

the Journal

Issue # 139

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*Working With
Character Defects*

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:

This issue's theme "Healing Character Defects," is one that is very important to me, as I suspect it is to many in the S.L.A.A. program. Coming to an understanding and accepting our character defects can be a long and painful road to walk. It's definitely not for the faint of heart. When I was young, I had a friend that used to say I needed to get a thicker skin. I thought that meant I needed to feel less emotion, to numb out. But I ended up discovering what that truly meant when I started doing the work of uncovering areas that needed to change in my personality in order to become a more healthy, spiritual person.

Steps Four through Seven do some really intense work in this area. The solitary writing of the Fourth Step uncovers a lot of defects we didn't know were lurking in the dark corners of our minds. And when we give it over to another human being, they may reveal even more defects and assure us that their Higher Power or work with the Steps has healed those very same defects, for them, so it can happen for us as well. And in Steps Six and Seven, we give everything to our Higher Power and we may start to see defects that have plagued us for years, fade away. Sometimes I forget that I was once as messed up as I was. But people who knew me then remind me! And I'm grateful for the change.

I didn't always want to see or change my character defects. Relationships with other people cures that aversion. I surrounded myself with people who called me on my stuff and weren't afraid to communicate if my behavior harmed them (and were self-assured and aware enough to do so.) And if I behaved badly and was called on it, I cared about keeping the relationship enough to honestly look at myself and see if they were right in thinking my character defects were causing damage (which they so often do without my permission or even knowledge sometimes.) And program has taught me the humility to admit when I'm wrong and change my behavior instead of lying and manipulating.

A lot of my character defects I was holding on to because I thought they kept me safe when they were actually harming me. Sober behavior and Higher Power are what keep me safe. I'm grateful the program opened my eyes and taught me the truth.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“HOW HAVE YOU USED THE TOOLS OF THE PROGRAM TO RECOGNIZE AND HEAL CHARACTER DEFECTS?”

Rather than concentrating on the defects, I try to constantly apply the principles of the program — honesty, humility, willingness, etc. Also, routine application of my 11th and 12th Step practices are crucial to my recovery.

— **Steve B., Sunrise, FL**

Tools: Pray, write, share... Go to meetings, do service, talk to my sponsor. All the tools help to calm me down and grant me service. Oh, and breathe.

— **Diane M., Hamilton, Ontario, Canada**

I use the Tenth Step to look at my day when I have an uncomfortable feeling in my gut — to see what “instincts gone awry” might have been activated. It helps me to get grounded and centered again and lets my Higher Power begin to heal me.

— **Susan G., Huntington Beach, CA**

As I realize I’m suffering, it reminds me that one of my character defects must be active. I admit (#1), I surrender, then ask Higher Power to help remove it and work on practicing the opposite characteristic to the defect.

— **Rick B., Largo, FL**

After using the Step process, I have utilized the 10th Step to increase my self-awareness and vigilance in making amends when my character defects lead to my own poor behavior.

— **Rick K., Santa Cruz, CA**

I use spot-check inventories and day-end reviews in addition to checking in with my sponsor and being of service in the fellowship.

— **Martina, Munich, Germany**

I journal for 15 minutes to review my day. I sponsor and have a sponsor. Honesty with myself and others takes me out of isolation and fear. Service heals me from being self-absorbed.

— **Allen, Seattle, WA**

12 Steps — 6 & 7. Humble = to be aware of one’s shortcomings.

— **Jim B., Hamilton, Ontario, Canada**

Identify the opposite behavior of the defect...When I see myself doing the defect, I (try) to do the opposite. I pray to Higher Power for the willingness to do this. It feels good when I do this!

— **Rob S., NYC, NY**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “How have you used the tools of the program to recognize and heal character defects?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #140 — “Has Sobriety in S.L.A.A. revealed addictive behavior that required work in other programs? What was your experience?” The deadline for submissions is 11/16/12; and Issue #141 — “How has your idea of intimate relationships/sober dating changed through working the S.L.A.A. program?” The deadline for submissions is 1/16/13. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

Healing character defects is a huge part of my recovery, and its never-ending! This is such a blessing. Attending meetings and identifying with member shares is a healthy and reliable tool for me to discover character defects that I’m ready to turn over, which I do through sharing, outreach calls, Step work and prayer/meditation. Every couple of months it seems I’m ready to release a character defect that I thought I’d have to endure for life. Thank you S.L.A.A.!

— **Anonymous**

By using the 4th Step and in the 10th Step, I am able to shine a light on my character defects. I am only as sick as the secrets I keep. These Steps help me be a little less sick.

— **Dave S., Tampa, FL**

Working with a sponsor has been very helpful; going through the Steps; getting ongoing feedback from group members; making amends.

— **Steve, OH**

I actually never thought too much about my character defects until I read an A.A. book call “Drop the Rock.” Before then, I had considered Steps 6 and 7 to be very simple steps that required very little action. You ask God to remove them and then you’re done.

What I realized by reading this book was that I am also required to take some action by letting go of my character defects. God can’t remove them if I don’t let go.

— **Andrew K., Dallas, TX**

Sobriety — through abstinence — (not obsessing about aspects of my addiction.) I can clearly see my part of life.

Sponsorship/meetings — feedback on Step work from my sponsors. Shares from others — I hear my story. I can recognize my similar behaviors.

Steps — looking at previous patterns, being rigorously honest.

Service — working with others — using the Traditions and principles of the program has shown me where I am out of balance.

Spirituality — contact with my Higher Power — asking for willingness to see/be aware of character defects and having the courage to change what is not working.

— **anonymous, San Diego, 2012 ABM**

What an incredibly important question! It has been through the literature, work with my sponsor and commitment to and participation in service for the Fellowship that I have been faced with many character defects. The support of members of S.L.A.A. have created a safe environment to heal.

— **Andrew H., Elizabethtown, KY**

Good question — the tool of service helped me deepen my sobriety but also revealed my character defects of perfectionism and workaholism. The healing comes from recognition and a gentle acceptance of who I am and a willingness to let Higher Power help me let them go.

— **Rita H., Montreal, Canada**

Question of the Day

By identifying and not engaging in destructive patterns.

— **Marcelo, San Diego, CA**

I participate in after-meeting fellowship regularly, so I can practice accepting others and relating in a humble and honest way.

— **Conrad G., Oakland, CA**

Outreach calls — working the Steps — doing service.

— **Jonathan K., London, England**

Step ^{10.}

— **Anke, Heidelberg, Germany**

Sponsoring /service work

— **Elizabeth, Houston, TX**

Spirituality: Journaling is one way I connect with Higher Power. And through the writing process I sometimes receive clarity on my character defects. Journaling also enables me to see where I'm experiencing healing and progress.

— **Kelli, Austin, TX**

Working the Steps with my sponsor.

— **Jack S., Seminole, FL**

Allowing and accepting — “being called out” on my behavior.

— **Jack S., Largo, FL**

The calm that came with working step 5 has enabled me to look at possible character defects without getting to “spin-y” or going off track. Once I can see the defect clearly, this solution is straight forward.

— **Jacque, Los Angeles**

To be present, all we need to do is notice our breathing: breathe in — be calm. Breathe out — be happy.

— **Tod, Los Angeles**

The 4th step inventory helped me “connect the dots” of my addiction and helped guide me through this process.

— **Chris, Los Angeles**

I ask God to remove them. — again and again. With all the humility I can muster.

— **Ben, Los Angeles**

When I have a conflict with another person — I go right to God. I'm able to respond with patience and gentleness. I know it's not about me.

— **Jason, Los Angeles**

Learned to pray, hope and not worry.
— **Brian, Monrovia, CA**

Meetings, reaching out, listening and learning to embrace my screaming little girl.
— **Claudine**

Recognizing when I have acted out and instead of beating myself up, I get on my knees and pray.
— **Tommy**

I go to my Higher Power to help me take responsibility, apologize if necessary and begin the process of forgiving myself.
— **Kathryn**

Sponsorship — with my sponsor's experience and strength, and my willingness to be open to new ways of being, I'm a better person.
— **Dorit G., Austin, TX**

By building a relationship with my Higher Power. Once I realized that I could accept help from others, my life turned around. I get in pain, but then I get honest. Once you "know" you cannot "not know."
— **Terry, Little Rock, AR**

My sponsor had me write out a broad list of character defects — pride, anger, envy, greed, lust, sloth, gluttony, lack of self discipline, and self-seeking fear — for my Sixth Step. He wanted me to see how these operated in my daily life and in my thinking, so he had me write down synonyms and antonyms for each of them. And he had me do some writing about specific examples.

For example, with the defect of anger, I recounted how I would develop bitterness and resentment, and strong hostility towards people, places, and institutions. My sponsor wanted me to meditate on these twice a day so that I would recognize these character defects when they reared their ugly heads. Only by seeing them, when they came about, (in whatever guise they were using at the moment) could I "ask God to remove them (Step 7.)"

The other day, at work, I was growing frustrated by the inefficiencies of some of what co-workers and I do. I was getting irritated and I wasn't seeing things well. It was to the point that I was losing serenity. "Oh," I then thought, "this is turning into unhealthy anger. God, please take this defect of character from me."

It's been months since I had been on Step 6, but it came to mind at just the right time.

— **Victoria H.**

Before, I was oblivious to everything around me, including how my actions affected others. Now, I am able to be present in the moment, and I am learning to listen — listen to my sponsor, my sponsees, my family, and most importantly, to my Higher Power.

— **Phillip W., Little Rock, AR**

Those Ever-Appearing Character Defects



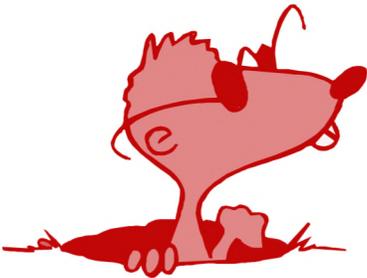
FEAR



LUST



ENVY



ANGER



JEALOUSY



LAZINESS

Before making my way over to the Barnes and Noble to pen my share, I was reminded how casting out my character defects is like playing a game of whack-a-mole.

I whack down one or two and three more pop up.

In the hotel this morning I lost my temper with an uncooperative

ironing board and ended up breaking it beyond repair.

(Remind me again how adults handle this.) Later, I made amends at the front desk — reporting the incident — and offered to pay for a new one.

Then while driving here, someone began to tail me while honking their horn. Responding in kind, I flashed my brakes hoping to make his life miserable. Ticked off, the driver spun his car around mine slowed down and opened his door. Sensing the danger, I made a wide arc around him, turned a hasty u-turn safely before oncoming traffic and haul-tailed it out of there.

OK. I'm a middle-aged professional who falls into the state of mind to let this crap happen! This is just one morning and it doesn't include my many other bad choices, let alone the junk in my brain that I just don't have opportunity or time to actually act on.

This is discouraging because I thought the program was supposed to make the bad stuff go away. I thought there was some sort of magical promise we read where, by working the steps, I was going to rise up to the spiritual level of Gandhi — cruising through life with a smile on my face, a feeling of peace in my heart and wise proverbs rolling off my lips to help those who are new to the program.

Before my sponsor catches me beating myself up too badly, let me think about how this program really has worked in regard to my character defects.

First, it helped me identify items that I didn't know were character defects. In my acting out career, I mentally portrayed driving down the boulevard in hunt-mode looking for the dubiously-dressed women who would have been walking by. I would use words such as "exciting, adventure" and "thrilling" to describe such activities. I would even use words

like "score, victory" and "euphoric." In doing my Fourth Step, I discovered more appropriate words for this behavior: "predator, cheat" (left work early; came home late) and "exploitive" with follow up words: "shame, fear," and "depression."



Second, the program helped me to go deeper than simply understand what my character defects are, by getting a sense of the process and dynamics. For instance, I am a dishonest person. The reason I am dishonest is not because I want to cheat, manipulate or do harm. Rather, it is because I am afraid. At the risk of doing a psychological dump here, women in my life were often very strong, powerful beings who did not, as a rule, have my best interest in mind — or at least that is how I perceive them. In my internal belief system, I came to think that the only way to get my needs met was to be creative and sneaky. If I am not up front about my needs (that never works anyway) I can find a way to work around the system and get my needs met. Fortunately, there is a whole adult entertainment industry that caters to people like me.

Seriously, knowing how the character defect of fear and dishonesty drives me, I can have conversations with my sponsor and discuss how I can establish true and legitimate intimacy

without sneaking off to the crack-cocaine stashed somewhere in the forbidden forest.

Third, when my character defects raise their ugly head, it is not my Higher Power throwing up His hands saying, "There you go again! You idiot! Another failure!" Rather, it is an invitation from my Higher Power that says, "David, what's going on? It sounds like your engine is a little rough this morning. Would you like us to look under the hood together and see what might be happening?" Why did I get so ticked off this morning that I headed towards rage? Do I need to adjust my sleeping pattern? Do I resent the fact that I am not in control of all my vacation time and I didn't get to go for my jog this morning? Is there a legitimate concern or am I being obsessive and selfish? If jogging is a legitimate need (third circle exercise) how can I have a conversation to make sure it fits into the vacation plans?

Did something in the long car ride last night trigger me back to the old narrative of my wife where "she doesn't meet my needs and the only way I am going to fix this is to sneak out and act out?"

A manifestation of my character defect is not a failure. It is an invitation to look at my interior life in conversation with others while noting the danger signals on the path. I may not come up with some sort of solution to my current feelings. I might have to move it all into the realm of "this too shall pass."

But the important take-away is awareness and a determination to be very careful and connected for the rest of the day knowing that things are amiss inside. This is important for me because acting out will only makes things worse.

— David S. Boone, NC



Not Working On My Defects

I have a friend in program who frequently reminds us that nowhere in the Twelve Steps does it say we need to work on our character defects. I used to dismiss that statement as being merely an expression of semantics until I really thought about it one day.

If you carefully read the Steps, you will see that it is indeed a true statement. Step Four only tells us to list the character defects. In Step Five we only share them. In Step Six we become willing to have God remove them. In Step Seven, we ask God to remove them.

Let me start by saying that I have worked Steps Four through

Seven more than once, in more than one program. The first Seventh Step I did was at the suggestion of a former sponsor who directed me to go someplace solemn (I went to a chapel) and get on my knees and recite a heartfelt prayer that I had written as part of my Step work. That prayer was basically a personalization of the prayer known as the Seventh Step Prayer from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.

While a helpful exercise, I did not find that the character defects were suddenly and miraculously removed from me. I was still contending with all too frequent episodes of pride and ego, some

bouts of dishonesty and the like.

Now according to my friend's statement, I figured I had done what I was supposed to do... I had asked my Higher Power (I believe humbly) to remove my defects of character. So why then was I still struggling all too frequently with patterns of conduct that revealed the strong presence of those very same defects that supported my sex and love addiction?

The second time I worked the Steps was in S.L.A.A. That time, I carefully took my prior Fourth Step, reviewed and expanded it, and spent more time praying for the willingness before moving on to Step Seven. Part of my Sixth Step exercises was to review my

Fourth Step inventory and to list the opposite traits of my character defects. For example, the opposite of my lying was honesty; the opposite of my pride was humility. I was struck by the passage on pages 88-89 of our Basic Text which points out that when we ask for the defect of impatience to be removed, we need not practice patience. Instead, we get honest about our self-centered willfulness and impatience disappears as we practice thoughtfulness towards others. It seemed to me that this approach was indeed the way to proceed through my Sixth and Seventh Step.

From my list of “opposite” traits, I created a list of those things, distilled to their most simple form, that represent my spirituality – the essence of what I believe my Higher Power gives to me through prayer. I came up with a personal list of character traits which seemed to me to be the characteristics that come directly from God, things such as honesty, humility and loving

compassion. I then proceeded, over a number of months, to pray and meditate on those characteristics.

I also resolved to carry this spirituality with me, not only when I meditated, but as I went through my daily activities. One trick I used was to take a wide rubber band and write on it, with a pen, the trait I was praying for. I would then wear that rubber band on my wrist throughout the day noticing that it said something like “honesty.” I did this for a number of months, carrying with me each of my “spiritual characteristics” to keep me mindful and open to my Higher Power’s presence within me. Instead of dwelling on the negativity of my character defects, I worked hard to keep my focus on the positive strengths bestowed by my Higher Power. For me, such an exercise is the essence of prayer. By such prayer, I found the unconscious grip on my character defects slowly loosening and I became more and more willing to let

them go.

I certainly don’t profess to having rid myself of all my character defects; I am very much human. I will still occasionally find the need to wear one of my old rubber band bracelets (most often the one marked “humility” as I continue to struggle with ego).

I do believe that I am a much better person than I was before and I realize that it is Step Six which was a key to my growth in recovery. I had found a way to enlist my Higher Power’s help, not only in removing my character defects, but in becoming entirely ready to have them removed.

Now, when I hear my friend’s often-made point, I remember a very important corollary: it is true that nowhere in the Steps does it say I have to work on my character defects; it does say, however, that I have to be “entirely ready” and that, in my case, takes a lot of work.

— Anonymous

***the Journal* themes and deadlines for 2013**

Issue #	Theme	Question Of The Day (QOD)	Submission deadline (articles and QOD)
#141	Developing True Intimacy: Sober Dating Plans to Healthy Relationships	“How has your idea of intimate relationships/sober dating changed through working the S.L.A.A. program?”	Jan. 15, 2013
#142	Safety in Meetings	“Have you ever felt unsafe or triggered by a member at a meeting? How did you (or your Group/Intergroup) handle the situation?”	March 14, 2013
#143	How Do Newcomers Become Old-Timers ** ABM Issue	“Why do newcomers leave S.L.A.A.? How do old-timers stay?”	May 16, 2013

Submit your writing at www.slaafws.org

Letting God Forge My Character While Trying to Participate

One of the many times I did my Fourth and Fifth Steps, I had a sponsor who sat with me and listened, but he also pointed out my character defects. He told me to write each character defect in the last column of my Fourth Step.

For each resentment on my list, my sponsor gave me four or five character defects that I never thought I had. This, of course, angered me, But I had the humility (or maybe fear of conflict) enough to do what he said (even if I planned on ripping the paper into tiny little pieces later.)

He told me to go home for my Sixth Step and write each character defect on a notecard. I ended up with 150 notecards! I was told to put the cards in a drawer and take one out each day and pray for it to be removed. I beat myself up with this for months until I felt like I couldn't take it anymore. Then a friend in A.A. told me that he takes a black marker and makes a big X through the character defects and acts as if God is removing that defect and eventually, it goes away or at least has less power over him. I tried that and instantly felt lighter.

But I had a huge problem with jealousy. After a nine year relationship with a guy who cheated on me constantly, I found it hard to trust anyone.

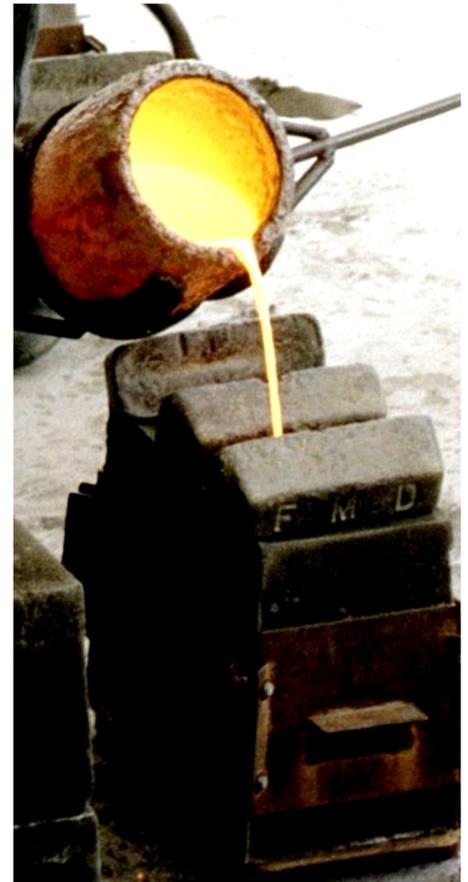
When I finally got sober in S.L.A.A. and followed a sober dating plan with the man that I am now married to, jealousy was a huge problem.

He didn't deal too well with the drama of jealousy (I thought most guys would find it flattering — a way I could rationalize my defect and not have to pray so much about it.)

I kept praying for it to be removed but it was so stubborn and wouldn't go anywhere. It stuck to me like glue and made me not want to go anywhere with my boyfriend for fear it would crop up and choke me. My jealousy became very painful. I, not so patiently, dealt with it for a year — trusting that God would eventually remove it. I guess in some small corner of my mind, I thought it was keeping me safe (as if believing my boyfriend wouldn't cheat on me would jinx me somehow and only *then* would he cheat.)

I must have still had that belief in a trickster God who was up in the heavens laughing at all my misfortunes as he played cruel games with my emotions — even with all the evidence to the contrary. After my lightning bolt spiritual experience I was an entirely different person — but that's a story for another time.

With this particular defect I prayed for an entire year. One day, my boyfriend had the day off from work but for some reason, I didn't. When I called him at home in the morning, he didn't answer. I called him again at lunchtime on his cell phone number. He still didn't answer. I was getting anxious. Abandonment issues came up. What if he got in an accident? Worse, what if he was cheating



on me? (That's not worse for him by far — but, of course, I'm a selfish addict.)

What if I had chosen a cheater? Then everyone in S.L.A.A. would call me a fool, I'd look bad (ego.) I wouldn't be able to trust that God's got my back (selfish, self-centered fear, taking things personally, etc.)

On my way home from work, with my mind in a whirlwind of crazy thoughts, I called him again (controlling, dangerous driving, and stalking by this point.) He still didn't answer.

I was convinced that God was

trying to tell me something. I had been praying for this character defect to be removed for an entire year. Why wasn't it going away? A thought popped into my mind. "Maybe God isn't taking this character defect away because my boyfriend is actually cheating on me and God wants me to realize that and break up with him."

I prayed for a sign.

I called again.

He didn't answer.

"That's what it is. I need to break up with him. God gave me the sign," I thought.

All the way home, I planned the break-up. I would call him (cowardly way out) and tell him I knew he had been cheating on me that day. God gave me a sign. (not crazy sounding at all, right?)

I ran up the stairs to my apartment full of steam and ready to go. As I approached the telephone, I noticed the message light was blinking. "I'll just listen to the message and then get right to the business of breaking up," I thought.

"Hi, Lisa. It's J." It was my Nicotine Anonymous sponsee leaving me a voicemail message. I had been working with her for a while and she struggled with terrible cravings for cigarettes (I know the feeling.)

The tone of her message sounded uncharacteristically light and calm — most of the time I got frantic messages from her.

She said, "I just got the most amazing God shot. I was sitting at the local coffee house reading and all day long I've been having cravings for a cigarette. They were so powerful that they paralyzed me and made it difficult to breathe.

I kept praying for the strength not to smoke. But the cravings were relentless. Finally, when I

couldn't take any more, I jumped up from the table I was sitting at and made up my mind to go next door to the market to buy a pack of cigarettes.

"I was completely resigned to the fact that I was just going to be a smoker and die of lung cancer, when who walked through the door and blocked my path? Your boyfriend with a group of guys.

"They had just come from some A.A. marathon meeting or something and I was so shocked to see another "smober" Nicotine Anonymous member that I just sat down and cried. He asked me what was wrong and sat and talked to me for two hours trying to convince me not to smoke. I haven't lost my smobriety! Can you believe it?!

"Who would have thought that just at that critical moment help would come in the form of another member of NicA?

"Amazing huh? I think I can stay smober today!

"Love you and thank you for sponsoring me."

With that she hung up the phone and I could have caught flies with the shocked expression on my face.

My boyfriend is actually a stand-up guy and not some cheating creep that my head makes him out to be?

The fact that he wasn't answering the phone was not a sign from God that he was a cheater at all — it was just a healthy behavior for him that my addict mind twisted into darkness.

He wasn't out there running around naked at all — he was helping the addict who still suffers. And the fact that he helped someone who was in a position to tell me about it and not some random stranger was a huge God shot for me.

It wiped away all the fear and doubt that I had been feeling about him just moments before. It made me feel foolish for listening to the addict voice — but I know that's part of my disease.

From that moment until now, I realized that I don't have to give in to the crazy addict voices. I can tell them to go away.

And whenever I think something is a sign from God I need to do what the A.A. big book says, run it by someone else and see what they think before you run off and do something stupid (paraphrasing here.)

And once my (then) boyfriend joined S.L.A.A. I realized that I don't have to take it personally if he cheats on me.

I know society says otherwise. But if he cheats, that's his disease and it's not about me. I can trust that he has his own Higher Power and his own path.

I can trust my Higher Power and God will give me the strength to follow His plan, whatever that turns out to be.

Don't get me wrong, I know it would be an awful, painful road if that were to happen.

But I have the support of my S.L.A.A. group and my Higher Power to help me get through life's difficulties and to hopefully stay sober through whatever happens.

And when I demonize, that allows me to forget that I was once a cheater myself. Realizing that we're all human and fellow sufferers helps me live in reality and brings me closer to my fellows.

God heals my character defects as long as I can quit playing God long enough for Him to do his work. Hopefully I will try to help Him along the way!

— Lisa C., CA

Share space

Storied Limitations

A Sex And Love Addict Story In
Three Parts



Editor's Note: This story contains content that may be triggering to some.

PART TWO

From the last issue of the journal...

Dying from the pain of my first gay experience I gave more efforts to being straight. Ironically I found a Mormon girl and I finally had straight sex! Thank you for the cheers and applause. Unfortunately, my father came home in the middle of it.

And the story continues...

I ran up to question him about his early day and to my surprise I found myself, instead, praying he would ask me if I was just having

sex so that I could exclaim to him, "Yes! Yes I was! I was just having sex with a *girl!* Aren't you proud that your son isn't gay?!" Later on in the evening, as I watched the young, naked male slowly download onto my screen, I found myself thinking that there has to be a faster way to get porn.

If my brothers and I couldn't bond over typical guy things, at least we could do it over alcohol and fake IDs. Being 15 and looking 18 helped to get me into sex shops. I learned to effectively steal porn magazines from the

book store but the sex shop was much harder to steal from if I couldn't even be admitted. So, with the fake ID, I'd run in and buy and steal toys and then run into the woods near my home to play.

I eventually got bold and tried stealing videos. After I was caught, my father told me that what I was feeling about guys was just a phase and that it would go away. I believed him.

With the pressure off a little bit now, knowing that this gay disease was leaving, I began to explore it a little more first.

Across the street was a boy I grew up with that as we got older he became more and more effeminate. People started to make fun of him, and I learned to stay away, in public at least. Through the internet I found my way into his bedroom. We didn't know what we were doing but I knew I didn't want any intimate contact. I just wanted to sexually abuse his body. The disgust I felt seemed to excite me. I began to bully him during the day and then have sex with him at night. After meeting up a few times, I couldn't handle the shame anymore and pulled away entirely.

I tried to hide again in a relationship with a new girl who thankfully didn't pressure me to have sex. But again I compulsively found my next hunt. This time he was a peer and my first great love addiction; a.k.a. my first qualifier.

We met in middle school but came together in high school. We both were freshman and part of the football team. Usually after a game night, we'd go out drinking with the boys but one night, after the others passed out, D and I snuck back onto the football field. His embrace was like injecting heaven and cured all the painful feelings I was having. It made me want to live. I was already drinking to get drunk and exploring heavy drugs, looking at porn everyday, masturbating everywhere and prowling the internet but he was suddenly the "thing" I'd been waiting for when I didn't know I was waiting for it.

He felt like all I needed. I thought maybe we could forget our lives, our dreams and just run away. I remember thinking how accurate all the Hollywood movies were, and finally, all the love songs that I used to dedicate to the girls actually made sense. So I pushed him away and began to bully him like I did the neighbor kid. He felt so right, yet

my head said it was so wrong. And D would certainly ruin me. But that stupid thinking only lasted a few months because I was hooked.

The rest of our high school career we attempted to understand, manage and survive this covert love affair. We traded love notes twice a day. We took the same classes. We had the same friends. We did the same drugs. We did the same jobs. We played the same sports. We dressed the same. We wanted to be "the everything" in each other's lives.

By sophomore year, I would ache when he wasn't around. I would sneak over in my parents' minivan during school nights and we'd drive off to dark places and be with each other. Or he'd spend the night every weekend. Or he would sneak over in his parents' car. The longest I went without seeing him was a week and it was awful, I fantasized about him missing me as much as I did or worse; moving on. I thought the level of my pain proved the depth of my love.

We both tried to maintain our straight lives, double dating sometimes. Unfortunately my best friend, who was a girl, was in love with him, and he was still confused about everything like I was, so we'd all hang out and I'd watch them engage. It hurt. We'd get drunk at parties and fight in front of people, sometimes being psychically abusive using beer bottles or our fists. Our friends just got used to it, figuring we drank too much. But really there was a deep unhappiness starting to resurrect in me. So I tried to pull D closer.

At the start of junior year, knowing that D's home situation was physically abusive, my mother allowed him to move into my bedroom. Now I had him all the time. I thought this would fix any unrest he and I were beginning to feel. And it did for a

short while. By this time, I pretty much gave up on girls. I did however become an incredible manager of gossip and built a façade that was undetectable. I made a few unwitting allies into beards.

D lived with us for an entire school year. It was a dream for me to have him there but the consistent fear of being caught was always between us. One night when we drunkenly passed out on each other, I awoke to screams and my older brother throwing D across the room. To stop the bashing, I jumped in my brother's face.

I said I wasn't going to hit him so he hit me. I made sure that I got back up quickly to defend D. My brother continued to hit me and say things like "I love you man," "you're not a faggot." He finally stopped and ran to wake my mother. She made me drive D home that night and banned him from ever coming back. We were the ones punished.

During senior year, D found another friend to live with which made it very difficult to get away with our covert relationship. As a result, D and I began to fight more and more. I started to drink during the school week and the blackouts on the weekends were more frequent. I also began to explore heavier and heavier drugs. Alone on the weekends, I started acting out sexually with boys from the internet. One of these boys knew D and told him what had happened.

I remember feeling bad, but I also remember thinking that I had to be smarter about it. It was always okay for me to act this way, but if D ever came close I'd be destroyed.

Finally, I survived high school. I fooled them all and had been exactly what they wanted me to be. I played the part so well that I was voted "Typical Senior." I was so damn proud of myself, I practically won an Oscar. And I

only had me to celebrate with because D and I were rapidly falling apart as I moved on to college.

I was offered an acting scholarship (at least somebody recognized my talents for being people I'm not) at a college in Richmond, VA, ninety miles south of my family and D. My first semester away was miserable. I found myself frequenting trips home on the weekends, saddened when it came time to go back down to school. To deal with it, I started sleeping with more guys from the internet, since I now had new territory to prowl. Then D and I attempted to sort of break up but found the pain like a rubber band that would sort of snap us back together.

I was beginning a slow coming out process, hanging out with gay people in public, well hell — I was a theater major anyway, but definitely still fighting to be a macho joke. On a trip to visit me and my new gay friends, D took interest in one of them and off they went.

Even though we were beginning to break up, I still went bat-shit crazy, running through the night, drunk and screaming. I became extremely paranoid and shut myself away from anyone I knew because I believed they were all against me. The episode came to an end one night at my parents when I punched a mirror and used the broken shards to slice my wrists. I made a good bye phone call to D telling him I had nothing to live for. I wanted him to hurt as much as I did.

He needed to know that he was taking my whole world away from me. After I hung up he kept calling back until it woke my mother. She found me and wrapped my wrists up, put me in bed and then slept on the floor

with one hand on my shin. I felt a little "seen" by my mother that night.

The brighter side of attempting suicide was that I had to tell everyone what was going on, which was my opportunity to come out of the closet. My poor mother asked questions like, "Do you have AIDS?" and reminded me of her view of the Mormon faith, "It's okay to have the feelings but not to act on them."

I spent the following semester at a community college away from D, who now moved to my old college town. I found excuses to go down and visit so that I could spy on him or somehow be around him. I would almost always inevitably get too drunk and black out or pass out and make a fool of myself. Then I met R.

R was somebody I never wanted to be in a relationship with — so I stayed with him for 2 years. I didn't want to be alone and feel lonely. He had all the qualities I think I wanted for myself. He went to an Ivy League school. His parents loved that he was gay. He seemed very confident. And so I believed dating him gave more value to who I was.

To him, I was a straight-acting-attractive-ball-playing-trophy boyfriend and I was okay with that. Trophies just hold poses and never speak, but mostly they're fake, plastic and dead on the inside. I would visit him at his school and feel like a total fraud. I felt less than these intellectuals and fabulous famous people. So I tried to make them want me and to impress them with my drinking/pot smoking skills. It's all I thought I had to offer.

I moved to New York to be closer to R and his school. Around that time 9/11 happened

and that was enough to send me back to Virginia and back to my original college. We started making an attempt at a long distance relationship.

However, when I was at my school, it was as if I wasn't in a relationship. I started doing heavier drugs that would keep me awake all weekend and then I'd get home, find sex online and crash. This was my pattern for a whole semester, making excuses why I could not come up to see R. My school work began to suffer because I had no time for it between trolling the men's restroom, navigating the sex sites, downloading new porn, managing the short term flings, planning the drug crazed weekend, and dealing with the overall constant craving for more.

It came as no surprise that I felt relief when R broke up with me — it was one less thing to manage. Regardless, all I could focus on was the tidal wave of pain that I was trying to board up. Again came the wonderful victim-speak of "How could he do this to me? Doesn't he know how great I am? He's the one who has problems," and my very favorite; as I would look at the world around me, "Oh, they don't feel as bad as I do. They don't know what it's really like; they don't feel pain like this."

During summer break, I tried to find excuses to be around R, hanging out with "friends" which were really his friends. We even attempted to work at the same summer job together and help run a convention. We pitted a poor bartender between us, using him as a pawn to make the other jealous. We said we were both having sex with him separately, although I was lying when I said we did it. This ended in hateful sex between R and I that led to

more misery and confusion. When I came out of this convention experience, I went out to the D.C. clubs to dance it all away. And then I met DJ.

I was out well into the next morning at an after hours party when DJ came walking in to make some deliveries to the dying crowd. He took one look at me and pulled me into the bathroom. He had drugs, meth, and lots of it and so I kissed him. He took me out of that party and on the rest of his drug runs.

The combination of the meth and the excitement from doing the deliveries made any thought of R vanish from my mind and gave way to an incredible profound thought, "why can't I feel like this all the time!" So I did, or tried to.

I have a very involved drug story that took me from dating this drug dealer to taking over and dealing drugs for myself. I say this because I want to weave through my story with the sex and love addiction thread and not the drugs. The drugs that I took were tools for the addictions to act out; it was like feeding cancer to cancer. And I believe sex and love addiction led the parade.

I flunked that semester, left school and was literally told by a

director that I would never work in that town again. I left DJ too because he was holding me back. He didn't provide enough drugs and meth had fueled my willingness to act out my fantasies. Word of caution: Fantasies never ever happen like they do in your head!

When next I saw my family, I flat out told them I didn't need them because I was making enough money drug dealing. I was very proud of this new role that I was successfully playing. I wanted my parents to react and try to stop me. They seemed more embarrassed that I was nodding out at my grandma's funeral than about anything else. It was as if I was becoming more and more invisible like a ghost; my skin was turning grey, I was sinking into my body and I couldn't stand to be in the sun.

The following year was a plane crash. I began the experience feeling like I was superhuman. All my life I gave my power away needing the world to love me, and now I felt like I had all that back when I was dealing and doing meth. I felt visible, desirable and like I could do anything.

Unfortunately, I did have to keep increasing the dose to sustain this new feeling. It felt

like just over my shoulder was a stockpile of pain waiting to fall down on me at any moment. My life became whittled down to just the base primal desires; I became a wild animal. I isolated in hotels room cruising two computers at a time, stopping only to sell drugs.

I found the hunt was a bigger pay off for me than the actual sex. I cared more about sustaining the high from being horny and used the meet ups as set pieces for my glorified masturbation. I travelled up and down the east coast stopping at all the bath houses. I was always having sex with people I didn't want to and found them never good-looking enough. A few times I felt compelled to join in on orgies but it was always with men that disgusted me. Maybe I thought I deserved it, like maybe when I was 13.

The scariest was when I was alone because I would constantly push the limits of how many different drugs I could take and how much I could take to reach more and more extreme orgasms. I frequently woke up later from blacking out not knowing what happened.

TO BE CONCLUDED in the next issue of *the Journal*



I Came Into The Fellowship Looking For The Expressway And Found The Service Road



My first S.L.A.A. meeting was in March 1999. I knew I belonged long before this meeting because I had met another sex addict in another state while going to A.A. meetings, trying to fix my wife. He shared with me about S.L.A.A. and was able to get me a Basic Text.

I immediately started going to seven meetings a week. I went to my first Intergroup the next month. I knew nothing about

service work and there wasn't any talk about or encouragement to do service work, people just said, "Go to lots of meetings."

All of my life, I just tried to fit in, to be a part of, usually with little success. I never let people get close. I had invisible walls surrounding me. And even though I had already failed in two marriages, *no one* had ever penetrated those walls.

I began to show up at meetings and help set up chairs, lead

meetings and be a part of. I actually became involved in the Intergroup, rather than just showing up. People didn't threaten me with their friendship, didn't want anything, and didn't shame me when I made a mistake. They just acted like they understood and had been there before.

In service work I have made great friends, male, female, gay and lesbian that I care about and I know they care about me. I have

learned true intimacy and how unconditional love works both ways. I can tell anyone that I love them and there truly is no strings attached. Because of service work I have learned what a true non-sexual relationship can be with another human being.

I can ask for help and support, something I would have never done in my addiction. I can stand face to face with an attractive woman and have a conversation and *listen*, not thinking of how I can get her into bed.

My service work above the local group level over the years has included Intergroup chair, treasurer and vice-chair. I have also served as the helpline person and literature person. In our area, I have participated in a local recovery conference for the last 12 years serving in every position

available. I have also served as chair of the local planning committee for the IRC (twice) and chair of the host committee for two ABC/M's.

I have, and still do, serve on Conference committees including Chair of a committee. I have been to seven ABM's over the years and made great friends, including people I met 11 years ago at my first ABM, and still lean on them for support when needed.

My service work has been the keystone to my recovery from sex and love addiction, as well as my relationship with my wife. It helps me stay accountable to myself, my wife and all of my friends in recovery.

It gives me character. It gives me confidence. It gives me courage. It gives me guidance. It

lessens my shame. It gives me unconditional love. It gives me many other things as well, too many to list here.

Service work has made it possible for me to travel to places I would have never been able to go to on my own. It has also given me a vast knowledge of the Traditions that you don't find at the local level. I am sober today because of the service work I am doing. It has given me relationships I would have never thought possible.

It is said, "We can give back what we freely receive." That is what I and others do, and the rewards of service have been absolutely *incredible*.

I write this in memory of my first sponsor, Dave K.

— Jack S., Largo, FL

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](http://directory.slaafws.org/intl_phone)

Telemeeting Series

Healthy Relationships

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

S.L.A.A. Women's We Are Not Alone Withdrawal Workshop Telemeeting Series

Event Date: Sat, July 07, 2012 to Sat, December 29, 2012

For Inquiries: Info@slaawomensgroup.org

More Info: Each Saturday at 7:00 pm (Eastern Time zone) through December 2012. The S.L.A.A. Women's We Are Not Alone phone meeting group will be exploring the process of withdrawal as detailed in Chapter 5 of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text. The first three Saturdays of each month will be devoted to a different section of The Withdrawal Experience. The Fourth and Fifth Saturdays of each month will be S.L.A.A.

Step One Speaker Share Meetings. See www.slaafws.org for more details.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fri, November 23, 2012 to

Sun, November 25, 2012

16th Annual Spiritual Renewal & Recovery Retreat

Presented by: Los Angeles Intergroup

Where: Malibu, California

More Info: Our 16th annual SLAA Spiritual Renewal & Recovery Retreat will be held, once again, at the Serra Retreat Center, Malibu, California. Serra Retreat Center is a monastery located in the foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains and overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Join us for a week end of speakers, small group sharing, time for personal reflection and conversation.

S.L.A.A. is here to help!

Go to www.slaafws.org

Fantasy: The Core Of My Addictive Behavior



At the core of my addictive behavior is fantasy. Like many of us, I started my imaginary life at a young age, and I used fairytales, comic books, and children’s fantasy stories to escape painful everyday situations.

Mostly, as a child, I felt confused. I was raised by a secretive alcoholic, and we lived in a foreign country where I encountered language barriers and culture shock. I often didn't understand what was going on around me, and I turned to imaginary narratives to make sense of the world.

Not only were the fairytales (and later, television and movies) a great tool of escape, I considered the stories manuals for living. Since I wasn't receiving consistent direction from my parents, I turned to another educational outlet. I really thought that if I wore a long blue dress, sang with birds in the forest, and then ate an apple, the resulting conclusion would be a happy sunset with Prince Charming. I poured over the imaginary stories looking for guidelines to happiness and love.

This all led to my most destructive fantasy: the belief that I had the power to control other people's feelings. I thought that if I wore the right outfit, had the right haircut, the most interesting job, or the nicest laugh, that I could make people love me. If I correctly intuited how to look and behave in any given moment, then I would get the love, affection, respect, or desire that I so desperately wanted. If things didn't go as planned, I thought it was because I had mis-read the situation. ("I must have worn the wrong shoes, or I should have dressed more athletic-looking...")

This kind of manipulative strategizing permeated my entire life, and was the underlying agenda to every decision I made during the course of a day. I chose my breakfast based on what might be most desirable and cool to the other person. And I picked out toothpaste with the

intent of impressing whoever might see it in my bathroom cabinet. Everything, from which school to attend, to which apartment I lived in, was decided based on how to get something from someone else.

As my disease progressed and I got older, flirtation became my main tool of manipulation and escape. I flirted with everyone: my parents, my friends, colleagues, men, and women. I flirted my way through job-opening interviews, job-exit interviews, uncomfortable social gatherings, birthdays, weddings, and funerals. I left a close friend's wedding in order to rendezvous with an ex-boyfriend. And I had a grand old time at my grandfather's funeral because I had ended the night with a prospective date. I used to gauge the success of any social activity by how many women were intimidated or envious of me, and how many men wanted to date me. And I gauged the success of any relationship by how many of my boyfriend's friends were secretly interested in me. (That means I'm a good girlfriend, right?)

When I came to the program, I was in a long-distance relationship with an active alcoholic. We were making plans for him to leave his son and ex-wife to move in with me, and I was miserable. Even as the fantasy of 'marriage' was in plain sight, I knew that something was very wrong. After going to my second meeting, I found myself sobbing uncontrollably with recognition, remorse, sadness, and an awareness of the pain I had caused myself and others. I knew I belonged in S.L.A.A., and the thought was terrifying.

I somehow drove home on the highway while crying, and went straight to bed. I woke up in the

middle of the night going through physical withdrawal. I had cold sweats, cramping, and I was doubled over in pain. In my confusion and fear, I cried out loud, "Please help me! I don't know what to do."

And, from somewhere else, an answer came back to me. It said:

"Get enough sleep (rest when needed).

Eat good food (cook for yourself).

Drink enough water.

Exercise.

Go to meetings."

This was not the answer I was expecting. As addicted to drama as I was fantasy, I was looking for, "Become a nun! Climb the Himalayas!" Somehow, "Drink enough water," wasn't the important answer I had hoped for. And yet... the beautiful simplicity of it, the accessibility of it, was moving. It felt like wise council. I fell asleep and slept soundly.

My recovery began that night. These simple acts of self-care became my antidote to fantasy. I had been spending 100% of my mental and physical energy on the fantasy world of manipulative thinking – who loved me, who didn't love me, how to be rescued by so-and-so – that I had ignored the physical reality at hand (that of just eating a balanced meal or drinking a glass of water – reality!)

Through my recovery, I surrendered my entire life strategy and went through a painful withdrawal. Previously I didn't know how to communicate without flirting, and I had to start from scratch.

I re-learned how to talk to people (and how to walk away if needed), how to wear clothes that were comfortable for me, how to pick healthy food that I enjoyed.

There were a lot of very awkward moments, but the exercise was effective. I began learning how to take care of myself, and how to be present for others. This was also the beginning of my spiritual practice, which is centered around awareness in the present moment. I consider my Higher Power to be reality, in this moment, which includes typing my story for you, sitting in a large chair, with a glass of tea. Because of this, I hear my Higher Power through the wise things that are

shared by my sponsor, my fellows, and all of you.

When I first started the program, I came with the fantasy (of course) of what recovery would look like. I imagined the perfectly balanced life filled with a loving partner, our beautiful children, my successful career, our house in the hills, etc. I thought the promise of these things was the reason to work the Steps. These are no longer the prizes of recovery for me. Today I strive to treat myself with kindness, and to treat others with

kindness. I work toward communicating openly and clearly, without manipulation, and accepting that which is out of my control.

These goals bring me purpose and are a constant, invigorating challenge.

I'm currently in a committed, long-term relationship and I'm in awe of all that I learn on a daily basis. My life today is much calmer, more centered, and simpler, and I'm very grateful to be on this journey with you.

— Elise

Monkeys And Bananas

As I sit here shoving a buttered brötchen in my mouth, I think about how those of us who were never taught some of the most basic adult skills resemble more orangutan than human. I'm specifically thinking about qualities more along the lines of expressing anger appropriately and stating one's needs, but the way I'm eating also leaves more than a little decorum to be desired.

One of the first things my sponsor stressed in my first hellacious days of recovery, was learning how to feed myself properly. Something that seems quite obvious and, well, almost infantile for the likes of a 34-year-old woman. But it's still these basic program tenants, like not

letting myself get too hungry, that remind me that my upbringing wasn't one that fostered self-love or care in any way, shape or form. So I guess it's no surprise really when one abused, needy adult meets another, the insanity which ensues resembles a lot more "Adventures of the Serengeti" than "Leave it to Beaver."

In the spirit of a completely random yet apropos non-sequitur, I feel it's important to note that I've somehow eaten three bananas today.

I can't speak for my partner, but my behavior alone, rife with control, judgment, and manipulation (particularly of the passive aggressive persuasion) clearly doomed even the purest of loves to misery. Currently

getting my PhD. in Step 4, each and every one of my various and sundried character defects have come out to expose themselves like a de-needled Christmas tree.

My personal favorite flavor of sex and love addiction is a dependency so desperate it makes a paperclip look like a can opener. I needed his approval to live almost as much as water. And if you'd demanded from me a choice of the two I would have readily proclaimed, "Death by thirst, please!" It's no wonder that by the time I came into the rooms, I had seriously contemplated suicide more than a couple of times.

Endowed with the gift of desperation that still drives me six months in, I've worked this program as if my life depended

on it, because it did. I left a relationship with the man I love in a foreign country where I had no job, no friends, nowhere to live and didn't speak the language. To say that S.L.A.A. saved my life might be a bit of an understatement.

The past six months have been the hardest of my life bar none. Sure, I've experienced hundreds of difficult periods, but now that the addiction has stopped and the damn onion peels away, I'm left grieving 34 years of stored anger, abuse, abandonment and shame.

Sobbing myself through this city, I'm confident that I've financed the Tempo tissue company's summer family holiday on the Riviera. I've walked and cried hundreds of kilometers just to keep from going crazy.

A couple years ago I took care of Cookie for a weekend, a poor little hot-dog who had been beaten almost to death as a puppy. She was so neurotic that every time I would leave the house she would pee the floor. I said to myself one day while impatiently walking her, "Be nice,

you two have more in common than you think."

Little did I realize at the time how accurate my statement actually was. I have hope that this program will someday restore me to something resembling more adult woman than wild ape or incontinent dachshund. Until then, I'll continue tearfully wandering the cobbled streets of this increasingly less foreign city. If not wild beast, at least I can always use the excuse of being just another crazy American.

— anonymous

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