

theJournal

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Recognizing Red Flags

Avoiding Situations That Put Us At Risk

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

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

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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

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

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Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader:

Whenever I think of red flags, I think of the fourth S.L.A.A. sign of recovery: “We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.”

In early program days I didn't see red flags until they had already made me slip. I didn't know something as harmless as an e-mail could quickly turn into a slip. My sponsor said a slip would be like a huge pit in the road. I would keep falling into it, not even seeing it before it was right under my feet. Eventually I would see the pit coming and walk around it even if I turned to look back at it, at least I would avoid it. Eventually I would spot it sooner, until I walked way far away from it with no chance of accidentally falling into it. It always felt like someone was pulling my feet out from under me and I ended up on the floor not knowing how I got there. Learning to recognize red flags requires work: conscious contact (with a Higher Power, group, and sponsor) outreach calls, writing, reading literature, Step work, etc. Sometimes we even need outside help from a therapist or spiritual adviser.

The articles in this issue focus on the fact that red flags often originate in the mind. When our thinking isn't on track with sobriety, we can go off the rails in our actions. If we can learn to recognize the red flags before it's too late, we can stay sober. My sponsor used to say if you let a thought go it's like jumping into a mud pit and before you know it, you're dirty and stuck in the mud unable to move your arms to help yourself out. You can't let the thought go for too long or else you'll find yourself in the mud pit. And sometimes fellows have to help you get out.

In one of the articles in this issue of *the Journal*, the author says “I implore you to ask for God's help right now. Put this down and pray for His direction in whatever area of your life you know you have taken wrong turns in.” I tried it, and it made me feel better instantly. There's a lot of good advice and some humor, too. I'm grateful for all the creative contributions that S.L.A.A. members have given to this issue. Enjoy!

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

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

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“WHAT ARE THE RED FLAGS THAT HELP YOU “AVOID SITUATIONS THAT MAY PUT YOU AT RISK?”

If the man is an alcoholic not in recovery, more than a 10-15 year age difference, a sex and love addict not in recovery or with little sobriety, someone I’m super-attracted to, someone in the same S.L.A.A. meeting.

— **Amy M., Hartford, CT**

H.A.L.T.

— **Anke, Heidelberg, Germany**

Feeling H.A.L.T. (hungry, angry, lonely and/or tired) being aware when these feelings are occurring and take action to work on “self-care” actions to address these feelings.

— **Steve L., Cincinnati, OH**

Fear! Anytime I become aware I am acting out of fear (in any situation) I know it’s time to step back and seek HP’s serenity.

— **Deborah R., Mission Viejo, CA**

When I notice myself becoming boundary-less and the feeling I get when this happens. It’s a nervous, shaky feeling in my stomach. When this happens, I must acknowledge this, slow down and breathe, breathe, breathe.

— **Jonathan K., London, UK**

When I get triggered; when I start to obsess. When my normal patterns of addiction start to surface.

— **Marcelo B., San Diego, CA**

If I am feeling afraid, attacked, anxious or angry, then I am apt to look for relief in unhealthy behavior. Avoiding unhealthy behavior is supported by using the tools of the program.

— **Rick K., Santa Cruz, CA**

Withdrawal or isolation, particularly as response to hurt feelings or anger.

— **Anonymous**

When I’m over-stressed, I’ve learned that my addict wants to take control of me. I now work hard to limit the stress in my life and instead reach out with contact with my Higher Power.

— **Elliott G., Lodi, CA**

My red flag is when something doesn’t feel right in my gut – that old anxiety comes back from my acting out days. I run the other way!

— **Marcella M., Los Angeles, CA**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “What are the red flags that help you ‘avoid situations that may put you at risk?’” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order.

My gut tells me pretty quickly if something isn't right. If I feel fear, I have to stop and figure things out.

— **Karma, Los Angeles, CA**

I listen to tone, body language and expectations when I meet new people. I observe their interactions with others for consistencies. I avoid the people who are inconsistent and if these are members of social groups or coworkers, I just focus on my needs and be present for others.

— **Elizabeth, Alhambra, CA**

Guys looking at all the other girls, people talking about sex, alcohol or financial problems all in one sentence... “J,” people who want to spend lots of time with me right away, complaining, lots of red flags!!

— **Christine L., Montreal, Canada**

Whenever I feel like doing anything and it has a strong “pull,” I know it's probably addictive in nature. At that point, I try to surrender it to my HP, and then do the next right thing. If I'm unwilling, I pray for the willingness to let go...

Rick B., Largo, FL

When I want to do something.

— **Anonymous**

If I think it's an emergency...the only emergency is addiction.

— **Karen S., Oakland, CA**

Anger – especially if I am swearing A LOT (I know I'm not in my “adult.”) Feelings of lust – means only that a physical attraction exists –tread softly.

— **Deb W., Cleveland, OH**

To avoid putting myself at risk emotionally by setting myself up for rejection, I look for certain red flags in my boyfriend. If he is hungry, lonely, tired, busy or angry I avoid conversations and especially questions until his needs have been met or changed. He is usually receptive to conversation or interaction if he has had a meal or a nap, for example.

— **Monique S., Venice, CA**

For me, I often experience things such as “red flags” after the experience. As an anorexic I often have to look long and hard at whether it is a red flag.

— **Alex K., Berkeley, CA**

Question of the Day

When dating in recovery, it's been challenging for me to recognize red flags because my addictive pattern always lacked healthy boundaries. I follow my 'sober dating plan' and listen for those subtle nagging feelings and fess up to my sponsor who will give feedback. Early this year on a 3rd date, the date started yelling profanity while driving. To me, I was unsure if this was a red flag but to my sponsor and recovery partners, this was a red flag. I felt that it would be okay to see him again since I was unable to speak up at the time and gather more information – such as would he be willing to change this behavior. On our 4th and last date, he started yelling at me. In the past, I would have easily overlooked this and entered into another unhealthy relationship.

— Tom B., Los Angeles, CA

When I'm not in contact with my feelings and/or get easily bored and/or irritated. Also when I look into the mirror and don't like to look at my own body – something's wrong.

— Carmen B.L., Stockholm, Sweden

I hit my bottom 6 years ago. I have had many first dates, but few second dates. I have a very strict dating plan which doesn't work well with today's society. I have to meet fellows 5 times in public before going to their home or having them to my home. I haven't found a man interested in playing by my "rules." My red flag would be going to their home or having them to my home before I get to know them in public.

— Zoe, Atlanta, GA

When I find excuses to go somewhere/ meet someone that is a red flag for me.

— Bachan, Southern California

When I start driving erratically and irresponsibly, I know that I need to get back to my Higher Power and back onto fit spiritual ground. It's just one of many subtle warning signs.

— Walter, Los Angeles, CA

There are certain websites that in and of themselves are benign but because those sites usually lead to my visiting porn sites, I know that when I start visiting them that I need to stop and figure out why I want to act out.

I find that it's usually because I'm lonely, over-tired or bored and need to go to a meeting or call someone.

— Andrea, Los Angeles, CA

Feeling like I need to spend money to get love and support. Unwillingness to receive, resisting opportunities to prosper, live my dream and choose to believe I am undeserving, not good enough. That takes risk. Hiding is a huge red flag.

— A.

If I feel too good, I need to make sure it isn't an addictive high, and that my decisions will be God's will and not my will running loose.

— Brenda, Los Angeles, CA

Stress. When stress goes up, when I'm overcommitted and too busy it seems to be okay to use sexual fantasy to escape. Monitoring stress is critical.

— Glenn L, Los Angeles, CA

Since this disease is subtle and insidious, the red flags are always in my body. Therefore, being aware and meditating are really important for me. When I feel the discomfort in my body and the obsession in my mind I know there's a red flag.

— Anonymous

Hypo-excitement.

Feeling like I don't want to tell people what I'm thinking/feeling. Hiding/isolating.

— Al G., Los Angeles, CA

Feeling lonely reminds me that I have to make outreach calls, not keep the feeling secret.

— BR R., Los Angeles, CA

Depression. Rejection.

— Robert, Bauxite, AR

Isolation on the internet.

— J.W., Little Rock, AR

Realizing that I am in pain and wanting to find something that prevents me from facing it honestly.

— David L, Little Rock, AR

The red flag of writing sarcastic and seemingly clever word-stories in my morning pages about how wickedly behaved my [partner, or brother, or boss, or peer, or pastor, etc., etc., etc.] is [the oppressor] and how non-wicked I am, [the victim] is avoided when I do my 10th and 11th Steps. This reflection leads me to avoid the risk of meeting violence with violence. My HP and sponsor lead me to just sit, in silence, and turn, turn, turn, down the spiritual spiral into the cave of the heart of silence and compassion for all, both other and myself.

— Beth L, Montreal

It can take me more than 3 years to reach the last straw [red flag] on my camel of carrying all the burdens of FOO¹, COO,² and WHO³ issues as my inner camel's knees start to buckle, and trip, trip, risk of slip scares me, awakens me, stops me in my tracks.

My inner child of light, friendly and fun play leads this foolish camel to come to realize that I am NOT Higher Power or even the favorite CEO of the universe; that the 12X3 blessings of intimacy with self, other, Higher Power is such a gift.

¹FOO=Family of Origin; ²COO=Church of Origin; ³WHO= World Health Organization [I volunteer in a psychiatric hospital]

— Anonymous, Canada Great White Northeast

How I Deal With Compulsive Thoughts

I think about God every day. I also think about acting out every day. The truth is, that is the way my disease works. In a matter of a short walk, I can move from the sublime to the profane.

There may be a day, perhaps, when I no longer think about acting out. But whether that happens or not is immaterial. My program is a program of action for today. Here are some of the tools I have learned in the rooms in dealing with my compulsive thoughts.

First, I accept that I am powerless over these thoughts. I came to the S.L.A.A. rooms because I was an addict. I would fight with the steering wheel of the car and could not understand why I couldn't keep it from driving to the adult venues. I would commit acts that filled me with shame, caused me to drive away screaming at the top of my lungs and were very literally a threat to my life. In working my program, I discovered that I was fighting my addict at the wrong place. The actual act of destructive sex was only an accumulation of the many prior hours of compulsive thinking that was filled with discontentment, fantasy, entitlement and contempt.

Today, my mind wants to go to the same places. It loves resentments. It loves to have internal arguments with people, places and institutions that have "wronged" me. It loves to feel sorry for myself and believe that this magical person out there can really meet my deepest needs. But on top of this, my addict loves to shame me with mock horror as if to say, "How dare you have such thoughts! You are really worthless scum!"

as if I should no longer be an addict.

The reality is, it is not helpful or healthy for me to beat myself up because a fantasy popped into my head. As the slogan goes, "I am responsible for my second thought and my first action." A destructive thought that lands in my head and disturbs my serenity is a reminder of why I am in the program – because I am indeed powerless over sex and love addiction and my life had become unmanageable. It is not time for beating but time to turn my empty arms to my Higher Power to help me to work the tools of the program.

Second, I practice not letting thoughts take hold of me. I learned from a meditation teacher a powerful image that has helped me in this regard. Imagine yourself standing on a freeway overpass looking down at the cars traveling under you below. The cars you are looking at go from left to right. They come in on one side and continue on to the other. This is the way our thoughts work. They come into our head and left to themselves, they go out of our head.

The problem is when I look down and see my favorite red sports car. I like the car so much, I jump off of the overpass and land on the car attempting to hold onto it. Now I have a big problem. Not only does it greatly upset my serenity but this car is taking me to places where I really don't want to go.

So it is when resentments, fantasy, self-pity and dishonesty pop into my head. A thought can indeed come in the front door and I can let it continue on right out the back door. Or I can begin to possess the thought and take

it home with me. When I do, however, the thought begins to take hold of me. It becomes larger than life. It becomes harder and harder to let go. Over time, these thoughts begin to control my actions. Ultimately, I find myself at that place where I am acting out again wondering how I got there.

In the rooms, I have often heard good phrases that are useful to let go of a thought my addict presents.

For example:

Addict thought	Healthy thought
"Boy, that college student is so sexy."	"Yes, she is, but that has nothing to do with me."
"You know, you have time to take a drive downtown. No one will ever know."	"I'm sorry but we don't do that anymore. But we can stop off and enjoy a chocolate sundae."
"Your wife is really a pain these days and you feel so isolated. You really need something special on the computer."	"You know what? There is nothing there for me. I'm just going to go to bed and look at my situation with fresh eyes in the morning."

Third, I focus on what is real. There is a single woman I know who has made it to the top of my "who I would marry if my wife disappeared" list. She has my sense of humor. She has that nice in-between look where she is not an intimidating beauty queen but not ugly either. We get along great. We have a similar type of thinking. And in this

fantasy, we have a wonderful life with mutual support, respect, and no disagreements.

But my program helps me think about this person realistically. First, I see the ashen look on her face when I proposition something sexual with her. I then feel the awkward chat with the Human Resources department. I next see the stern look of the security guard who is standing there while I clean out my desk. I then see myself stammering as I try to explain to my wife and kids why I lost my job. I then feel the awkwardness of being at church where everyone knows why I lost my job.

Not only is there the reality of the consequence of my action, there is also the reality of what this person is really like. I had been in business meetings where she stood her ground and was completely inflexible. It was great to focus in on her inflexibility and how much I don't want that in my life. I have also seen her be fearful and very resistant to change. It was great to think about how much I don't want to take on her set of prob-

lems and baggage in my life.

The truth is, she is a real person; she is not the magical sex god waiting to meet the deepest needs of my heart. As a person she (and every other one on my list) comes with real problems that would add problems and burdens to my life – a life that is actually pretty good if I stay sober. There is nothing that destroys a good fantasy more than living in reality.

When I play the mental DVD to the end on any sexual fantasy, I find myself at reality. Instead of seeing how wonderful the sexual encounter will be, I see myself filled with depression, shame and disconnection – the kind of feelings I always get every single time I act out.

I see myself afraid because I have to take a sexually transmitted disease test and I am horrified of what the results might be. I see myself always wondering if anyone knows and who will find out. I see myself confused and cynical with God and my faith tradition because it doesn't seem to be working. I see myself miserable.

There is nothing that brings me to reality more than hearing others talk at a meeting or phoning up my sponsor. In the midst of my compulsive thought, it feels so real, logical, practical and beautiful. But when I share what is inside my head with my sponsor, we usually end up having a hearty, good-natured laugh at how inane the thoughts are – proving once again that my mind is a dangerous place for me to go by myself. Over time, I find myself spending more time in my skin, living practically in the moment, and spending less time living in my alternative universe somewhere inside my addictive head.

In conclusion, every compulsive thought is an invitation by my Higher Power for me to turn to him. It is my opportunity to be reminded once again that I am powerless on my own, that I have tools I can use and I have people who will link arms in support. And that I have a power greater than myself that can day by day, moment by moment, restore me to sanity.

— Dave S., Boone, NC

The
S.L.A.A.
Conference Public Information Committee
wants your help!

Calling on all groups, intergroups and individual members!

Do you have materials that you have created to reach out to the addict who is still suffering? The Conference Public Information Committee was created to assist the fellowship in attracting new members. For new groups that are just starting out, reaching out to mental health professionals in the area can be one of many ways in which to grow our fellowship. In order to find new ways to inform the public that there is help for sex and love addicts, we are asking for your help. What has worked for your group or intergroup? What have you created or what tools have you used to reach out to others? We want to know! Let's pool our resources so that we can continue to help people.

**If you have something to share, please contact
the CPIC at: <http://www.slaafws.org/contact/cpic>**

And if you're interested in helping out, everyone is welcome to join the Conference Public Information Committee! Get involved at the Conference level and work that Twelfth Step! We're looking forward to working with you!

GPS — God's In Charge

Editor's Note: "As a fellowship, S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements, or causes, either religious or secular." — S.L.A.A. Preamble © 2003. This is one S.L.A.A. member's story describing his view of spirituality. It is suggested that each S.L.A.A. member find their own concept of a Higher Power.

GPS: I have been trying to figure out my own neat little acronym for "GPS"...God's planned situation? God plans stuff? God provides scenarios?

I can't think of any that reach out and grab me, so instead of trying to be all cute, maybe it's best if we just get into it!

I have been working for an asphalt and maintenance company for the past few months. I feel beyond blessed to be with them and I emphatically take delight in this new manly work environment!

I always wanted to be one of those guys walking around the hardware store with stuff all over his jeans, cut off sleeves, work boots, a mesh hat, and carrying something that nobody else knows what to do with but him! I can at least now proudly check that off my life's to-do list!

But at the same time, it has also been a genuine life shocker. I went from a comfy and secure \$60,000 a year job with summers and weekends off, to now working with 450 degree crack filler, shoveling 3 tons of asphalt, having to spend hours scraping my arms with steel wool scrubber pads to get sealer off, and being called off when it rains. In this world, no work equals no pay!

I have gone from having 2 homes, 2 cars, and living with my "perfect" family, to living in a tiny apartment on top of my parent's home, having no car,



and now having no communication with my family and many of my old friends.

All of this happened in the blink of an eye, and all of this is a result of my addictions and selfish lifestyle. I was set for a certain destination, on a road to success, but instead allowed my own reckless behaviors and lack of direction to take me off that said road.

I was on a road that most people were impressed with. It

was a road that on the outside looked like one that most people worked their entire lives to get on. There I was, on that road and at such a young age to boot! I should have been at peace. I should have been happy and content. I should have been overflowing with joy. I wasn't. Far from it!

For reasons that I will detail in other writings; I was in pain, full of addictions, fragmented, depressed, and driving way too

fast to enjoy any of it. I was driving my own way, on my own terms, and in my own time. I never went to God for directions. I never allowed Him to help plan any of this trip. I was in charge and refused to allow anybody else to help me! This journey would be on my shoulders; it was all up to me.

It reminds me of the man who knows darn well that he is lost. His wife keeps telling him “just pull over and ask for directions already!” To which he replies, “Will you just trust me, I know where I am going for goodness sakes!” This stubborn guy is fully aware that he has no clue where he is headed, yet he refuses to ask for help and just keeps on rolling getting himself more lost by the mile. That was me. I look back and see the countless times that my wife would plead with me to just stop and pull over to ask God for direction. Yet time and time again, I refused her request. I would look her dead in the eye and tell her to just trust “me,” that I knew where “I” was going. I acted as if she was just plain silly for thinking that we needed God to help us. I had this under control! To be honest, I had no clue.

I truly believe that God gives each of us gifts and talents. I also believe He brings us opportunities to use those gifts and talents. He equips each of us to do something uniquely special within this world. Our abilities will also enable us to reach that certain destination — a destination that if we remain focused, we will accomplish His will in our lives and the lives of many others around us.

If we can just keep on that set road, if we could just obey His commandments daily, if we could just listen to the Holy Spirit as it leads us day in and day out, if we could just allow

Jesus to set our every direction, and if we were just strong enough to ignore the temptation to hit the old short cuts; then and only then could we fully enjoy that road the way our ultimate tour guide (God) originally intended us to.

But what happens when we take a left, instead of His original plan to stay straight? What happens when we drive way too fast, get reckless, and even may crash at times? What happens when we ignorantly drive in the dark with our headlights completely out? What happens when we end up in back alleys and in dark woods that we were never intended to drive through anyway? What do we do when we consistently take our eyes off the road, get distracted, or just start driving aimlessly?

I found my answer to this dilemma while driving to a job with my fellow asphalt guys. In the truck there is one of those GPS systems. If you, like me, are one of the sadly underprivileged and technologically deprived cavemen without a GPS in your vehicle or an icemaker in your freezer, then a GPS is a small computer like device that maps out your route to get you to a certain destination. It actually tells you every step you need to take and even shows you what is to come ahead of you.

I have noticed that for the most part, Frank (the driver of the asphalt truck) follows exactly where that GPS tells him to go. Especially when it's a road or place he has never been on before. He listens intently to the directions he is to follow and follows them.

But there have been those times where he doesn't follow as closely as that GPS wants him to. On occasion, especially when he thinks he knows the lay out just a bit better than the GPS

does, he makes his own turns and makes decisions to go in a different direction than that of the GPS.

He makes his own way, goes on his own terms, ignoring what the little magic box has told him to do. He may take a left when the GPS told him to make a right. He may even miss a turn that the GPS instructed him to take only a few minutes before.

What then? Now what happens? Does the GPS say “You idiot! Can't you understand a thing I say to you? I said go left, where the heck are you going? Forget you! Find it yourself kid. I'm done trying to help!”

Though that definitely would have added a welcomed moment of humor to our difficult day of hard labor, it is not what I heard at all.

Immediately, the voice on the GPS simply said in a very even tone, “recalculating” and then began to figure out what would be the best thing for him to do next. It even chose to do this for him! He was the one who took the wrong turns, yet that GPS took on the responsibility to recalculate his route to get him back on the correct track!

That smart little GPS thingy started recalculating so that it could evaluate this new situation, decide what needs to happen from here on out, and then find the absolute best way to get Frank back to the road that could still lead him to his destination.

Frank simply had to recognize and accept that he was lost, hear the new directions, and then be willing to trust and follow them. Yes, he had to take several extra turns that he didn't expect and that he certainly didn't plan for. Yes, it was definitely not convenient for him, nor was it an easy route to take.

It even added time and effort

to the journey. But regardless of how many extra turns and how much extra time it was going to take, Frank could trust that if he was willing to listen and follow these new directions, it would surely get him back to his destination and that he would be OK.

So is life I guess. My life has a destination. I have gifts and talents that I know can still be used for His glory and can still be used to help others in this world. To be very honest, I thought I was already doing that for years before now. I thought I had already reached my destination. Boy, was I wrong!

I was driving way too fast for way too long and I did it my own way. I refused to ever roll that darn window down to ask anyone for help. I decided to look like I knew exactly where I was going. And guess what happened? I made many lefts, instead of rights. I missed tons of turns that I was supposed to take. I ended up taking myself to a place that is filled with dirt roads, dead ends, and tons of potholes.

What does God have to say about this? Recalculating! I don't know how long it is now going to take. I don't know what desolate run down roads or broken down bridges I may have to still drive over to get back on track. But I know one thing for sure...God is not done with me. I didn't drive off a cliff just yet. I



didn't run out of gas just yet. I still have four wheels and all four still have a little air left in them. So if I can recognize that I am lost and in need of help, trust in that recalculation, and be willing to drive through anything He sends my way, then I have complete faith that He will guide me to that right road.

Have you made any wrong turns recently? Have you made any in your life at all? Maybe these turns haven't gotten you completely into another state just yet. But have those times that you think you know better than God's GPS gotten you off track enough that you are in need of hearing that voice say, "recalculating?" Do you feel like you are starting to hear that voice tell you to put that cell phone down, stop messing with the radio, and keep your eyes on the road?

If that is the case, then I would advise that you drop your pride, roll that window down, and ask for directions! Even if you feel like you are only a little bit off course, I implore you to ask for God's help right now. Put this down and pray for His direction in whatever area of your life you know you have taken wrong turns in. Listen closely to what you need to do to get back on that right road. Don't waste another moment driving aimlessly hoping you know where you are going.

The quicker that you accept His direction and get back on track, the less recalculating you are going to need to do in the future. Take full and complete advantage of God's GPS right now.

Nothing will be easy about this. I don't mean to insinuate that the recalculating process is one without consequence. There are consequences to getting lost, some larger and more long term than others. Can you get back on

track, headed in the right direction?

With God's help, certainly it is a possibility. But that's not all there is to this trip. I have found that one of the hardest parts of this process is thinking about that part of road that I missed out on, and having to accept that it is truly gone. It can sometimes feel overwhelming to grasp the realization that there is now a part of the road of life that I will never get a chance to drive on.

Looking back on it with the fresh eyes I now have, I see clearly that I was on one of those extra special kind of roads — the ones that just don't come along in life very often. Do you know the kind of road that I'm talking about? The ones that have trees filled with never ending splashes of color, patterned in ways you never could have imagined? That road was the road I was on. It is the road I turned off of. That road is the road that I have lost. The one that I will forever miss.

I believe that is the most difficult part of this recalculating; always knowing that road you should have enjoyed and stayed on, but didn't. The majestic colors on that road that I will miss are birthdays, Christmas mornings, date nights with my wife, family trips, long talks, catching fireflies, and goodnight kisses. That piece of road will forever stick with me like a thorn in my side, reminding me of all the wrong turns I made and reminding me about the road I could have been on if it were not for my own miserable sense of direction.

That road will be the road that reminds me how bad of a driver I used to be. At times it will feel almost impossible to accept the fact that I will now miss driving on that road of my life. The knowledge that there is this strip of road that my own

misguided and even at times reckless turns have taken me away from can feel devastating and debilitating to even the strongest of people. It can make you feel like there is no point to even continue on this journey.

So what do you do about that? Do we sit and ponder all the turns we should have, could have, and wish we would have made? Do we try to force ourselves to drive backwards to make up for the missing part of our trip? Do we go back to the drawing board on our own and begin to force the shortest paths to get back to that missed road?

The answer is two simple words: trust God!

OK...I know that sounds like its one of those good old Christian sayings that you hear the pastor repeat to just about everyone for just about everything, and guess what... it is! This is an over-used saying for one simple reason, because it works!

God loves you. He has a full and complete desire that you stay on that "once in a lifetime" road of joy and vibrant color. In fact, He was the one that sent you in that direction in the first place! You turned off that road, not Him.

To get back on track, the trusting of God is essential. Have faith that He has planned ahead to create more of those

roads for you to enjoy in the future. It may take time to find them, it may take some difficult roads ahead before you get there, but continue to trust God that they are there.

There will be different degrees of recalculating for each of us and different roads that we will have to go over to get back to where we need to be. But if you trust in Him and finally listen to His direction for your life, He will take you on a road to joy, restoration, healing, and recovery. I promise you that this road will still be filled with endless colors, joyous surprises, and exciting adventures.

— Jason

The Bottom Line

Hi, I'm Efraim, and I'm a sex and love addict.

The behaviors that sent me into a pattern of compulsion didn't start out, didn't present at first, as an addictive pattern, or else my self-preservation instinct might have taken over and saved me. If I would have known up front that my behavior was going to get me arrested and exiled from my home for three years, cost thousands in legal fees, and deeply damage my relationships with close family members, I'm sure I would have taken more aggressive steps to deal with it at the beginning. If I would have recognized my compulsive patterns as a sexual addiction, and not just old-habit mischief, I might have shown up at a meeting a lot sooner.



That little voice that urged me on to do things that were wrong, selfish, outside of integrity with my higher self, that told me it was a great idea to...whatever, get high, go to

clubs, look at porn, etc., that was not my highest self. That was my deepest addict.

Well, you know what the big cosmic joke is- experience is the thing you get right after you

need it. So now, looking back on my patterns of self-indulgence and self-destruction, I see the things that got me into trouble in the first place.

Through the grace of God we may have also found our way into recovery. Coming to a meeting may have been the first step, or it may have been one of a series of first steps that we took to try to come to grips with what it was that was torturing us, making us miserable, possibly ruining our marriages, our relationships with our kids, ruining our lives.

As the S.L.A.A. Tradition states, the only requirement for membership in S.L.A.A. is a desire to stop living out a pattern of compulsive sexual behavior. It doesn't even say we need to stop. We only need to have the desire to stop, to stop getting ourselves into trouble. It is from there that recovery can begin.

If we are to be successful in our recovery, to achieve true sobriety every day, we need to know how to stay out of trouble.

We need to set boundaries for ourselves that will keep us from acting out in those behavior patterns we have come to recognize as part of our addiction. We need a line which we will not cross if we are to maintain our integrity.

There's a reason why there's a barrier arm at most railroad crossings: if we're so oblivious as to ignore all the other warnings — road signs, horns, flashing lights, there's got to be something firm to stop us, something besides a suggestion. See, the railroad people really don't want us to get hit by a train. And most of us, also, would rather not get hit by a train. It makes a real mess that's a pain to clean up.

So, like the railroad, we need to make ourselves a barrier, a

series of warning signs, horns, flashing lights, an arm that comes down, that keeps us on the safe side of things while the train passes.

This barrier is what we call our bottom line. It's a line we draw for ourselves to keep our bottoms out of trouble, out of getting hit by the train wreck of our addiction.

The places where we didn't have a line, a barrier, a boundary in our lives and we got into trouble is the EXACT place where we need to set one, if we are to be successful in our recovery. We need to set limits around where we channel our passion, our desire, our creativity- all characteristics we might have used to feed our addictions. We need to take control of our own boundaries, with the help of our Higher Power, to avoid getting into the train wreck of addiction again.

Now, just to stretch the metaphor a bit more, trains, like passion, desire, and creativity, are a good thing — a lot of people are served well by public transportation and mass freight transit. Trains fulfill a great need in society. Trains are part of a vast, organized system run by people who know what they're doing. If you happen to mess with this system without enough experience or self-control, you can find yourself on the wrong end of a battle with a very powerful force, and you will be unable to avoid disaster. On the other hand, there are times and ways when it is safe for us to "cross the tracks."

For example, for those of us who are married, seeking true loving intimacy with our spouses is very different from sex outside of marriage. The former is life-affirming; it can be a beautiful, spiritual act of unconditional giving. We build families with our partners, we

grow together.

On the other hand, that same act with someone we're not married to might result in the same physical response, but it is absolutely toxic spiritually. It's not about giving, it's about taking. It is another step towards a descent into hell. Lest issues of religious doctrine infect this concept, I should explain.

You may have heard the story of a man who, in the midst of an existential dilemma, a spiritual crisis, wanted to know the difference between heaven and hell. He was taken by an angel to hell first. There was a long, sumptuous banquet table laid out, as far as the eye could see, and every seat at the table was filled. There were all kinds of delicious food at every place setting, but the man noticed something strange. People weren't eating. He looked a little closer, and he saw that instead of hands everyone had forks and spoons, and no elbows. So while they could pick the food up, they couldn't actually get it into their mouths. They were eternally starving to death in this hell, because they couldn't figure out how to feed themselves. There was much crying, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. It was hell.

Next, this man, shook up from this image of incredible bounty and yet denial, was taken to heaven. Here, he saw a table very similar, no, identical to the one he saw in hell. Well, the table cloth was nicer here. And when he looked closely at all the people, he saw they had the same utensil hands! But here, an amazing thing was happening. Everyone was eating, and laughing, and having a great time. The only difference here? Everyone was feeding each other.

This is the difference between

heaven and hell. Between living in a state of perpetual self-serving, where we never get fed what we truly need, and a life of service, where we only truly live fully if we are of service to those in need. It starts with those closest to us, and expands outward, in ever widening circles. We are truly nourished, filled up, healed, by the ways in which we serve others.

The way for us to get out of the hell of our self-serving, but ultimately self-starving addiction is to stop the active addictive behavior and raise ourselves up to our highest selves. And if we want to stay in the good graces of our higher selves, we need to know where to put up these barriers. We need to know ourselves well

enough to recognize the things we did, the places we went, the thoughts we had, that would get us into trouble. Then we need to make a contract with ourselves, and someone we hold ourselves accountable to, that we will honor so that we don't get hit by our train of addiction.

There is one catch to this — when we set a bottom line for ourselves, we may or may not come to a thorough assessment of where our boundaries should be. One thing is certain, though. We are here because we have a problem. We need to consider ourselves like those people at that table in hell. We are unable to feed ourselves.

How do we get ourselves out of this purgatory? We reach out to someone else at the same

table. We find a sponsor. We get some help thinking about how to go about our recovery. Remember back when it seemed like a good idea at the time? We might have been the only ones thinking that. A bottom line we create with the help of a sponsor will separate for us the things that might seem like a good idea, but aren't, and those that really are gifts from God for our recovery. This is why we say sponsors need us as much as we need sponsors. We need to feed each other. This is the way we lift ourselves out of hell, out of the train wreck of our addictions, into the light and grace of sobriety.

Thank you.

—Efraim S., Newton Meeting

Self Discovery in Recovery

Editor's note: This story contains descriptions of physical abuse which may be triggering to some readers.

When I got to S.L.A.A. it was about a year after I was nearly choked to death by my (now ex) husband of 20 years. We had a very tumultuous relationship that went up and down and was full of abuse of all types. We met in high school and dated for four years. During that time, he hit me, kicked me, slammed me against walls, bit me, called me ugly names. And yet, at times, he could be very loving and supportive of me. He was a real charmer and I was an 18-year-old who made a decision to

marry the first guy who came along because I thought I was the ugliest, most horrible person in the world. I thought I would have to marry anyone who would have the guts to be involved with me because I was so defective. I had horrible self esteem.

Along came Prince Charming who was good looking and smart and I got "high" just watching him across the room at a Christmas party. He kept staring at me and every time he looked away I stared right back at him. It was like we knew each other and the chemistry was magic. (I now know that the "magic" is actually a drug that can delude my judgment unless

I listen to my inner voice that may have been yelling "get out of there" at that time.)

Since I had such a low opinion of myself, that stemmed from childhood, I was willing to do whatever it took to be involved with him. He was cute and he was paying attention to me and this is all I required at the time. I was needy of being loved by a good looking man and he fit the bill. (I now realize that I learned this directly from my mom). I was in love and I knew it because whenever HE was around my heart skipped a beat. (I now know that is an indicator to run the other way). He was my first boyfriend ever in my life. Oh, I had a few guys

want to have sex with me when I was younger but I never had a real boyfriend. And he was all mine. <swoon> I finally found the guy to rescue me from my family. They would be so proud of me for finding Mr. Right because, after all, in my family (and in society in general) finding that guy to support me and make me whole was the ultimate goal in life.

We got married 4 years later and I got beat up on my wedding night (talk about a present.)

The beatings continued for the next 16 years like clockwork. If I got too needy — or got in his way — I got hit, smacked, spit on, slammed against the floor, had my hair pulled, was pinched, pinned down or called names.

The worst of it all was if he ignored me, because then I did not know how he felt about me and that was scary. At least if he hit me I knew he was with me and I was not going to be abandoned (I had serious abandonment issues from childhood.)

Over the years he would go out every night of the week without me. As it turns out he was meeting sex partners and acting out his sex addiction. But, in those days, none of this was known. He also had a good buddy that he hung out with every chance he got. When I asked if he was gay, he kicked towards my face. I was protecting my face with my hands, and his kick broke my wedding ring finger.

That, in itself, was a very symbolic sign. It took many years for me to see that as a sign from my Higher Power to get out of this relationship immediately!! I sat there with my broken finger that grew as big as my whole hand and was purple, yellow and blue. I went to work where people asked about my finger (which was now limp and unusable and I was a computer entry person.) Co-workers suggested I go to the doctor even though I said I was fine.

I had to have surgery to replace my knuckle

which was knocked clean off my finger by his kick. I told the doctor I hurt it in the door because I was too ashamed to admit I got hit. I felt that if I admitted that it would mean I could not please my husband. And people might ask me what I did wrong to make him hit me. (At this point this makes me very sad that I thought so poorly of myself).

I endured many types of physical, sexual, intellectual, emotional, and neglectful abuse in those 20 years of knowing my ex. But the episodes were sprinkled with love and genuine concern and charm. He said “I love you and would never hurt you” and I believed what I heard instead of what was happening. The good times were just as good as the bad times were bad. It was not until I was laying on the ground, with his hands wrapped around my throat, saying he was going to kill me and kill himself that I got the message from my Higher Power that I did not need to be in that relationship any longer. I heard the question, “Do you want to live or die?” from a voice that I now believe was my Higher Power. I decided I wanted to live.

When his hands released, in that moment, I decided that I had to get out of there and never go back, or the next time I would die.

When I came out to California from Virginia, I got into recovery and I have worked very hard on sobriety and my self-esteem. I continued to draw men to me that would not treat me very well. But as I got more support from S.L.A.A. members, and the groups themselves, my self-esteem grew.

And when I got into situations that were bad for me, I got out sooner each time. I now listen to the intuitive voice inside of me, which is my Higher Power. And when I see those red flags that I used to ignore — believing I was here to fix men (or people) — I now recognize them.

I go another direction on my path so I can keep myself safe and alive and thriving in my life. The



steps, the groups, the book, the sharing and the belief that my Higher Power wants me to be successful and to care about myself is a miracle. I set bottom lines that allow me to move forward and have self respect and self-esteem. They help me move forward in a safe and loving manner. I have a life that is worth saving. And it is my job, along with my Higher Power, to rescue myself and be my own best advocate and friend. I am so grateful to S.L.A.A. and for my self discovery in recovery. I

do keep coming back and doing the work so I can continue to thrive and have a wonderful life. It takes dedication and caring about yourself and hard work in S.L.A.A. to be a happy person who wants the best for themselves and others.

And as the saying goes at the end of each meeting when we pray out: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." It works, if you work it, so work

it, because you are worth it.

It saved my life and continues to save my life as I grow in loving and caring about me. In that process of self-care, I draw healthier people into my life who also care about me — including my family. I now know, I show people how to treat me, by how I treat myself. I do have faith in a higher power to guide and sustain me in every moment of every day. Namaste!!

— Anonymous

*Presented by The Augustine Fellowship
Hosted by San Diego County Intergroup*



2012



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

Tuesday, July 24 - Friday, July 27, 2012

Conference
Theme

Tradition Ten

*"S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues;
hence the S.L.A.A. name ought never be
drawn into public controversy."*

Crowne Plaza Hotel, 2270 Hotel Circle North, San Diego, CA 92108

Share space

Overcoming The Past To Finally Find Sober Sexuality

My sexuality was heavily influenced by my family's alcoholism. According to my mother, who had her own issues with alcohol dependency, my father drank alcoholically and raped her. My parents separated when I was three years old.

My father found recovery from alcoholism in a Twelve Step program and experienced a spiritual rebirth. He remains sober to this day and I have a wonderful relationship with him. My mother's drinking became worse and she entered into unhealthy relationships with other alcoholics.

My sister and I resided with her, and at the age of six, I experienced brutal sexual abuse at the hands of one of these alcoholics. I repressed the memory of this abuse, but did find some

help by entering recovery for my own alcoholism and the effects alcoholism had on my upbringing. I remembered some inappropriate hugging and kissing from drunken family members, and attributed my fear of sexual involvement to those experiences.

I did get married, but it was to a man who had his own issues with sexuality, including sexual orientation. And after this 10-year relationship ended, I had many problems with my sexuality. Recovery from alcoholic issues alone was not enough for me.

I would have periods of anorexia which would alternate with acting out and unhealthy relationships characterized by dependency or domination. I finally remembered my severe childhood abuse when I was 32 years

of age.

I entered psychotherapy for this abuse. While I was in therapy, I began a long term relationship with a woman. I tried to identify myself as gay but this turned out not to be the case for me. I realized I was bisexual and tried to stay faithful to my partner without success. I attempted multiple sexual relationships and found myself quite miserable.

My life had become totally unmanageable. I finally found recovery for my sex and love addiction in 1994, and my partner did too. At that time, I defined sexual sobriety as not having more than one partner at a time. My life improved dramatically. I was living in New York City at the time.

We moved to Miami in 1997, but I couldn't find a meeting for

sexual recovery that I felt was appropriate for me. My partner dropped out of recovery and our relationship ended.

I focused on meetings for alcoholism, believing that since I was away from New York City, which had lots of triggers for me, I would be OK.

Of course, my disease caught up with me again, and I became involved with my second husband, who insisted on engaging in unhealthy sexual activity which was based on pornography and role-playing.

During the course of our relationship, he became more and more dependent upon prescription drugs and gambling. I be-

came very sick in this relationship, but I maintained my sexual sobriety. I continued to read literature for sexual recovery during this difficult time, and would share my experience, hope and recovery with program friends from the fellowship for alcoholism.

After six difficult years, the relationship with the prescription drug addict and gambler ended. I had remained faithful to this man despite numerous temptations.

I tried dating without attending sexual recovery meetings, but ended up having unhealthy experiences. These experiences did not affect my sexual sobrie-

ty, but I wasn't happy, either. I finally returned to meetings for sexual recovery in 2006 and have been attending meetings in person and online since that time.

For four years, I have been in a healthy marital relationship that is based on honesty and does not involve pornography or role playing.

I have changed my definition of sexual sobriety as well, which is that I will not date anyone who is not interested in marriage and that I will not engage in genital sexuality outside of marriage.

— **Dorothy W.**

Calendar of Events

Phone Meetings

There are numerous phone meetings. A good place to start is the S.L.A.A. F.W.S. website: http://directory.slaafws.org/intl_phone

Telemeeting Series

Healthy Relationships

To receive our schedule of telephone meetings and topics simply email: slaahhealthyrelationships@gmail.com.

2011-12 Sponsorship Telemeeting Series

Presented by: S.L.A.A. Conference Sponsorship Committee
Sept. 10, 2011 to Aug. 11, 2012

For Inquiries: <http://www.slaafws.org/contact/Sponsorship>

Upcoming Events

May 5, 2012

Houston Intergroup 2012 Spring Workshop

Presented by: Houston S.L.A.A. Intergroup. Where: Council on Alcohol and Drugs. For Inquiries: 713-781-3999.

June 15-17, 2012 (NEW DATE)

S.L.A.A. Anorexia Retreat at Mount Manresa Retreat Center, Staten Island, New York

Registration fee 255.00 USD (this includes lodging, workshops, and 6 meals over the 3 days)

For full, up-to-date details please visit <http://AnorexiaRecoveryEvents.blogspot.com/>

Questions? Email Anorexiarecoveryevents@gmail.com.

July 24-27, 2012

2012 S.L.A.A. Annual Business Conference/Meeting

Crowne Plaza Hotel, 2270 Hotel Circle North, San Diego, CA

July 27-29, 2012

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

Presented by: New England Intergroup. For Inquiries: vtweekend@slaanei.org

Aug. 17-19, 2012

Healing Heart Retreat (co-ed) at Camp Indianola

<http://www.slaa-seattle.org/events.html>

**S.L.A.A. is here to help!
Go to www.slaafws.org**

Twelve Not-So-Easy Pieces: Variations On A Theme

1.
HONESTLY, I AM POWERLESS.

2.
HOPEFULLY, I REMIND
MYSELF DAILY
OF THAT POWERLESSNESS,
AND LEARN TO BECOME SANE.

3.
FAITHFULLY, I DO THE THINGS THAT
OTHERS HAVE TOLD ME TO DO,
NOT BECAUSE I BELIEVE THEY WILL
WORK, BUT BECAUSE I KNOW THAT
MY WAY WILL NOT.

4.
COURAGEOUSLY,
I COUNT MY GRUDGES, LIST MY
ASSETS, OPEN THE TREASURE CHEST
OF MY SECRETS.

5.
ONE BY ONE I TAKE OUT EACH COIN,
EACH CLOSELY GUARDED TRINKET.
THEY SMELL OF DECAY, OF DEATH.
AND SHOW THEM TO ANOTHER.
THEY AREN'T SO UGLY NOR SO DARK
IN THE LIGHT OF DAY.

8.
FOR SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, OTHER HANDS HAVE JOINED MINE IN HOLDING UP THE CHEST. AND
IT MAKES ME REALIZE THAT I CAN LAY DOWN THE CHEST, TAKE A REST FROM ITS BURDEN, AND LOOK
TO SEE HOW I MIGHT HAVE ADDED WEIGHT TO MY LOAD, AND THE LOADS THAT OTHERS CARRY (FOR I
SEE, FINALLY, THAT OTHERS HOLD THEIR OWN BURDENS, THAT SOME ARE HEAVIER THAN MINE,
WHEREAS BEFORE, I FELT MINE TO THE HEAVIEST LOAD ANYONE HAD EVER CARRIED).

6.
I BECOME WILLING
TO GIVE THEM ALL AWAY.
I'M TOLD I WON'T NEED THEM
ANYMORE, THOUGH I CANNOT
YET BELIEVE IT.
AND SO I REMIND MYSELF
THAT I AM POWERLESS,
THAT PERHAPS GIVING THEM
AWAY WILL HELP ME BECOME SANE,
THAT MY WAY DOES NOT WORK.

7.
I PUT THEM ALL BACK IN THE
TREASURE CHEST, PICK UP THE BURDEN,
ITS PONDEROUS WEIGHT,
AND HOLD IT UP TOWARD THE SKY.
ITS WEIGHT KNOCKS ME TO MY KNEES, AND MY
KNEES BLEED ON THE ROCKS OF MY
STUBBORNNESS, SO THAT ALL I HAVE LEFT IS
STRENGTH ENOUGH TO ASK SOMEONE TO PLEASE
TAKE IT AWAY, TO USE IT FOR WHATEVER PURPOSE
THERE MIGHT BE, AS LONG AS IT'S BEYOND ME.
FOR SOME, THE WEIGHT OF THE
CHEST IS LIFTED
IMMEDIATELY. FOR MOST, IT IS AS THOUGH A HAND
REACHES IN AND PICKS UP EACH COIN, EACH
TRINKET, WEIGHS IT IN HIS HAND, SOMETIMES
THROWS IT INTO THE OCEAN, BUT AT LEAST AS
OFTEN PLACES IT BACK INTO THE CHEST. EVEN
WHEN THAT HAPPENS, MIRACULOUSLY, THE CHEST
DOES NOT FEEL QUITE AS HEAVY,
ITS WEIGHT NOT AS HARD TO BEAR.

9.

NOW, WHERE AND AS I CAN,
I DO MY SHARE IN
BEARING THE WEIGHT.
AND WHEN THERE IS
ANOTHER TO WHOSE
CHEST I ONCE ADDED WEIGHT, OR
WHO ONCE
CRUMBLLED AT MY HAND,
EVEN THOSE WHO DARE NOT
ALLOW ME CLOSE FOR FEAR OF
CATCHING AGAIN THE UGLINESS I
ONCE BROUGHT, I MAKE AND SEEK
TO LIVE MY AMENDS, OR ASK
SIMPLY THAT SOMEONE OTHER
THAN ME EASES THEIR BURDEN
AND HELPS THEM TO LIFT THE
WEIGHT.

11.

NOW, I LAY THE CHEST DOWN, EACH DAY,
AND ASK TO STAND ATOP IT,
WITH ARMS OUTSTRETCHED TO THE HEAVENS,
TO THE SKY, TO THE BIRDS,
TO THE WATERS,
TO MY FELLOWS WHO BEAR THEIR OWN CHESTS,
OR WHO STAND ATOP THEIRS,
SHOUTING WITH JOY AND RELIEF.
I BREATHE IN THE SALT AIR AND
LISTEN TO THE SQUAWK OF GULLS,
THE BARK OF SEAL AND SEA LION,
THE BREACHING OF THE WHALE,
AND SEE WHERE MY STEPS ARE DIRECTED,
TO HELP WHERE I CAN,
AND TO GET RID OF MORE OF MY COINS,
OR ONES I'VE PICKED UP ALONG THE WAY.

10.

WHEN I GO BACK TO LIFT MY OWN
CHEST, I SENSE ITS WEIGHT HAS
LESSENERED.
OR PERHAPS I'M JUST STRONGER. I
MUST STILL LOOK TO
SEE WHICH TRINKETS
I HOARD, AND
WHETHER THERE ARE NOT YET
SOME SECRET
COMPARTMENTS WHERE I ONCE HID
MY MOST PRECIOUS COINS.
AND I ASK THE PARDON OF OTHERS
WHEN I'VE TAKEN ONE OF THEM,
OLD OR NEW, OUT OF MY OWN
CHEST AND THROWN IT
UNWITTINGLY ONTO ANOTHER'S
BURDEN, INSTEAD OF ASKING FOR
THAT HAND THAT ONCE WEIGHED
ALL MINE TO REMOVE IT ONCE
AGAIN, AND IF THE TIME IS NOT YET,
TO ASK STRENGTH TO BEAR ITS
WEIGHT A LITTLE LONGER.

12.

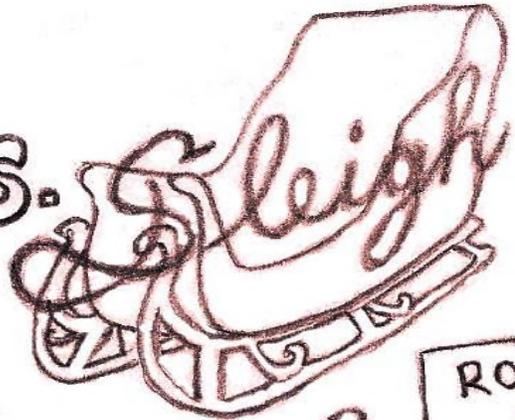
ONCE ALL THIS IS DONE, AND DONE YET AGAIN,
WHEN I CAN FLY WITH THE BIRDS, SWIM
WITH THE WHALES, WALK WITH THE
TWO-LEGGEDS, AND NOT LOSE SIGHT OF
WHERE AND WHO I AM, I GO TO THOSE IN NEED OF
HELP, AND REACH OUT MY HAND, AND REALIZE THAT,
IN HELPING THEM,
I HELP MYSELF.
EACH DAY, I REMIND MYSELF OF MY
JOURNEY TO THIS POINT, AND RETRACE MY STEPS.
EACH DAY, AS I WORK, AND PLAY, AS I LAUGH AND
LOVE, AS I TOIL AND SERVE,
AS I LISTEN AND CONTEMPLATE,
AS I SHARE AND RECEIVE,
I FORGET NOT THE JOURNEY, NOR THE ROUTE, NOR
THE ONES WHO
HAVE HELPED,
WHO ARE HELPING, ME, NOR THE ONES
WHO HAVE UNTIL NOW
REMAINED UNSEEN,
WAITING FOR A GIFT THE SHAPE AND VALUE OF WHICH
THEY DON'T YET KNOW.

— Mark H. California

THE MAIN EVENT!

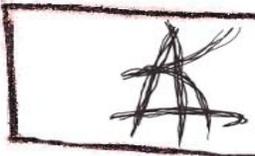
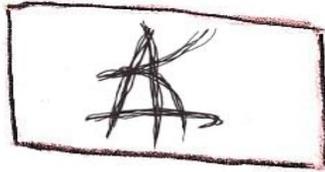
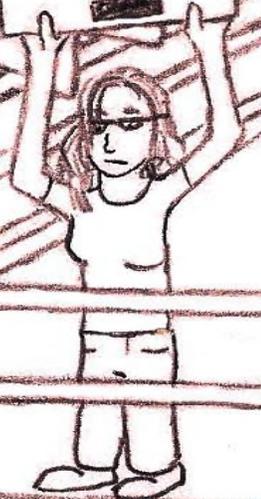


VS.



WHICH WILL WIN?

ROUND
1



BUT FIRST, LET'S HEAD TO THE DRAMA TRIANGLE FOR OUR OPENING BOUT. IT'S THE VICTIM VERSUS THE RESCUER VERSUS THE PERSECUTOR! AS USUAL, THE PERSECUTOR IS COMING OUT STRONG, READY TO POUNCE ON THE VICTIM! IT LOOKS LIKE THE RESCUER IS ON HIS WAY TO TRY TO STOP THE FIGHT! I SUPPOSE WE SHOULDN'T HAVE EXPECTED A DIFFERENT OUTCOME.

PLEASE STOP! IT'S NOT MY FAULT!

HEY! QUIT PICKING ON HIM!

