went to a meeting and afterward a restaurant. She sat me down and laid out steps 1, 2, 3 on paper.

Then she gave me instructions to Step 4. The first thing she told me to do was to buy a teddy bear. I was not going to do that, but looking back, I believe a lot of this was to help me soften.

It was also a way to start expressing love in a different way, because I was convinced love was only achieved through sex. The love of a pet and family, that was just a given. It did not really feel like something to work for, maybe I did not value it. I felt love around me in nature, but it did not give me the same reward I got from sex.

She also told me to make a collage of how I saw my life. At the time I was really confused with a vocation and what I wanted to be

doing in life. I was really expecting God as my spiritual source to provide that for me.

I needed a purpose but I was not sure what it was. I hear a lot of people in the meeting share about how their work is tied into SLAA. As an artist, I definitely felt that mine was similarly tied to SLAA.

I was often asked to participate in a lot of activities, and I'd say, "Yea, sure!" without really thinking whether I wanted to do it or not. I said yes so often, liking to be wanted. It was similar with my dating experiences. I liked to be wanted. It did not matter if I wanted the person as well, I just wanted to be wanted.

Looking back, my relationship with my family was very similar. My desire to be liked came from childhood roots. I did not know how to reciprocate. I wanted to be wanted and validated, and yet I did not have anything to give back, so I would vanish.

I had no sense of who I was. You hear people say "Just be yourself" on a date, and I always thought "Which one?" I had only different ways of acting to get what I wanted. It was about objectification and a dependence on external validation. It took spending years in the program to develop an inside instead of the card-

board cutouts of my pleasing behavior. Just as real human flesh starts to form as a person. That is what I relate to now, not outside, not to external validation.

So let me get back to starting my 4th Step. Another thing that my sponsor asked me was whether I was on any medication. Going through withdrawal is similar to depression and anxiety.

I see it being common that people take medication around this time. I do not remember if I was on medication at that time or not, but she advised me to ask when I began to sponsor other people.

So now I ask, "Are you on medication, are you seeing a therapist, what's actually happening to you in your withdrawal process?" Because withdrawal makes you feel like you want to die.

It says we surrender our whole life strategy one day at a time, to let go of this mental obsession, physical obsession, to have another life so that there is trust.

Faith is needed, and a lot of prayer and meditation, and tons and tons of meetings and fellowship, and talking to people, constantly calling and asking what your experience is and sharing it with another person when there is a need. The support in the fellowship is so valuable, and if you are just working with a sponsor you

are not really in the group. The group, I think, is developing where love is, where God is and people are sharing their experiences.

After the withdrawal process, anorexia is always lurking! There was an anorexia meeting that I went to early on in the beginning of my recovery.

I walked into the meeting and there might have been six people sitting on the floor with pillows – this is my recollection – and I sat down and the Anorexia pamphlet was being read, and I related to so many of the characteristics, it was really painful to hear.

My first thought was, "I'm not catching this. This is contagious; I'm out of here. I'm going to get a pair of pretty arms to lie in and call it a day." I was working on a 4th Step in another program, and I was so turned off by anorexia. It just wasn't sexy.

I would rather be a sex addict at least that involved some action. Probably the reason why I was so turned off by sexual anorexia was that I really related to it, being alone, keeping people away. In addition I was an extrovert, so I really related to social anorexia, particularly the part about being around a lot of people, having a lot of fun, but just feeling alone and isolated. I also appreciated not wanting to leave the

house, not doing something, not doing something, and not doing something.

All this tied into my depression with a feeling very similar to the withdrawal depression of “Oh no, I’m never getting up and dating, I’m not going to connect with another human being ever again, and I never like anybody.”

I did not go back to the anorexia meeting for a long time. I started dating somebody while doing a 4th Step in another program, and a lot of things happened, a lot of action to avoid the anorexic reality. Years later when I started going back to anorexia meetings, I shared my initial fears.

It invoked a lot of “Me too, Oh, me too” from others. I am not sure, but I know that the top line meetings really helped me to get out of my anorexia, to do things differently, to take action.

I got really afraid of saying that I am an anorexic. I kept thinking that it was a phase. It had part to do with sex and love addiction, but I did not want to label myself as an anorexic sex and love addict. It was so painful to relate to it and to be in it, that I never wanted to take it on as a rule for myself, but I pushed myself to face my anorexia.

I think I pushed because I was real, I felt it, and it is hard to get

out of it. I worked really hard to stay busy or to force myself to date, to get on the phone and make calls when I did not want to, just stay as proactive as possible.

It was especially hard to keep going to top line meetings. These meetings forced me to prepare to be active, try to join groups of people and not isolate. I was afraid of being swallowed up and engulfed in anorexia.

It was really hard. I do not even know that I can describe the feeling. I do not feel anorexic now, but I know it is like the flip side of a coin of sex and love addiction. Not acting out but acting in.

Before recovery, I could barely walk down the streets when couples walked by holding hands. I just felt so envious and alone and separate.

“How do other people have love in their life when I don’t?” I felt the same way about the dog. “How do those people get to have a dog?” I saw things so negatively, “everybody out there can figure something out but me - I’m left out and alone.” I especially felt that way about people having love in their life. Holding hands, getting married. I considered that normal, what normal people do. I never knew how to be nor-

mal. I felt so abnormal that I did not want to share in the success of strangers.

I loved going to weddings, I was definitely able to celebrate my friends' weddings.

But going to a movie by myself (which I love doing) or going to a play by myself always felt as though I was the person sitting behind that couple that's kissing, holding hands... there's always somebody saving somebody a seat... there's a partnership... someone gets the person popcorn... and I am just left alone on an island by myself struggling to muster through this world alone.

I remember watching the sunset in Santa Barbara and taking pictures of other people taking pictures of all these brides and grooms and thinking it was such a beautiful thing. And that was a marker of how much I've changed.

I used to think too when I saw a pregnant woman, "Oh, somebody loves her - !" And then I'd realize, "No, I don't know that to be true." That could have been a prison conjugal visit for all I know. I felt so unloved that I spurned the idea of love.

Now I'm in love and I am happy. How did this happen? I

think by doing a lot of things opposite to my addiction and anorexia and learning that my thinking was faulty. I constantly have to really challenge my faulty thinking and say, "Well, that's not really true."

I need to make phone calls. I feel very lucky. I am not sure how it came about, but I like who I am, and I like who my partner is able to see today. Before, I could not say these things.

I would say that maybe I tricked somebody into liking me, falling in love with me, or my sexuality was a commodity. That is not the case now.

Now it is based on friendship. I had always heard that you can have a relationship with friendship, where your partner is your best friend.

That concept terrified me because I thought that meant that I would not be attracted to the person as a friend. I have learned that it is not the case.

I feel blessed and that this was a miracle and God-given. Today, I feel that I cherish my blessings, that I am really grateful, that there is no sense of entitlement. There is just appreciation.

— Jill W.

SHARE SPACE
CONFESSIONS OF A HAPPY JOYOUS AND FREE AGNOSTIC -
FINDING RECOVERY

I am a member of a small subgroup in SLAA – sober agnostics. I have been sober over 5 years. I am also sober 28 years in another fellowship– all without a belief in God. First, I want to say that in the Big Book of AA, “We Agnostics” is not by agnostics.

Rather, it is a grim warning of the perils of non-conformity from Theists. I believe that the chapter is not really directed to non-believers but to Theists in a rebellious child ego-state – believers that are balking or acting out against their core beliefs. It was also written a long time ago, before scores of addicts found recovery without God or at least, not with any convincing conviction about a benevolent deity.

I suggest that belief in a deity is a core belief and that you cannot really “come to believe” in something that is not authentic to your true nature. Step two is about getting real – for Theists, Atheists or Agnostics.

Becoming more authentic is a process – not an event and in steps two and three the key is open-mindedness. Being willing to scrutinize whatever we believe from



time to time in recovery is a healthy activity. I sometimes say, I could have been referred to as “often-wrong-never-in-doubt”, because many times I was 100% sure, but dead wrong at the same time.

I find that doubt is, for me, a higher state of enlightenment than certainty or confidence. Recovery also requires going outside our comfort zone and trying new ways of thinking.

When I was new to the program, being open minded meant trying anything, including praying on my knees or while driving, at meetings and in private. I also tried my hand at the “turning it over to God” vocabulary. Ultimately, I knew I was kidding myself and I wouldn’t continue pre-

tending to believe in God any more than I would insist to a doubting youth that there absolutely is a Santa Claus and he lives at the North Pole.

I find there are three types or phases to living “beyond belief” or being a doubter and I have experienced all of them. First, there is the “apologetic agnostic” who prefaces everything said with “I don’t mean to offend anyone...” or “keep an open mind but...”

The non-believer feels there is a connection between believing and belonging, and craving the belonging of the fellowship, she or he will either feign belief or go out of their way not to raise a commotion that might result in being kicked out on her or his God-rejecting behinds.

Second, there is the “obnoxious agnostic” who is almost looking for fights and will be quick to liken belief in a God in heaven as the same as a newcomer hanging on to the belief that their problem really is not that bad.

I remember finding ways to fit into discussion, my story about how I would love to subscribe to an all loving, all powerful deity that cares about me, has a will for me and the power to protect and enlighten me but for me, that would be insanity and the program

teaches me to seek the truth and shed unsound thinking. At times, I was speaking my truth and at times I was venting my Theist-resentment.

In fairness, I as a free-thinker (agnostic or atheist), have a bone to pick with some of the literature. Disbelief or doubt is disrespected as being nothing more than resistance to change and a threat to recovery.

Just as it is not unpatriotic to expect more from our government, it is not risky business for us to ask how our literature and language could improve to better accommodate the 21st Century new-comer.

Nothing is lost in the spirit of the steps when you look at the agnostic/free-thinker version:

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction —that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe and to accept that we needed strength beyond our awareness and resources to restore us to sanity. [Original: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.]

3. Made a decision to entrust our will and our lives to the care of the collective wisdom and resources of those who have

searched before us. [Original: Made a decision to turn our wills 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 ourselves without reservation and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. [Original: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.]

6. Were ready to accept help in letting go of all our defects of character. [Original: Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.]

7. With humility and openness sought to eliminate our shortcomings. [Original: Humbly asked him 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 meditation to improve our spiritual awareness and our understanding of the SLAA way of life and to discover the power to carry out that way of life.

[Original: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.]

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a 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.

This is one of many versions I have seen work for people. I have seen the term “character defects” removed and replaced with “defenses” too, which is fine. No meaning is lost and no magic spell broken. It still works.

The same is true about the agnostic pre-amble. This group of SLAA attempts to maintain a tradition of free expression, and conduct a meeting where SLAA members may feel free to express any doubts or disbeliefs they may have, and to share their own personal form of spiritual experience, their search for it, or their rejection of it.

We do not endorse or oppose any form of religion or atheism. Our only wish is to assure suffering sex and love addicts that they can find recovery in SLAA without having to accept anyone else’s beliefs or having to deny their

own. The third type of non-believer, I would call the “resolved agnostic.”

In this state, where I hope I spend most of my sober time, I know that what divides me and theists in the program is small compared to the common-ground that binds us. Most of the time, I meditate during the praying in meetings and apply the adage “Live and Let Live” during the sharing portions of the meeting. It is only when others talk of non-belief as a childish phase or recovery without God as being impossible or undesirable that I feel discounted.

Our literature states, “Now we were truly feeling some sense of deep release from the past! We were free of much guilt for our misdeeds, from the shame of having fallen short of our inner values. In many instances, values we

had thought were ours had turned out to be someone else’s. We had shed or changed these to allow the seeds of our own personal wholeness to take root and grow. We were indeed living new, positive, unfolding lives.”

A value such as “turning my will and life over to the care of God” is indeed someone else’s value. I just don’t believe in God or heaven. There is much I don’t understand. I don’t willfully pump my own heart, for instance but I see much of the unknown as chaotic - not a divine mystery.

I joke that you might think the steps without God is a short cut, but actually it’s more work - less delegating and more personal responsibility. But SLAA is for all of us. And you can belong without believing.

-Joe C., Toronto, CANADA

Editor’s note: Publication of this share in *the Journal* is neither intended to espouse a particular belief nor an alternate interpretation of the steps. The intent is to fully share all stories of experience, strength, hope and recovery without bias to the path chosen.

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Feelings, Nothing More Than Feelings...

One of the hallmarks of sex and love addiction, according to the literature, is a tendency to sexualize our feelings. Loneliness, boredom, anxiety... in the addict, these express themselves as (not to put too fine a point on it) horniness. I was always willing to accept this premise, but I had a small problem with it. I couldn't identify a feeling to save my life.

I was told, when I came out of my decades long self-induced anesthesia (thank you, xanax and tobacco), that the six main feelings are Mad/ Sad/ Glad/ In Shame/ In Pain/ Afraid.

This seemed reasonable to me, and euphonic to boot. So I went with it. I quickly discovered that Mad and Afraid (grownups know them as Fear and Anger) were inextricably entwined with Lust. Apparently, these three were the only emotions powerful enough to register. This synesthesia made for some exciting sex and some truly horrible relationships.

In time, I was able to parse feelings a little better. When my eyes leaked for no apparent reason, this was a sign of sadness. If, however, there is a red haze in front of them, I'm probably angry. Pulling the covers over my head and sleeping for 18 hours a



day is a hint I could be sad about something. Trust me. I had to keep it that simple. Without analysis, all feelings would invariably default to Infatuation or Lust.

Regular folk experience this, too. Revenge sex, make-up sex, mercy sex, you're-so-hot-when-you're-angry sex... you don't have to be an addict to confuse lust with other feelings. Marriages – hell entire dynasties – have been founded on confusing love with the desire to rescue or be rescued.

The difference, I guess, is that regular folk (“normies,” we addicts lovingly call them) have the ability to shake the cobwebs out every once in a while and exclaim “What was I thinking!” An addict, continuing to blank out all those confusing and uncomfortable feelings with whatever sub-

stance or behavior does the blessed oblivion trick, never do.

We're like lepers sticking their hands in a fire. Their fingers are too numb to feel the pain, so they don't bother to pull their hands away. They keep repeating the same destructive behavior. In the

leper's case, their fingers get gangrene and fall off. In the addict's case, it's more grudge sex with a different grudgee.

Yup, that's us: A bunch of insensate lepers with gangrenous appendages. And you thought sex addiction was hot!

-Ethlie V. Beverly Hills, CA

I did not realize I was sick. There is hope for management.

Editors Note: This article includes statements that may be triggering to some. If you might be susceptible to triggering language, please read no further. I have included this article in *the Journal* as an example of the experiences that bring individuals to their bottom line and into SLAA recovery. For those of us in recovery for a long-time it serves as a reminder of the progress we have made. For those early in recovery, it is a reminder of the surrender necessary for to begin our path to recovery.

Many of us suffering from sex and love addiction probably do not realize we are addicted. This is my story of how I learned of my addiction, but first a bit of background. As a child I always wanted my step-fathers attention. Once my parents divorced, I suffered with feelings of abandonment. Even as a young pre-teen I would fantasize about sex and

constantly touch myself and masturbate. I would put myself into situations where sex would be available. At age 15, I constantly had sex with my 24-year-old boyfriend. After meeting my real father I started having sex with him, something I initiated. I liked it a lot. Sex with him gave me feelings of fulfillment, love and self-worth, along with feelings of shame for wanting and liking it. I think everyone is attracted to themselves and we all look like our parents.

At age 15, I also started prostituting on the streets and quickly began enjoying sex with several different men a day. After being arrested for it and serving time, I could not return to the lifestyle quick enough.

I started exploring same sex and group sex. I worked doing masturbation shows behind glass. This I thoroughly enjoyed. I could

sit in my booth and watch men moan and masturbate all day long. My interest then turned towards Domination. I became a Dominatrix and made a dungeon in which to torture men. Since I viewed myself as a nice person, I created an alter ego named Mistress Harlot. Mistress Harlot became an alcoholic and enjoyed humiliating and abusing men. After 6 years of tease and denial, I craved hard core sex again, so I started advertising online as a prostitute. Money, alcohol and marijuana could not fill the emptiness of being alone. No man wants his woman to be a whore. When you are laying in bed cuddling and a client calls and your man has to leave so someone else can come have sex with his girlfriend, it is hard to maintain a relationship. Two years ago I fell in love, deeply in love for the first

time in my life. I abused and betrayed my lover and after he left, a deep depression set in. I regretted all the things I had done and tried desperately to regain the relationship I had lost with no luck. I started idolizing him, blaming him for my abuse towards myself, became self destructive to the point of being extremely suicidal. Viewing me through the eyes of others is not healthy. Expecting others to bring me happiness is insane. It was not until recently that I discovered I was sick and I had an addiction. I crave love to the point of extreme. Now I can start focusing on coping with this addiction that will never be cured.

First step is to start attending meetings and getting support from others like me to start trying to have a healthy lifestyle. Wish me luck,

-T

Addiction

I thought I had you locked away in my secret hiding place. Just when I think that things are good, I see your ugly face. Why can't you just let me be? I was doing, oh, so well. Why have you come to drag me back to the fiery pits of hell? I thought that you were done with me. I gave you all I could. I told you I had changed my life. I thought you understood. But, now, you've come back to me...and I can't turn you away. I feel so weak and helpless. I've, yet again, become your prey.

-Tiana G., Beachwood, NJ

The Power of Reaching Out

Throughout my years in S.L.A.A., I have learned many valuable lessons from many people, but none as powerful as the lesson that I learned this week.

I am usually one who keeps his personal and recovery life separate as much as possible. I do this because one can interfere with the other. Yes, there are times when they do blend, but as a general rule I do not share family issues with my friends in recovery. During the past week, however, I was facing a serious, unexpected illness and finally death within my family and it was very stressful. I know that stress is one of the triggers that can cause me to lose my recovery and sobriety. With stress I could easily convince myself that it would be alright to indulge in some bottom-line addictive behavior, just once to try to dull the pain and sorrow that I am feeling.

I thought to myself, "What can I do? I need to do something." Initially, I made a couple of phone calls and sent out some mass emails locally to friends within the Program. Then, I began to fear that no one would respond to my cries for help, so I sent out emails to the Conference Committees on which I serve. I knew that I had a strong support

network available at the click of a mouse. I requested prayers from my brothers and sisters in S.L.A.A. The next morning I was overwhelmed with the number who had already responded to my cry for help and the emails continued. Since giving a final update on the situation there have been even more people reaching out to me offering their sympathy, care and love.

Is this not a part of what S.L.A.A. recovery is all about? Sure, I was not acting out, but still I was in a vulnerable state. I am a strong believer in the power of prayer because of the positive energy that it can bring to even the worst of situations. Although, the prayers did not change the final outcome of the illness due to the severity of its nature, the prayers kept one sex and love addict sober during that week and in the few days following. I surrendered my will to the trust of my Higher Power and with the prayers and encouragement which I received from others, I am still sober.

Although I have had to put my service work on hold for a few days, I had important work to do in being there and supporting other members of my family. While I know that I still have

some stressful days and weeks ahead, I know that I can always reach out to a friend in recovery for support in making it through those days.

I am forever grateful that I made that decision to reach out for the supportive fellowship of others in S.L.A.A. in order to help me through these difficult days.

I have said all of this to remind everyone that if we reach out for the supportive fellowship of others in S.L.A.A. we will be able to continue in our recovery. Please, reach out to others; don't give it a second thought. We all care for one another.

-Garry K., Medina, OH

Resolution

New year

New day

Another 24

Sobriety

Serenity

Surrender – so where is resolution

Resolve that I will be sober

OR

Surrender to my character defects

Resolve that I will attend meetings

OR

Surrender to my weak will

Resolve that I will have serenity

OR

Surrender to my Higher Power

Surrender trumps resolution

Serenity

Sobriety

Another 24

New day

New year

Surrender.

-IrvB Connecticut



The Augustine Fellowship S.L.A.A. Fellowship-Wide Services



July 12-15, 2011
Tuesday through Friday

Theme: Tradition 9

S.L.A.A. as such ought never to be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

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2011 S.L.A.A. Annual Business/Conference Meeting

Host: San Diego County Intergroup



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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