



theJournal

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Secrets Versus Privacy

How Do We Tell the Difference?

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:

We hear it chanted at many meetings: Who you see here, what they say here, let it stay here. Privacy — I can tell my secrets because in the meeting space we respect privacy. We have to because we are striving for recovery. A meeting is an appropriate place to share because no one has anything invested in you or your share. We all come from different backgrounds and only use our first names when we share. Anonymity respects privacy —the principles create a safe environment.

S.L.A.A. meetings and the Twelve Steps and the principles of the program teach us to respect other's privacy also. The program taught me that I have to respect my husband's privacy. I don't have to be so afraid that he's cheating on me that I read his journals or letters or start snooping and spying on him. My sponsor always told me that that's none of my business. My only business is my own business. Stick to my side of the street. Pray that God will protect me and trust that I'll be okay no matter what happens. So every time I got the urge to invade his privacy, I reminded myself to stick to my own business.

And secrets used to be a necessity around my rageaholic father and abusive boyfriend. But as an adult they only serve to keep me small. We are courageous people in S.L.A.A. as we bring out our secrets and stand in the sunlight.

I'm grateful to everyone who shared their stories for this issue of the Journal.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

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The Augustine Fellowship,

S.L.A.A.,
Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc.
1550 NE Loop 410, Suite 118
San Antonio, TX 78209

1-210-828-7900 Tuesday-Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. CT
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(fax) 1-210-828-7922. www.slaafws.org

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Managing Editor Lisa C.

Outreach Director

Art Director Fiona

Proofreaders for this issue Andrew K.
Beth L.

Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Has S.L.A.A. helped you understand the difference between secrets and privacy? Please share your experience, strength and hope.” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #154 — Ready for Sponsorship? — “When did you begin sponsoring and how did you know you were ready?” — The deadline for submissions is 3/15/15. Issue #155 — ABM issue ** Benefits of Service — “What blessings/benefits have you received from service?” — The deadline for submissions is 5/15/15. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

“HAS S.L.A.A. HELPED YOU UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SECRETS AND PRIVACY?
PLEASE SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE.”

Yes, although I’ve never thought about this. I’ve thought a lot about privacy (I’m an over-sharer). So I guess I’ve learned it’s not “secret” (i.e. wrong) to withhold private (i.e. personal) information.

— **Madeline S., Los Angeles**

Yes! I am as sick as my secrets. But working my S.L.A.A. program has helped me establish and respect boundaries which protect appropriate privacy. I now have integrity instead of illness.

— **Suzie, Los Angeles**

Yes! And it taught me about taking the time to discern who I can trust with private things that I want or need to share, or secrets I need to share.

— **Kelly A., Austin, TX**

Yes. It has helped to understand the shame, which motivates secrecy and self-care which allows for healthy privacy.

— **Steve B., Sunrise, FL**

Yes. I look at my intent now when I omit information, whether I feel my Higher Power wants me to share information or not. I look at keeping the anonymity of others. I do not gossip. I don’t hide things to save my image like I did before program.

— **Doan, NY**

Yes. In a safe environment, there is no need for secrets. S.L.A.A. groups provide that.

— **Anonymous**

Secrets

make me feel ashamed. I have to ask myself, “If this fact were known, how would it affect those around me? How would it affect my sobriety?” Privacy is about boundaries and dignity.

— **Anonymous**

I’m grateful for the opportunity to be able to speak about this question, because just last night I was talking to my roommate and I realized that I had divulged someone else’s business to him. Luckily, my roommate didn’t even know this person. But still, it was not appropriate and not fair to the person that was not even present. Today, I had a spiritual awakening about this because I knew that it was wrong and heartless. I was so happy to have the opportunity this morning to be in the full realization of my self and to have the knowledge given to me by my Higher Power. I know that I haven’t always been fair in keeping secrets or in keeping someone else’s privacy. Grateful sex and love addict.

— **Kristin, NJ**

Secrecy and Privacy



Photo by James E.

As a sex and love addict, I get both secrecy and privacy wrong. Secrecy is a withhold. It does not want to name my little compromises because, after all, I should be beyond that by now. I don't want to say that I went into a boutique bookstore convincing myself that it was upscale and intellectually chic when in fact that it was filled with sexually charged material and I knew it. Worst of all, I keep secrets from myself, whereby amidst all of my good outer circle activities, I slip into planning and low level triggers.

Privacy is protection. While we think of anonymity as keeping others from knowing

that I go to meetings, it is also in place for the opposite problem. I can be indiscreet and over-disclose. One program I know reads a warning to newcomers not to go home and confess to their spouses their entire acting out history. There is a kind of pride in such a toxic dump that glories in my honesty but in fact devastates the receiver and crushes the opportunity for healing that would happen if the disclose was done appropriately (if at all). Wise counsel and clear limits are in order here.

Many of us whose faith tradition takes on a revivalist flavor, assume that "I once was lost but now am found and here

are the gory details to prove it" is the proper template of discussing one's recovery. For me, this has often led to regret as I recall some testimonies that I have given that I wish instead I had just listened silently and worked my program.

Like I say, I have not always gotten this right. Nevertheless, I find that over time I end up telling my sponsor or the meeting what I need to disclose. And I accept the over-disclosures that I am now embarrassed about and trust my High Power to make with my mess what he wills.

— **David S., Boone, NC**

The Sacred Value of Privacy

When something is private to a person; it is something that is inherently sensitive or special to them.



Writing this piece has helped me to understand the sacred value of privacy and to really consider what I think of as sensitive and/or special to myself — what I want to guard and protect and what is worth cherishing.

As privacy involves protecting from others, it therefore also overlaps with security: physical, emotional, spiritual, something which as an addict, I have not much practice in. There was no real peace or safety because rather than holding myself as special, I held

my addiction as special.

So what is sacred, special and sensitive to me? I guess it is my body, my mind, my self — the various stages of life — the young child, the young woman, and the older woman who I will become. What is also special is: my connection to God and others, my recovery, my struggles and past wounds, the emotional processes that are still being worked through or being healed by God, feelings and thoughts that are mine and not appropriate to be shared and the confidential struggles of others.

Privacy gives one the ability to express selectively. Therefore, I get to hold to myself what is sacred, protect it, surround it with my own and God's love and care, and choose who to invite in to witness, share and love. This is different from spilling, where I am disconnected in the hopes of "getting something." Spilling is in service of my addiction. Privacy is in service of my recovery.

Privacy — a state of freedom from intrusion. Privacy means that there is a degree of safety in the relationship: I don't just trust everyone, and I am present

and connected when it is safe to share. Therefore privacy deepens intimacy and trust, and builds trust in myself, a foundation on which all my other relationships rely.

I realize how little privacy I have had in my life and how I continue acting this way, even when it is completely unnecessary and uncalled for. I grew up with no real privacy, and there was not much that was held sacred. I felt like I had no boundaries because I was so desperate for love that anything that anyone wanted was up for grabs. And therefore my true expression of myself was limited as I became a non-entity in order to try to receive love.

With you all and a Higher Power I get to change and claim the right to privacy.

I have to remember to honor and respect other's rights to privacy, even if I don't always use my own right! More and more, I feel a sense of where the line of comfort is drawn. I realize, "This is comfortable to share with another, this is not." Now, I have started to honor that. And I have started to understand and not take it personally that other people have boundaries of intimacy and privacy.

In recovery, I have to work with a fear of aloneness. I am fearful that if I am private and have boundaries, everyone will disappear. Now that I am growing in recovery, I can see that if I maintain more privacy and dignity and discernment, my life will be calmer and there will be less entanglement in my

interactions with others.

Writing this helps me to feel stronger, and more calm and collected. I believe that one day at a time, I can experiment and learn about privacy and have the protection, boundaries and self-care that ensue.

Other definitions of privacy that I found were: aloneness,

Privacy deepens intimacy and trust, and builds trust in myself, a foundation on which all my other relationships rely.

insulation, secluded from the view of others, solitude, protected. These words give me a sense of peace, sacred stillness, and calm.

Secrets are dangerous in recovery. Sometimes, I keep things secret – thoughts, impulses of acting out, actions that I have taken or am about to take that I know should be shared. My addict tells me, "It's no big deal; You can handle it; Don't trouble anyone else with it." But these secrets can kill, damage and destroy. They also cut my continuous contact with myself, with others and with my Higher Power. The flow of life gets jammed because there is no continuity in honest

expression as I trudge the road of happy destiny.

One reason why secrets may have a bad rap is that there is an association with deception. In some cases, to keep a space or thing sacred and secret, unknown to others is okay and serves a purpose. Sometimes they will remain forever secret, because they are sacred and not to be shared – like trying to explain my relationship with a Higher Power. Other times, they need to be secret until it feels safe to share.

Deception however is a different matter, and actually stems from the Latin "decipere" –meaning to trap. Deception is about concealing things that people have a right to know, or withholding information in order to mislead, deceive and get something from someone, or give a false appearance. Obviously, we all know something of this.

I smile when I want to shout or cry. I shout when I want to cry, because I deceive myself and others of how I really feel, out of fear of getting hurt or not getting what I want.

Recovery is about learning to step out of deception, and into reality and honesty. In that place, I can choose what I want to keep hidden, and what I want to or need to share with others. But at least I am standing where I actually am, rather than twenty feet away from myself like I am when I live in deception.

Thanks for being part of my recovery.

— Elise

Awakening My Spirit

I wasn't raised to feel sorry for myself. I didn't grow up free of addictive personalities. I used to survive by keeping my focus on the big picture. With the help of S.L.A.A., I can barely feel any of the pain from my life experiences.

Editor's Note: There are references to abuse in this story that may be triggering to some.

I came to understand myself through the program's terminology: qualifier(s), bottom and top line behavior and consequences, obsessive/compulsive, intrigue, to rescue, to be rescued, fantasy, understanding, permission, compassion, Higher Power, surrender, hope and boundaries. My spirit was awakened in these words and in doing an inventory. I stepped into this program more so to reinvigorate my unmanageable life. Each week, I come away from the Monday night Women's Closed Writing Workshop meeting feeling safer about being in my own skin.

It's humbling as well as imperative for me to feel safe from gossip and judgment. I need to be able to say out loud to

another human being that I am an emotional anorexic. If I don't stick to my bottom lines, the consequences are that I have zero active relationships, whether with family or friends. I have zero bonds, whether with an acquaintance, lover or boyfriend. I spent the bulk of my life perfecting the art of invisibility and living beneath the radar.

I realized through working this program, that my motives come from a place of anxiety and from living an otherwise unmanageable life. Being an active victim as opposed to a survivor means something to me; it's not unimportant, because the space I take up matters. Date rape was common place in my life. I couldn't let go of the drug use and wondered why I couldn't

recall things, whether it was a distant memory or happened within the last twelve hours. It wasn't okay. In these rooms my exacerbation is not looked on as crocodile tears. There was no crosstalk, no feedback — just me, getting things off my chest.

I was bedwetting because my father would be getting out of the shower and readying himself for work in the wee hours of the morning, and he petrified me. I didn't want to see any more of him than I had to. He taught me to expect him at night, after my sister told him to bother me for a change, God rest his soul. And he did leave her alone.

After he molested me, I ran into traffic just as a driver came too close to see me. He couldn't stop the vehicle in time. I failed



to die. It earned me a short vacation. I learned that greater risk yields a greater reward.

If my father had to stop with my sister, he'd have to quit me. He also beat my brother and the poor dog. He had started violating my brother before my sister.

My brother got beaten every day after our father had to stop his activities with the rest of us. That is probably the reason why, despite much success, financial gain, getting married and having children, my brother committed suicide.

Where was my mother? Well, she only got married to bring her family out of the third world, so

you already know. Now I am a mother. And my daughter tells me she loves me, and I reciprocate.

I was only barely holding on when she was taken into child welfare, and that is when I had to admit to myself that my life was unmanageable.

It matters, I tell you, that I love myself as much as I love this 18-month-old innocent kin of mine. And I am prepared to usher this child into a better future, even if it means facing things I've buried long ago.

This baby was my wake up call. Maybe it's different for you, but for me, this Higher Power has finally blessed me with

something of a reward. I have an incentive to come out of hiding and to be brave and to love the greater good. All of a sudden, I've stopped crying when people ask me how I'm feeling.

All of a sudden my routine is not a secret. My personality is more assertive than cooperative, and I don't offer too much information; and I do this unapologetically.

There is so much more to my story. But at the end of the day, working the steps, and sharing with these ladies releases me of unnecessary guilt and gives me a fresh perspective on life: so thank you.

—Sue on Mondays



Photo by James E.

The Slippery Slope of Secrets

There is no question that S.L.A.A. has helped me understand the difference between secrets and privacy, or rather helped me understand my previous lack thereof.

Growing up, I was the keeper of secrets in my family. How well

I organized and guarded said secrets was instrumental in determining if I attained and remained in others' good graces. So I became extremely proficient at knowing what secret was kept where and who it belonged to, both literally and figuratively.

Keeping secrets provided me with a sense of entitlement, a sense of privilege, a sense of belonging, a sense of self-worth. It enveloped me with a false sense of pride and source of illusory power. The fact that my parents, who at the time

represented my Higher Power, were providing me access to their most private secrets equaled trust and intimacy, or so I thought.

Page 81, Step 5, of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text states, “many of us recognized that a characteristic of our sex and love addiction was that our lives were divided into carefully segregated compartments, underscored by secrecy and confidentiality.” All the skeletons stored in my mind were locked into compartments so separated from each other that the walls guarding them served doubly by offering to protect me from myself. I became so engrossed in keeping others’ secrets safe that it left little room for any thoughts or feelings of my own. If something did surface, I couldn’t discern if it was even mine. So this then led to the beginnings of disassociation and disbelief that I had knowledge of anything that was in my best interest. All these secrets also afforded me an unending source of drama, along with distraction from my own life by complete preoccupation as to when they were accessed, by whom, and for what reason.

Part of the script I had to rewrite while working my program was reshaping my understanding that secrets and privacy were very different from each other, instead of one and the same. In my sobriety I have come to recognize that secrets, for me, are smothering and shrouded in shame. Secrets are something kept hidden from

others and may or may not be exposed at random for the sole purpose of self-preservation, without any regard to a fellow’s well-being or care. Privacy, on the other hand, is protective and nurturing, and presents itself as a clearly marked place to grow and process through thoughts and feelings. Privacy is

Secrets seem easier to slip into, because privacy takes strength, courage, and contrary action to ask for and uphold.

established, it is known, and if needed, whatever is learned is later presented appropriately, and in due time.

When I present the need for privacy, it often holds with it the practice of healthy boundaries. If I am grappling with the conflict of suppressing or spilling secrets, I am feeding the all or nothing, good/bad, black/white thinking that fuels the

addict/avoidant behavior and all-encompassing nature of my addiction. In contrast, with privacy I am practicing the pause, and inviting my Higher Power to help me get quiet, reason things out, and let any addictive approaches settle so I can hear my safe, serene and steady self. This is the source from within me that I want to allow a voice. This is my program of recovery in action.

Secrets seem easier to slip into, because privacy takes strength, courage, and contrary action to ask for and uphold. When I allow you privacy I am essentially saying I respect you and I am trusting in my Higher Power and yours for more to be revealed if and when it is time. I am saying I do not need to control or contrive the current situation or outcome and am secure enough instead to focus on keeping my side of the street clean with sober motives and intentions.

Through working my program and the miracles of Steps 6 and 7 I now can sense secrets, and in fact have a strong aversion to them. I will often ask in my communication with others for them to please limit the details if I feel I am becoming triggered in any way which might lead to addictive thought patterns or bottom-line behaviors around secrets. As a result I have learned that, for me, privacy is the true nature of trust and intimacy and I can ask for it while respecting my sobriety.

— Amy L. Arizona



You're Not Lying

In November of 2001, at the age of eighteen, my girlfriend, A., found illegal pornography on my computer. I had walked out of the room and when I returned, A. was sitting on the bed, a puzzled look on her face. It took several attempts to get her to tell me what was wrong. When she finally told me what she had seen, I began damage control. "I told you I have a problem with pornography," I said.

"I didn't realize it was this bad. I don't think I can give you what you want," she said.

"All I want is to be with you," I told her. "That stuff isn't real. It's a fantasy. I didn't realize it would bother you so much. I promise you, I'll never look at it again."

I kept my promise, white-

knuckling it for the next two months, thinking that everything was going to be fine between us. But she was distant and, unbeknownst to me, was doing some serious examination of our relationship. A. called me one day in January, after she got out of school, and said, "I think we need to break up."

"Fine," I said, and hung up on her.

I'd done as she asked. I couldn't understand why that wasn't enough for her. I finally called her back, apologizing for my rude behavior, and asked her to meet me at the make-out point where we went on our first date (I've always been one for dramatic symbolism). We sat in my car and talked for an hour.

"I just don't feel the same way

about you," she said.

Before she left, she said that she hoped we could remain friends. I told her she wouldn't be seeing me again. I didn't explain that it was because I planned on killing myself, but it didn't matter. That's not what I did. Instead, I drove south, a hundred miles, over a highway lined with empty fields and smokestacks. I ignored the calls from my family and friends, intent on starting a new life somewhere else.

I returned home a few hours later.

In the intervening years, before I joined S.L.A.A., I had no serious relationships. I refrained from viewing pornography for all of 2002, sure that if my ex saw my commitment, she would take me back. At the same time, I was

perusing sexual personal ads on the internet, hooking up with complete strangers, convinced that it didn't count as breaking my oath. All the while, a persistent idea gnawed at the back of my mind that if my ex couldn't love me for what I was, then no one ever could.

I joined S.L.A.A. in 2009, tired of living a life consumed by sex addiction. After two months, I got a sponsor, who helped me work the steps. I set a bottom line that dealt specifically with avoiding illegal forms of pornography and acting out in chat rooms in an illegal manner. Despite such a defined bottom line, I avoided all forms of pornography entirely. I felt that it was the only way I could stay sober. There were times when I felt it was wrong for me to even look at a woman, walking through my life like a horse with blinders on. My sponsor tried to encourage me to be gentle with myself and remember that it was my bottom line that I needed to be most concerned with. I thought he was crazy. Surely, living life as a recovering sex and love addict meant complete abstinence from any form of acting out.

At five months sober, I was still striving for those brightly colored chips, eager to receive my blue, circular piece of plastic. My recovery got a little more complicated when my friend and co-worker, L., about to leave Dallas and move to Austin for school, informed me that she had feelings for me. I called my

sponsor as I drove away from her parents' house. "I think I might like living in Austin," I told him.

"Do you see what you're doing?" he asked me in his southern drawl. "All she's done is tell you that she likes you and you're ready to pick up your entire life and move to Austin."

I hadn't even noticed that enormous leap in my brain. He was right. It turned out I wasn't just a sex addict, but a love addict as well. L. moved to Austin and we kept up a long-distance relationship for a year-and-a-half. Periodically, I asked my sponsor when I should tell L. that I was a sex and love addict.

"Is it really necessary?" he'd ask me as he sipped his Starbucks coffee.

"I feel like I'm lying to her," I would tell him. "We've been going out for months and she still doesn't know this secret about me. I feel like I'm completely honest with her about everything else in my life, but can she really know me if she doesn't know about this?"

My sponsor smiled his knowing smile amidst his ever-present grey and black stubble. "You've been going out for how long now?"

"Six months."

"And how serious would you say your relationship is?"

"We're pretty serious."

"When she was here a few weeks ago, you said that you weren't sure if you were going to keep dating."

"Well, that's true. I mean, I'm

still not sure. I really like being with her, but with her living in Austin, it makes it difficult to know for sure. We don't know if we would work well as a couple if we actually saw each other every day."

"So, again, would you say that you're really serious?"

"I don't know," I replied, looking down at the wooden table. "I guess I can't be sure right now. Maybe it's better to wait and see what happens. I still feel like I'm lying to her, though."

"You're not lying to her," he told me. "Some things are private and we don't need to share them with everybody."

I must've had this conversation with my sponsor at least five times during my relationship with L. Our relationship got stronger, our commitment to each other grew in intensity. But my sponsor still maintained that disclosure of my status as a sex and love addict should only occur when it was absolutely necessary. I asked others in my group. I read some material in a non-S.L.A.A. book on sex addiction. Everyone preached extreme caution. Though the voice inside me told me I was being deceitful to L., I decided I had better heed the advice of those who had been down this road before me.

Long-distance relationships are difficult. They require constant communication and even then, they may not succeed. With L., I enjoyed the most honest and open relationship that



I had ever been a part of. My experience in recovery allowed me to be vulnerable with L., telling her when I didn't like something she said or did, not without fear of her reaction, but in spite of what her reaction might be. I learned that it is important for me to state who I am and what I am comfortable with, despite my fear of being abandoned by my partner. If I am meant to be with someone, then they will accept me for who I am.

L. was always accepting and in retrospect, I idealized our relationship, because it is difficult to find such an understanding person.

Ultimately, our relationship only failed because she could not continue with the roller coaster of emotions that she experienced every time we spent a few days together.

Our visits were always too short and too infrequent and then we'd have to say goodbye to each other for another month or two. When she finally broke it off, I drove back to Dallas ahead of schedule, in tears for half my journey.

L. and I still see each other from time to time. We have somehow managed to maintain

what for some is just an empty promise of, "let's stay friends." It hasn't always been easy. A year after our split, L. wanted to get back together with me. Though it was everything my love addict wanted, I had to deny her. I knew that nothing in our situations had changed and nothing would change. After another year, I changed my mind.

I wanted her back, but she had moved on. It was very difficult for me to accept. Several times we had to cut off communication with one another, but eventually we got to a place where we could talk from time to time without getting into the "what-ifs" of our past relationship.

In September of 2012, I started dating a girl I met at a roller derby game. My friend, R., was playing in the game. R. had previously worked with me at a drug rehab and was the person I went to when I decided to get help for my addiction.

I saw R.'s husband speaking with some friends at the game and I started to talk to one of them. This girl, J., seemed nice enough and she shared a mutual friend with R., so I assumed she was probably alright. With a

little liquid courage, I asked her out. We began dating and it quickly felt like a relationship. J. expected me to call her on a regular basis.

She also expected me to pay for nearly everything on my meager income, though she made twice as much as me. I found myself refraining from being open and honest with her because I recognized a judgmental streak in her personality.

She tried to bully me to change things about myself. She didn't like that I had dandruff and a minor amount of peeling skin on my eyelids. She told me that my appearance reflected on her. When I refused to do anything about it, she bought me skin and hair care products as a "gift." I was outraged.

Thinking I would save face (no pun intended), I tried out the skin care lotion one day. I covered my face in it. The next day, I did the same. And again the next day.

I went to my Monday night meeting, my skin tingling. Some of my fellow S.L.A.A. members pointed out that my face looked red. When I got home that night, I saw that my face had broken out as a reaction to the lotion.



I was angry with J. again. Luckily, a sponsee clued me in on a different type of lotion that would clear up the outbreak, and my skin settled down immediately. When I saw J. on Friday, I casually explained that I had been angry with her at the beginning of the week. She got angry with me for being angry with her. "I don't see why you're blaming me," she said.

I stayed with J. for as long as I did on the advice of my sponsor.

He told me that it would be good dating experience. Maybe you've heard the program slogan, "Date 'em til' you hate 'em." I tried to listen to my sponsor's advice, because I know that he's got more experience than I do, but while I dated J., I felt like I was ignoring my inner voice. That voice was telling me that I was allowing myself to be walked on just for the sake of staying in a relationship with someone that I didn't even like. It told me that I was not practicing the principles of the program which have taught me that I need to be honest about my feelings regardless of how the other person might respond.

On our first date, I made the mistake of telling J. that I was in a twelve-step program. I thought it would make it easier to explain why I wasn't available so many nights out of the week. Unlike L., who never once asked me the nature of my program, J. immediately wanted to know. "If you're an alcoholic or a sex addict, then that's not okay," she said.

I should have known right then that we were incompatible. Her comment hurt. During the two months we dated, she tried and tried to get me to tell her what my program was about. She even tested me on the

wording of the steps, like she didn't believe I was really attending meetings.

After we broke up, I learned that she tried to go behind my back to find out what program I was in. Her friend went out with my friend, R., one night and asked her about it. R. proved what a true friend she is. "I don't think that's really any of our business. If he wants to tell her,

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he will," she said.

One night, J. was railing at me for my decision to return to school for writing. She said there was little point as I wouldn't be able to make any money. I told her that that was not why I wanted to do it. I told her I wanted to go back to school because I wanted to learn how to be a better writer and possibly get a job, any job, where I could use those skills.

She continued to argue that it was pointless and I would never be successful. I reverted to my old method of dealing with anger which is to just stop talking. Finally, J. said, "Are you one of those people who just bottles up their anger?"

I responded in true passive-aggressive fashion. "I figured you could tell that I was angry. I didn't think I needed to tell you."

She sat down and we talked. I explained how I felt that she was always trying to change me and make me into something that she wanted me to be. I told her that my concept of love is that if two people love each other, they accept them for who they are (with the caveat that "love" was not really even a concept that was at play between us).

She stated that for her, love means you try to help the other person become better than what they are, for their own good.

"I just have these high expectations for people that I go out with," she said.

"Well, I'm not interested in meeting your expectations," I told her. I left her house and we never spoke again. I vowed never to allow someone to walk all over me like that in a relationship again. I need to be who I am and if the other person doesn't like it, they can go date someone else.

At the start of 2014, I started seeing pictures on L.'s Facebook page that were difficult for me to look at. She was dating someone new. I brought it up at a meeting and a program buddy informed me of the ability to unfollow someone on Facebook. I liked the idea. I wouldn't have to unfriend L. and hurt her feelings like I had in the past. She wouldn't even know that I wasn't following her. I just wouldn't see her posts showing

up in my feed. I'd given up on being with her again, but it was still too difficult to watch her fall in love with someone else.

A month or two later, I was surprised to get a call from L. I was driving back from the post office after dropping something off for work. Our phone call frequency at the time was pretty limited. I still had the love-addict behavior of wanting to rescue her when something was wrong, so on the rare occasion that she called me, I assumed it was because she needed my help. When I saw her name pop up on my phone, I had that cattle-prod jolt that told my brain, "Here's your opportunity."

I countered this thought with my recovery, telling myself that she was probably just calling to talk.

"Hey," she said. "How are you?"

"I'm good," I said. "How are you?"

There was silence on the other end of the phone and then she said, "Not good."

L. didn't go into the details. She knew I didn't want to hear about her new relationship. She's always been considerate

like that. She told me that the pain was so unbearable and she felt like something was wrong with her. "You've always talked so highly of that program you're in, and I was trying and trying to remember what it was called."

"That's because I never told you what it was called."

"You didn't? I could've sworn you did."

I considered my options. L. was always an understanding person. I never thought she would judge me for my addiction, but I had that fear in the back of my head that I would be hurt again the way I had been years ago when A. found those images on my computer.

But L. was in pain. The way I saw it, if she was reaching out for the help of the program, I couldn't withhold that from her. I decided to take the plunge. "The name of the program is Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous."

There was no gasp. No huge explosion. No attacks launched at me about why I'd never told her. Instead, she simply said, "Okay," and I started giving her information on how to get help. I directed her to the FWS website and told her about the 40 Questions for Self-Diagnosis.

I was ashamed to realize that part of me was excited about the fact that she might be one of us. I felt that it would explain so many things and would fulfill a love addict fantasy of "meant-to-be."

She called me later that night and told me that while she hadn't identified as a member of our program, she was relieved to at least be able to say, "Okay, it's not this." Now she could look at other possibilities. I felt ashamed again, because I realized that I was disappointed. But I was glad that I was able to help her in some way. "I was pretty nervous to tell you what the program was," I said.

"I know. I hope you didn't feel pressured. I was just hurting so much."

"I always felt like I was lying to you by not telling you about the program."

"You weren't lying," she said. "It's a very private issue. There's nothing wrong with that."

If I was a person who cried easily, I would've broken into tears right then. My eyes did get a little wet. "That's exactly what my sponsor always told me," I said.

— Anonymous



The First Drink



Until A.A. came along in the 1930's, people didn't understand the mechanism that caused an alcoholic to get drunk. Since then, the model has been played out in many different ways.

Essentially, it comes down to the first drink. Since I am not an alcoholic, I find that if I drink, I eventually get a woozy

imbalanced feeling. My body is telling me, since alcohol is a toxin, that I've had enough and so I stop. This is the way the normal body reacts.

In an abnormal body, when alcohol is consumed, a phenomenon of craving results. Due to a different set of chemical metabolisms, the body says, "Give me more of that!" So

another drink is taken, and another, and another.

Combine this fact with an obsessive mind that says, "It will be OK this time," and you have a recipe for disaster. A story I related to in the A.A. Big Book is that of Jim who resented the fact that he was working for someone else in a business that he started (normal feelings). He then drove

to the country to check on a client (normal). He then stopped off at a restaurant to eat (normal). Even though the restaurant had a bar, he had been there before and felt safe (normal). He ordered a sandwich and milk followed by another glass of milk (normal).

He then got this idea that if he put a shot of whiskey into the milk, he could tolerate it on a full stomach (uh, oh). This was the beginning of the next drunken spree.

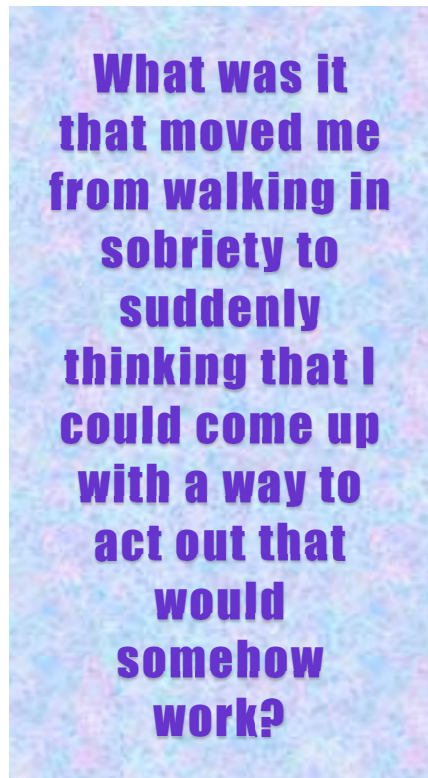
When I acted out a month ago, it was well planned and intentional. I decided to do a massage exchange with another guy. It was brilliant, or so I thought. It didn't have the difficulty of having sex with a woman that demands either money or a relationship. Spending time at a guy's house would look normal to the neighbors. And I was very clear in my head that we were not going to do the risky stuff that spreads diseases. We would just engage in touch. And there would be no "needy" love relationship. We were professionals.

Equipped with a plan and justified by a stressful life that needed relief, I initiated an ad on a hook-up site explaining exactly what I wanted. Someone responded in my very own neighborhood who was just waiting for someone like me. He even had his own massage table. And I even had the perfect time to do it. All I had to do was miss a meeting and no one at work or in my family would even wonder where I was. God must truly be giving me insight.

In spite of the deftness of the plan and the swift and accurate execution, I just could not make it work. When I showed up for the massage exchange, I could not quiet myself down emotionally. I was shaking and could not relax. The man was very nice and apparently felt at

home with this. However, as enjoyable as the physical touch between us should have been, it was as if I was barred from the enjoyment.

For two weeks I told no one.



My prayer life dried up (obviously, it doesn't work anyway). One Sunday in church, a discipline issue had to be dealt with and I sat horrified in the pew thinking they were coming after me (an insane thought – this church doesn't "out" people in their sin; they would come to me in private).

Any sharing in meetings was pointless because I knew that anything I said was baloney because I had this dishonest withhold. I felt like David after he acted out with Bathsheba, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my

groaning all day long." (Psalm 32:3)

The thought occurred to me that if I pushed through the emotions, I could become like the man I acted out with. I could become more comfortable with it and even have it as a part of my life. However, the more I thought about it, it became abundantly clear that I could either have the spiritual life I was developing in recovery based upon honesty, authenticity, connection with a Higher Power, growing intimacy with my wife and others, and a sense of finally understanding who I am. Or, I could develop this new form of acting out. However, I can't have both. No matter how perfect and planned my acting out is, it would always include some form of secrecy and dishonesty which is contrary to what I was becoming in recovery.

Over the period of my withholding, I moved through: 1) I will never tell anyone about this. I will just work through this. 2) I wish I could tell someone. I don't like this withhold. 3) I wonder who I could tell without telling someone I know – maybe a priest in another city or an online confessional or something. 4) Maybe telling someone won't be so bad. 5) I'll tell my sponsor but all the circumstances have to be perfect. 6) I'm going to talk about it the next chance I get.

The next chance was a meeting and then I was able to discuss with my sponsor on the phone the next day.

I didn't feel especially devastated. Unlike when I first entered the program and this voice in my head (and even the car itself) seemed to drive me to the massage parlors, I felt that this time was a conscious choice. It just happened to be a bad choice.

I went through the details with my sponsor but it was actually about a week later that it dawned

on me what my first drink was. What was it that moved me from walking in sobriety to suddenly thinking that I could come up with a way to act out that would somehow work?

It began one week when my wife was out of town and I was in the midst of a stressful computer system conversion. I had come home exhausted and, quite unusually, flipped on the television. For some reason, our paltry cable offerings included a free preview of one of the premiere cable stations. A movie was playing that I had heard of – it won several awards as a play – and it struck my interest.

The movie was about the AIDS crisis of the early 1980's. It was an angry movie chronicling the lack of responsiveness to this disease by the greater community. It also captured well the promiscuity of the time. Many cable stations have perfected the method of making shows that are suggestive and almost pornographic. The scene I watched was two men on a date who quickly ended up in bed. There was a flashback to a bath house scene where they had first met.

This took me back to the 1980's where, while I never had been in a bathhouse, I was learning how to work the Asian massage parlors.

I felt at home with the dark, seamy attitude of “anything

goes.” I was looking in the dark, hoping to find something that would make me feel better.

I only watched a half an hour of the movie but I was hooked and captivated. The next day, I began researching the movie and everything that had to do with the Gay scene in the early 1980's. I searched Wikipedia. I looked at the movie preview again and again. I went to the library and looked through other books on the subject. I even wrote in my prayer journal, “Why am I so fascinated with this?”

In my research, I stumbled upon a website supposedly by a Canadian health organization. Looking very official, it offered advice on how to hook up. It included ideas that made acting out seem healthy.

My addictive mind was racing! After all, an intelligent cable station by way of a Broadway play was telling me that acting out is OK. A Canadian health organization was telling me that acting out was OK.

“I'm just going to be smart! “ I thought. “I'm going to take their advice and do it in a way that is not dangerous. I am going to set down the rules I spoke about previously and do this thing that I deserve in a way that is safe and sane.”

And so it happened. And so once again I discovered that acting out never works.

In discussing with my

sponsor, we talked about the difference between intuition and insanity. In recovery, we often intuitively know how to solve problems. Most people, myself included, don't live mostly by facts. Often we may be taking a shower or driving and then suddenly, we get a solution to a problem or dilemma. The problem is that my road to acting out felt so much like intuition. It seemed like I was getting genuine insight. It seemed as if research was supporting what I was proposing to do. It seemed like my heart was giving me good direction though I had the nagging sense it was not.

The difference is that if I have intuition, I could talk to others and it would ring true to them also. Insanity, on the other hand, is recognized by others as just that. If I went to the meeting and talked about how I felt jogging with the dogs in the morning, it would be good outer circle behavior, I would probably get some affirmations. If I went to the meeting with this new, safe way to act out, everyone would laugh.

So I am back in sobriety, back in the life I truly want to live. I am more mindful to turn away when the offer of the next drink comes along. I am in communication to help me not buy into the next great idea.

— **Anonymous**



Share space

The Only Problem Is Me

My sponsor has told me for years that the 2nd A-hole I meet in the day is me. How true I've learned that this is.

You can probably tell, my sponsor has a little bit of the A.A. Big Book in him and I'm obstinate, thick-headed, in denial, you name it. Some messages take a decade or so to sink in. Good thing my sponsor is patient. I've been meditating on this concept for a few weeks now since one Saturday afternoon. I came home from my meetings and curled up on my couch. I slept on and off that day, waking up to "should" myself, berate myself for the activities I could be taking care of.

I couldn't just accept that my body was just simply tired. I fed myself, took care of my dog, watched a movie but I couldn't find serenity that day because of one project I felt I should be taking care of. So every moment that I was awake, I obsessed about the project and then criticized myself for not getting up off the couch and finishing that one project.

Truth be told, I was light-years from my earlier days of recovery. My house was literally clean, not that I'd eat off my kitchen floor (I have a dog) but I could easily walk through every single room of my house. There weren't maggots in my trash or kitchen sink. I had food in my fridge. And like I mentioned before, my dog was clean,



fed, and walked. But I couldn't accept that my body was tired and my addiction to self-criticism raged out of control.

The very next day, I did get up early and that project took less than one hour. As I finished the project, I looked at it with appreciation. I'd done a good job. Then I went about my day. For the next several days, I prayed and meditated on my incredible negativity towards myself and my compulsion to beat myself up. I did a 7th step on it and asked my Higher Power to help me with it and I began to realize that the only problem with the way I had spent that day was me.

Over the next few weeks, I shared about this experience at meetings and I heard my story echoed in other attendee's experiences. I wasn't the only one to "should" myself, I wasn't the

only one to obsessively criticize and negatively judge myself. I wasn't the only one to nag myself.

The awareness of this behavior was eye opening to me. And then I had another experience which showed me that sometimes the only problem with a situation was me. I applied for a new position at work and my inquiry was warmly received.

Then a week went by, then two. I sent a follow up communication to the hiring manager which was not responded to. Another week went by. By this time, under my standard operating pattern, I would have been bitterly criticizing myself for speaking up and asking for the position. I would have been berating myself for making myself vulnerable by being open and asking for a promotion. Only since the

awareness, and the "spiritual solvent" around this issue, I wasn't.

I waited patiently and with love for myself. I gave myself praise for putting myself out there and being willing to take a risk. When the call did come, and I was gracefully and respectfully turned down, I was able to take it calmly and with humor.

I was gracious. And this was amazing because usually when I'm in the midst of beating myself up, I have the tendency to be a real bitch to others, even those that I love dearly. So during the wait for an answer, I didn't take it out on myself and I didn't take it out on anyone else either. And this, for me, is progress.

— Anonymous

The Power of My Higher Power

“When you texted me ‘I love you’ yesterday, I didn’t know if I could text it back and mean it the same way you do,” is all I clearly remember hearing.

What followed after that is a complete blur.

It was Friday night, M and I were having sushi at one of our favorite restaurants in the city. I

was exhausted from the week—emotionally drained from a fight we had the week before.

Yes — we made up and all seemed good. Despite everything I told myself — I couldn’t put my heart at ease. Something was not right. All I wanted was to have a good weekend with him, with no one else around. We had plans for

both Saturday and Sunday. All we needed was to be alone and shut the world out — I knew we would be okay if we could do just that. Apparently he felt differently.

Once I realized we were having the “break up talk” everything around me started to shut down. My hearing started to fade, my vision became

blurry, my brain function was slowly declining and I could no longer put words together to speak. I couldn't breathe, it felt like an elephant was standing on my chest. He kept talking, rambling and not making any sense in what he was trying to say. We had talked about getting married, having children. We planned a future together, how could this be happening?

He started pulling reasons from anywhere that he could in hopes to make a convincing case that something was "missing" between us (as true avoidants always do). But all he kept referring back to was that his feelings had changed, and he didn't know why.

He was going through his own panic and anxiety — not noticing that I was mentally and physically shutting off. My blood pressure began to drop and I knew I was heading into survival mode — I was about to faint in this packed restaurant and there was nothing I could do. My body went into shock.

And then, just as I thought it was the end of my consciousness, this voice appeared in my head. She sounded calm and was speaking slowly, yet crystal clear. It was as if she was sent down to me by an angel up above. She said to me in a firm tone, "This is not your fault- this is not about you. You did nothing wrong. He is broken. He is going through his own process and there isn't anything you can do to fix him. Don't fight him; don't try to change his mind. Let him have his choice; let him go; he wants to go. You loved him with everything you had; you did your best. He can't be in this

relationship with you. You're going to be okay. I've got you."

The fogginess cleared and I just listened. All I remember saying to M was "I don't want to be in love with someone who doesn't love me back." He just looked at me. No words. I could see the disappointment he had with himself. This wasn't something he wanted to do; it was just what he had to do. He didn't know why, so I wasn't going to ask.

This voice, my Higher Power I call it, saved my life. I had never heard her before, and I haven't heard her quite that clearly and straightforward since. In that moment where everything was against me- my Higher Power came to my rescue and carried me through. She kept me quiet, calm, composed and full of grace. I walked out of the restaurant with my head held high and my eyes filled with tears. She reassured me that this wasn't about anything I had done or said. Earlier that day I was feeling guilty and continued blaming myself for the argument we had just one week before. This habit of mine is probably one of my greatest weaknesses and stems from my own insecurities. We had moved on from our "fight" and even though I didn't really do anything wrong, I still apologized for my part in things. I owned up to my faults and promised to change and be better. I was willing to do anything to keep the relationship afloat. He apologized as well. What shifted in the next few days is something I will never know.

To this day, I am proud of how I handled things and the strength I found to quietly go. It was the

hardest thing I've ever gone through- watching him walk away. I can honestly say there has never been anything more painful. It was as if a piece of my heart had been ripped out of my chest and thrown away. But I had no choice but to surrender and open my tightly-held fists. I had lost the battle. My Higher Power was in control and I had to trust that it was going to protect me. I had to believe that it would guide me and take me down the path that was meant for me, no matter how painful or uncomfortable.

Yes, there are times when I'm resentful towards my Higher Power and ask why this had to happen. Why him? Why us? Although I have no answers today, my heart tells me that one day all of this will make sense. I will look back with gratitude for the experience and hold compassion for what transpired. But for right now, I have to listen to that voice and trust that everything is happening exactly as it should be. My Higher Power is holding me, she promised I would be okay. She saved my dignity and most importantly my life.

This voice that I was introduced to during one of the most traumatic moments of my life will continue to make the right choices and hold my hand. It will always be by my side and keep me grounded. I got lost before because I ignored her — I had no faith and buried her far away.

My Higher Power is love and creates my fate. It always has and will forever remain within me- I just have to promise to never forget about her again.

— Anonymous

My Love

My Love is a broken bird
In hobbled flight
Intent upon its destination
Ungainly in its passage.

My Love is a broken bird
It's beauty crippled
Pure of purpose
Borne on ruined wings.

My Love is a broken bird
Destined to soar
Condemned to walk
Carried on pigeon toes.

You took my broken love
You called it whole
See how I fly
My love is enough.

— David A, UK

Meditation Book Project

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE:

1. PERSONAL SHARES FOR MEDITATIONS.
2. POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS/PRAYERS.

PLEASE EMAIL SHARES TO THE *JOURNAL* WWW.SLAAFWS.ORG

Serenity Prayer

QUOTE: THE TIME-HONORED SERENITY PRAYER BECAME A PART OF OUR DAILY REPERTOIRE FOR HANDLING CHALLENGING AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATIONS: 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. THY WILL, NOT MINE, BE DONE. STEP 3 S.L.A.A. BASIC TEXT

SHARE: Initially I was disappointed to admit I was a sex and love addict. The familiar and comforting words of the Serenity Prayer gave me the peace I needed to accept my disease and begin to heal one day at a time. I cannot change the fact that I am a sex and love addict. As the A.A. Big Book states, “We are like men who have lost their legs and they don’t grow new ones.” However, the popular prayer empowers me to change the things I can. The life I lived before S.L.A.A. was entirely different than the life I live now because I have changed so many of the things that I can. As a result, today I am grateful I am a sex and love addict. The relationships I have now are deeper and far more meaningful and joyful than I ever dreamed possible.

AFFIRMATION: *The Serenity Prayer reminds me there are many things I can change and it empowers me to do so.*

— AA.

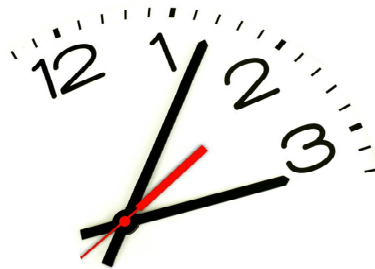
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- After listening to the message, YOU have an opportunity to leave your own message for the speaker to listen to.
- You can go to <http://www.slaadvi.org/inspiration-line.html> to download a month's worth of messages, FOR FREE.

The Inspiration Line is presented to the SLAA Fellowship by the Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup. To find out more or to volunteer, call the Line and leave a message.



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