



the Journal

Issue # 157

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Moving from Victim
into Responsibility

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:

For my letter from the editor this issue, I decided to copy a meditation I wrote for the “State of Grace Meditation Book” (draft literature that the Conference Literature Committee is working on.)

* I’m doing this because we had so many responsible members of the program that this issue had too much content submitted! I had to remove the Meditation Book page to make room for all of the articles and answers to the Question of the Day! Thank you all for your wonderful contributions!

Here is the meditation:

QUOTE: While it was not wholly appropriate to blame either our early experiences or ourselves for our behavior as sex and love addicts, we had to accept some personal responsibility for it. We needed not to hide our true motives behind cosmetic rationalization or blame. S.L.A.A. Basic Text, Page 83

SHARE: I always believed I could use the excuse of what happened to me to stay a teenager for life. I never wanted to grow up and take on the hard work of adult responsibilities. My numbing out behaviors helped me stay incapable of living up to obligations. And rationalizing my situation with “It’s because so and so did this to me,” worked for me. The Fourth Step started me on the road to being willing to be responsible for myself. Fellows and my sponsor taught me the art of self-care. When I let go of immaturity it is often the more painful and difficult way of doing things but in the long run is much better for me. When I look at my side of the street and make amends, I am clearing out what keeps me stuck in the cycle where I need to be rescued. I am able to stand on my own two feet and maybe even be of service to others.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

* *To contribute to the Meditation Book draft literature project contact the CLC at www.slaafws.org*

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

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO DISCOVER AND MOVE FROM VICTIMHOOD INTO RESPONSIBILITY?”

For me, victimhood has always equaled vulnerability and weakness. In my experience, to admit victimhood got me, #1: no help, and #2: taken advantage of even more. I chose to reject being a victim and, in my anger, focused on getting my needs met no matter who I hurt. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was inviting victimization from the men I chose. In recovery I can acknowledge that I was a victim and that my choices in life were affected by that. I still have a hard time saying it, but that was key for me. Not acknowledging “why” gives me fuel to keep acting out. When you remove the fuel, the fire dies, and when the excuses are proven false, the only thing left is responsibility.

— **Beth S., Pennsylvania**

I was open and honest with a qualifier in the rooms about my feelings for her. I fell in love with my best friend. And finally, after 2 and a half years, told her (despite risking our friendship). From that point, my recovery turned. I took responsibility for my recovery and emotions. Since then, I have found a job and kept it for 2 years. For the first time ever, I'm financially stable and about to move out of my mother's house.

— **Matthew, NY**

Regardless of my background, the actions I took were mine. I knew exactly what I was doing, as well as my poor choices. I just couldn't stop! Once I joined S.L.A.A. and acquired a sponsor, he made it clear to me that I am the only one to blame for my deeds.

— **Jase S., Monterey, CA**

Realizing how I gave my power away by playing victim. When I reclaimed my power, the light came on. I reclaim my self-esteem. I reclaim my confidence. I'm better able to give back. It is a struggle for me. It's embedded in me to play victim.

— **Danette S., Seminole, FL**

Connection with my Higher Power. Belief that through this connection and the fellowship, reading, meetings, sponsor, prayer... I could and did explore what my part in my life choices I could and did affect. I have come to believe that, with support, I can be responsible and sober.

— **Anne K., Tampa**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, — “How were you able to discover and move from victimhood into responsibility?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #158 — Anorexia and Dating — “Is the plan of dating different when an S.L.A.A. member is acting in instead of acting out?” — The deadline for submissions is 11/15/15. Issue #159 — Dealing With Triggers — “How do you deal with triggers in your recovery?” — The deadline for submissions is 1/15/16. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

Service, service, service. The sane people do service! Being seen, listened to, and acknowledged. I no longer need to be the victim. I am responsible.

— Paul T., London, UK

Remembering when I point the finger that there are three pointing back at me. Take responsibility. But remember I’m lovable and enough, just as I am.

— Jaki Jo, London, UK

Doing the Steps! I worked the S.L.A.A. H.O.W. first 30 days with my sponsor back in Singapore. I learned how to acknowledge what happened to me and still take responsibility for my recovery.

— Trevor G., Seattle/Singapore

Oddly enough, writing a Fourth Step on an issue made me move from victim to “co-conspirator” and to accept my responsibility in an unhealthy relationship.

— Angela, Fort Lauderdale

Doing a lot of therapy with a 12-Step therapist and a comprehensive 4th Step as done in A.A. and the columns (HOW S.L.A.A. program).

— Jane, Sydney, Australia

In 2012, my brother passed away. At his funeral, my nephews didn’t display any pictures of me in the pictorial memorial of his life. I cried the whole plane trip home from Detroit to L.A., while journaling about it. I came to realize feeling alone was an action and belief that I held that was a two-way street. I now reach out to my family regularly and now have them in my life and am in theirs.

— Suzanne, Los Angeles

I am making great progress in moving from victimhood to responsibility. I am two months out of a two year relationship. My gratitude for him is stronger than my feelings of victimization. I do not feel victimized.

— Anonymous

The only reason is that I don’t like my former life as an addict anymore. Then I had to make a choice: accept that I was powerless and look for help. My sponsor told me that this was a program to do what I don’t like. And that’s the choice. I don’t like to be sober when I’m in my addiction, but if I want to have a better life, I have to take the responsibility to do what I don’t want.

— Maarten, the Netherlands

Recovery, becoming honest, commitment, faith.

— Roberto, Frankfurt

Question of the Day

I applied/apply the Steps. Step 1: Powerless over being a victim. Step 2: Higher Power, restore me to sanity. Step 3: Turn my will over to Higher Power, asking for Him to relieve me of the bondage of victimhood. Step 4: Do my inventory. Step 5: Admit to self, God, another. Step 6: Entirely willing for God to remove it. Step 7: Ask God to remove my victimhood.

— Liz D., Dallas

For me — therapy. What keeps me in responsibility is my program of recovery meetings, fellowship and, for me personally, a job in a 12-Step Fellowship.

— DJ, Houston

I don't think I ever considered myself a victim. There were things that happened to me that through therapy helped me understand the roots of my addiction. I take responsibility for my past, and lean on others in my recovery. I could not do this on my own

— Dave G.

Putting my issues on the table with my sponsor opened my eyes and let me see my own responsibility in what seemed to just “happen to me.”

— Christiane S., Frankfurt, Germany

This is a continual process for me — one of my main processes. “HP” helps. So does fellowship/service. Blocking me is ego, fear, and old story. I had to realize that my victim's Higher Power was no other than my own painful, selfish “stuckness.” Working the Steps in the S.L.A.A. community brought me the solace of commitment for the very first time.

— Madeline S., Los Angeles

When I realized the only person victimizing me was me — that I had the power to change my thoughts, and thus, my circumstances.

— Amy G., Austin, TX

This has been a painful process for me. My identity has been attached to victimhood for my whole life. What helps is to have people in my life with whom I can process my growth and challenges. This helps me stay grounded.

— Duane T., Oakland, CA

I tried to stay in victimhood, but it was killing me. S.L.A.A. recovery, for me, is about reparenting myself- giving to me what I didn't receive as a child. It is empowering for me to find ways to stand up for myself. I played the blame game all my life and it got me a seat in S.L.A.A. I'm glad I found it. Today, I am responsible.

— Rick B., Clearwater, FL

“How were you able to discover and move from victimhood into responsibility?”

By staying focused on my character defects. Denial, justification, and self-deception will let me see myself on the receiving end of all wrongs. Openness to my part in things and to taking responsibility also allows me to let go of feelings of victimhood.

— Steve B., Sunrise, FL

I first had to become aware of my “victim identity.” Once I became aware of it, I was able to set bottom lines and work on the defects/survival characteristics that created such need.

— Denise, China

Working Steps 4 and 5 with my sponsor and then Step 8, helped me get really clear about my part and how I could take more responsibility for myself and my actions through the Steps.

— Austin

No! Low self-esteem! Bad habits of isolation (watching T.V., sleep, games, etc.).

— Anonymous

When I realized that my Higher Power was within me, I became willing to give the love God gave me to others. My responsibility is – having had a spiritual awakening- to carry the message.

— Anonymous

By turning it over – accepting what is – releasing resentments.

— Anonymous, Seattle, WA

I read a great book about identifying as a victim that brought me awareness of my self-perception, along with consistent Steps 4, 10, and 11. This has changed me from someone who seemed to have a “kick me” sign on her forehead to someone with stronger boundaries who doesn’t defend (as much), back pedal, and someone with a newer confidence. People have begun to treat me differently, notably my family.

— Doan, New York

Victimhood, for me, is an excuse to not own my own stuff. Moving from victimhood is not dismissing another’s wrongdoing. There is freedom in responsibility.

— Anonymous

Today, I realize that, in every situation, I am the common denominator. I need to look at my part. When I can see that my Higher Power has his hand on everything, I can relax, take it easy, stop struggling, take responsibility for my part, and “Let go, and Let God,” of the rest.

— Anonymous

I have been aware of my fear of responsibility for some time. I am reaching out to people in recovery who take action in areas of their lives where I am blocked. Just connecting to that energy helps me with baby steps.

— Anonymous

The Movement from Victimhood to Responsibility



I sat down at a coffee shop on a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 2013 to write down the story of how I had fallen in love with my supervisor at work. Even though she was married, with a daughter, and 13 years my elder, I believed that fate had conspired to bring us together in secret but passionate love, then marriage. But the story I wrote was not just a love story; it was the saga of my inner loneliness and my failed

relationships, ending finally with connection and belonging.

This was the last chapter of the story as I imagined it: the wedding would be at the nearby church with the sloping view of the bay. The priest whom we both adored would be the officiant.

My qualifier's daughter would be the ring bearer. The homeless people whom we knew from the local church would be the readers. Our colleagues from

work would be beaming in the second row. They would be over the shock of the disclosure that we had been doing more than work behind the closed door of our shared office. My parents would look, perhaps not happy, but at least relieved in the first row; their youngest son was finally getting married.

They'd keep their disappointment to themselves that I had chosen someone 13 years older and divorced. Their

disappointment would be important to me; it would mean that I had finally risked being myself. That night, the sex would be impassioned and the emotional intimacy profound. We would have children together, even though she was 48.

We'd be, not just husband and wife, but spiritual brother and sister, innovators of progressive Christian community. Our bond would be a beacon to all who yearned for their marriage to support the work of personal transformation and social justice.

If this fantasy were an animal it would have been a stallion – erratic and erotic, wild but with the possibility of domestication. At first it fed on the discovery of loving the same poems and experiencing the same colleagues as unbearable.

It quickened with texts and emails and gifts outside of work: a glass vase for the bouquets I had begun making, an email forward of E.E. Cummings' "I Carry Your Heart With Me", a text about how alone she felt on vacation in the midst of her daughter and husband. Its appetite grew, hungering for time together outside of work.

We were on a sunrise walk in the woods when she told me she'd been thinking about leaving her husband for years. Ambiguity kept the fantasy cantering along the fence line, restless and impatient. Every few months I would ask for clarification, trying to communicate the intensity of yearning without saying the word "love."

She'd say she felt the same way, too but add, "I don't know how it's going to work," and, "You take the lead." A "friend" told me after I shared with him about these conversations, "Dude, you can have an affair if you want. You just have to make the move. She'll pull back but then fall into your arms. Trust me." I hesitated. I didn't want an

affair. I already had much of the guilt and shame. After all, when I saw her husband at work parties, I hid. I yearned for sex but I also knew that it would bring even more guilt and shame. What I really craved was the fantasy: the wedding, the emotional intimacy, the end of the inner loneliness.

The fantasy died a few months later, mid-morning on the Sunday of Labor Day 2013. I was standing in the driveway of my uncle's dairy farm, where I had invited my qualifier and her husband and daughter to visit for the weekend.

I see now that I was trying to seduce her ("Look at what a kind and loving extended family you could be part of . . . and a farm too!"). But at the time I believed that I was being a kind friend—giving a young city family a nice weekend in the country where their daughter could experience a real working farm. It was a sunny morning and the grass was still wet with dew in the small yard encircled by the back of the farmhouse, the cow barn, and

acres of open pasture. Overnight a piglet had died. When my qualifier had learned of its death she had asked my uncle if she could bury it.

With his approval, she had walked alone, cradling the piglet in one arm and carrying a shovel in the other, across the yard and climbed over the stone wall and into the pasture. While she was digging the piglet's grave, her husband and daughter had come into the yard to eat breakfast at the picnic table. As she climbed back over the stone wall, the arm that had been cradling the piglet was thrust across her eyes, trying to block the flow of tears. Her husband stood up and opened his arms. They embraced, swaying slowly back and forth as my qualifier continued to weep.

I didn't look for long. I only needed a few seconds to see that this wasn't the picture of their relationship that my qualifier had painted: quarreling, dissatisfaction, and emotional disconnect. This looked like tender and lasting love.



I understood then that my stallion of a fantasy was, in fact, a piglet, and it was now dead and buried. With no future with my qualifier to look forward to, I turned my eyes to the hard, dusty, and lifeless gravel at my feet. That night, alone in my apartment, I lay down on the floor and called into my first S.L.A.A. meeting.

The dictionary defines a victim as a person harmed because of a crime or someone who has been duped or tricked. Early in my recovery I would have denied that I acted or thought like a victim. I came from an upper middle-class family where I had the privileges of private schools, piano lessons, and summer camps. I had not been a victim of sexual or



physical abuse. I had not been bullied at school. By all appearances, my childhood had been picture-perfect.

Yet, as I began to talk daily with a sponsor, go to multiple meetings per week, and work the Steps, feelings of helplessness and rage surfaced that are the hallmarks of victimhood. Early on, I set a bottom line to have no contact with my qualifier outside of work and communicated that to her by email. She said that saddened her deeply but she wanted to respect my request.

Occasionally though, she would send me a text at night, “Really great to be with you today.” I wouldn’t feel the rage right away but I’d notice myself pacing, distracted. Then I’d notice the commentary in my head, “How dare you send this to me! I could get you fucking fired for this!” I’d make a program call and find myself talking about how I wanted to punch through a wall or just pound my head against it. The rage against myself was equally powerful. “How could I have been so stupid to fall for such a manipulative, cheating bitch?! What the f*** is wrong with me? How have I f***d up my life so much? Why can’t I just be married and normal like everyone else my age?”

I felt so helpless that it took my sponsor to point out that I had options: I could leave my job; I could report her behavior to her supervisor; or I could look at how I had engaged with her during the day to provoke such a comment from her.

Some years ago, I received a token from an A.A. friend, with the slogan on one side, “I’m powerless, but not helpless.” On the other side was engraved a sailboat next to the affirmation, “We can’t control the direction of the wind but we can adjust our sails.”

When I lived in victimhood, I believed the opposite: “I’m helpless, but not powerless.” I

believed that I caused my love addiction and anorexia and that I was responsible for curing it. I believed that I was responsible for figuring out how to stop hating my qualifier, how to stop avoiding women enough to marry them. Yet I felt helpless to make any meaningful, lasting changes. Victimhood for me was like being a child sprawled out on the floor in a tantrum, banging my fists and head, crying out that I couldn’t have what I wanted, and feeling abandoned, betrayed, and deceived by the one person who could give me what I wanted.

My movement toward responsibility in S.L.A.A. has not happened quickly or linearly. I have had three different sponsors, changed meetings, and had two major slips, each time after about eight months of sobriety. But looking back I can see that three simultaneous but distinct movements have been happening.

First, I have quit trying to suppress or “figure out” the rage I feel as a victim. I don’t need to explain it or excuse it. It’s there and it needs to be let out in order for me to grow spiritually. Rather than directing it at myself or my qualifier of anyone else, I can find a safe place to release it: making an outreach call, or (I used to laugh inwardly at people who mentioned this) punch a pillow.

The most satisfying thing has been to go outside and beat a pillow with a stick until my hands were blistered. Afterward I found myself taking in the trees around me, even hugging them gently, feeling more connected than I had in years. If in victimhood I was like a child throwing a tantrum on the living room floor, I have learned not to interrupt the child but to let him cry and pound the floor until he stops and relaxes in exhaustion.

Second, I have learned to keep the focus on myself. As a love addict this has meant going to any length to avoid contact with my qualifier. This has been

difficult since we work in the same building, but I have declined her invitations to events outside of work and stopped all non-work communication.

I have committed to not dating until I am through Step 9 (the only person I know who identifies as a sex and love addict and anorexic and actually got married in recovery walked this path). I have deactivated my Facebook account, because I realized that that I couldn't be on it without scrolling through profiles of friends of friends for the one woman who would fulfill me, or falling into "compare and despair" as I looked at photos of my peers on vacation with their wives and young children.

Finally, in the Fourth Step process, as I was taught it from the Big Book of A.A., I learned to "do a turnaround," to see my part in the resentment. In order to reveal the underlying character defect in me, I have dissected each of my fears and resentments with these questions: "What does

the resentment affect? How have I been selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, and afraid? What if I trusted and relied on God instead?"

Keeping the focus on myself has felt like closing my eyes – to dating, to the internet, to my qualifier – so that I can turn inward and take responsibility for where the addiction resides: in my own heart and mind.

Lastly, taking responsibility has been reaching out my hands to others in program and accepting their help. This has meant finding a sponsor, making three outreach calls a day, going to at least three meetings a week. It has meant accepting the wisdom of the program and setting top lines and bottom lines, committing to a spiritual life through a regular meditation practice.

It has meant finding a home meeting and providing service there. It has been hard for me to keep pounding my head and hands against the floor as a

victim when I have placed my hands in the hands of other men in program and they are helping me to stand on my own two feet. I have a plan to leave the job where I have to see my qualifier and the city where I have been living the last twelve years. I'm working with a professional to set short-term and long-term goals for my career, creativity, and relationships.

I'm paying attention to gifts and passions that I've long ignored: writing, yoga, Tai Chi, and gardening. I'm in the middle of my Step work and can see ahead some difficult amends, But now I have the tools of meditation and prayer to help me focus on today. And most importantly, I have the faith that if I keep my hands in the hands of God and other people in S.L.A.A., even if circumstances throw me off balance, I can't be knocked back down.

— **Anonymous**

I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR MYSELF...

AFTER BLAMING MY LONG DECEASED FATHER FOR HAVING SEXUALLY ABUSED ME.

AFTER BLAMING EVERYONE WHO EVER TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THAT HURT LITTLE GIRL WHO NEVER GOT ENOUGH ATTENTION FROM HER MOTHER, HER GIRLFRIEND, HER BOYFRIEND, AND THE WORLD IN GENERAL.

AFTER BLAMING EVERYONE BUT MYSELF FOR ACTING OUT ALL MY YEARS OF PAIN AND ANGER, THE TRUTH IS THAT I AM, IN FACT, RESPONSIBLE FOR MYSELF.

WHAT I FINALLY BEGAN TO REALIZE, AFTER POINTING THE FINGER OF BLAME EVERYWHERE BUT AT MY OWN IMAGE IN THE MIRROR, IS THAT THE FREEDOM OF RECOVERY ONLY COMES WHEN I

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY.

THAT DOES NOT DENY OTHER PEOPLE'S PART; RATHER IT ILLUMINATES MY OWN. MORE IMPORTANTLY, I AM ABLE TO RECLAIM MY POWER, AFTER ALL THIS TIME WASTED MOANING AND KVETCHING LIKE A SPOILED LITTLE KID.

TAKE THIS LARGE, LOUD FONT SIZE, FOR EXAMPLE. MY SPONSOR ALWAYS TELLS ME UPPER CASE LETTERS MAY BE CONSTRUED AS RUDE ONLINE. NOT MY INTENTION, I AM MERELY TRYING TO MAKE MYSELF CLEAR, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME EASING MY EYES, WHICH HAVE SEEN ENOUGH ACTING OUT IN MY OWN FAMILY TO LAST A LIFETIME.

— **Marsha Z, Jamaica Plain, MA**

Making My Own Decisions



For so long, my mother held this fear over me that without her, I wouldn't be financially stable. She remains my main qualifier and is currently harassing my ex-boyfriend, even when I have dropped him from my life. As a victim, I allow her insanity to keep her in my life, because I let it take up space in my brain.

If I am responsible, I see that if I respond to her insanity, I'm not trusting that God will absolve me of her insanity naturally. As a victim, I believe my fear that I'll be alone and I can't be independent. But if I take responsibility, I know I can make my own decisions.

When I look at how far I've come from growing up in an abusive household — deciding to live outside of my mother's house during college, getting a job and apartment immediately when college ended, breaking up with a boyfriend that I was staying with just because I was afraid that I couldn't afford an apartment on my own — to now living in my own place, with a job, and financial stability — I have to remind myself that I can take control over my life and that I have been independent, even though I sometimes focused on the negative. I recently redid my first three Steps about my mother.

I am totally powerless over her insanity. She's not mentally well. She's unpredictable. She has borderline personality disorder. I have no reason to believe, however much I want to, that she will ever be the parent I want her to be — the parent who gives me the encouragement and confidence to be my own person.

But that's okay, because I can now give myself that encouragement and confidence. Life has been unmanageable with her in my life because I let it be and didn't open my life up to new experiences or take risks.

I was afraid it wasn't safe

enough (by her standards). But now, I have to realize that I can create my own living standards. And by my standards, I'm living the way I want to, even if she doesn't approve. I can let go of contact with her and I don't have to rely on her.

I can trust that as long as I don't stay in victimhood- as long as I start realizing I am responsible for my own life and what happens to me, which includes deciding to refuse the responsibility for her insanity, God will take care of me. He doesn't want me to feel like a victim. He wants me to free myself from using her as my crutch because that's when I can be the person I want to be.

Ultimately, we all must take responsibility for our actions, and we can't be responsible for others' feelings surrounding our actions. The way we do that is by having faith we're taken care of, as long as we're not acting out in our insanity. We're where we are supposed to be when we sit back, pause, and realize that the craziness around us may be out of our control, but we can choose to let go of it and not put our will into trying to control it.

Responsibility starts with taking care of ourselves even in insane environments. For so long, I thought my mother had to be the one to take care of me, because as a child, I didn't get that expected care. But now, I can

hold my childhood self outside of that trauma and be the responsible "parent" I never had.

And what that looks like to me, is someone who pays attention and listens to her feelings, nurturing them so they have time to be expressed in healthy ways, instead of ways that beg for the attention of men, and seeking others to validate me. I can validate myself. I can love myself. And that starts with realizing that I have agency. I have choice. I have self-care, meetings, and phone lists. I have places to go and I'm not alone. No one can take that away from me.

— Anonymous

My Wake-up Call

Editor's Note: Tradition 6 states that, "An S.L.A.A. group or S.L.A.A. as a whole ought never endorse, finance, or lend the S.L.A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise." This story reflects one member's experience in recovery.

Looking back, it is not really hard to see what happens in our lives to make us "wake up" and see our part in our mess.

My Higher Power must have known I needed direction and would be ready to receive when I was nearly destitute. The economy was tanking and I ended up working for a mental health facility that had staff more mentally ill than the clients.

I got my wake-up call in 2009 when the only work to be found was from a temp agency. It was a job working for a mental health service provider in the area. I had just completed training to work in a hospital as an administrative assistant. There were no jobs available in healthcare and my

first job had been a disaster. But I needed work so I took the job. I was really afraid of being overwhelmed like I was before.

I was supposed to help an alcohol/drug program for local inmates in an annex building through the county jail specifically set apart to deal with

mental health issues. The job was simple enough. The place was just seriously backlogged on filing. The longer I worked there the more my job duties expanded. Finally, I ended up working with the inmates.

My wake-up call was realizing how much the inmates whined, begged, and conned for favors. Then when these “favors” normally were not granted, they would dive into a temper-tantrum extolling all the pain, misery, and entitlement they had for having such a hard life. They felt they were “entitled” to better treatment and blamed the world for all their problems.

Most of us like to think that we are better than an inmate but I was realizing that their whining sounded so familiar. It was like the whining that I used to do to give “excuses” to explain my lot in life.

I promised myself then that when the temp job ended, I would look into exactly what I had in common with the inmates. I discovered that I was like the inmates — their childhood paths and mine were similar. I had a better grasp of where they came from and what motivated them than some of the counseling staff.

I decided during this time that I would not seek another job in healthcare. It was too toxic and the system was set up so that people were constantly looking for someone to “blame” for mistakes and there was no team work to boot. The implied expectation was “perfectionism.”

This was not me. I lived by the seat of my pants, being a chameleon trying to “fit in.” But I was always trying to be bright, sunny, and funny in the morass of gloom that hung in the air of this mental health facility. They liked me, so I got to stay month after month. In the end I was booted from the job when another program was shut down and one of their long-term employees was out of a job. She

got my job.

After 9 months on the job, I was unemployed again. Knowing I was not interested in healthcare, I thought, “What next?” My marriage was falling apart and I had made a promise to find out what exactly the inmates and I had in common.

It was strange that the answer would come in the form of a book. I was entering a strange phase in my life where I would be pulled to specific books on library shelves. Each one I read got me closer to the truth.

At the start of my unemployment, I wrote a timeline of all my jobs and really studied what went wrong. I ended up with the conclusion that the common problem turned out to be ME!!! I brought wrath upon myself time and time again. I pointed out the “elephant” in the room too many times and had boatloads of anger in me that would cause miniature “explosions of rage” at the drop of a hat.

I read a book titled, “What Happy Companies Know” written by Dan Baker, Cathy Greenburg, and Collins Hemingway because I wanted to work for a “good company,” (one that treated their employees well). The book gave me my first insight into my kindred spirits with the inmates.

The book described a cycle of toxic, stagnant growth in which the person stayed stuck but could get worse. The acronym they used was “VERBalize.” I changed it and called it “VERBAGE.” The VERB is the cycle one can get stuck in and stay for a lifetime if they do not “wake up” and see their part in the problem.

VERB:

Victimization - Seeing their life as a victim of bad circumstances.

Entitlement - Expecting “better” treatment than others.

Rescue - looking for someone to “save” them from their problems.

Blame - looking for someone to pin their problems on.

Note: A person can jump from one to another on an ongoing basis and stay in this cycle for a lifetime. No problems are EVER solved when one is in this phase.

I had changed the ending to emphasize what the outcome would be if you stay in this cycle. This toxic cycle ages you and...

AGE:

A...your attitude stinks... really, really bad.

G...no growth exists for your spirit. Again, no problems are ever solved.

E...exit. Everyone exits soon after meeting whiners because no one wants to hear about other people’s problems nor are they concerned about how they ended up in the VERBAGE cycle.

It was from then on I got a little closer to the core problems. I am a sexual anorexic who used to live in the “romance factory” in my brain. I would not discover this “secret” about myself for another four years.

I realize that the sickness is extensions of generations of ancestors who were without the proper tools and support of 12-Step programs to see their part in the mess they made. Also, my latest discovery is that I grew up in a system that was run by my mother, who may be a sociopath. She was not interested in making human connections with others, only in using others for her own personal gain.

I cannot say I am completely VERBAGE-free today. But I am always questioning, when tears come, if they are tears of real pain or if I am just feeling sorry for myself. I now know that growth comes when one is ready and the time is right. The biggest element that must be in place is a willingness to see my part in the legacy of pain that I have caused myself as well as others.

I am still pushing to learn. But my recovery now is more about the discovery of what is going on

within myself. I sit in meditation. I try to stay in the moment. It is about seeing things clearly in others, yet keeping my focus on myself. I do grief work to grieve what I did not get as a child. I am now ready to release archaic pain and accept things as they are rather than thinking of how I wish them to be.

I am not out of the woods, but I am getting better at picking up the clues the Universe provides. Also, I have a deep gratitude for the inmates. Without them, I would not have had this massive amount of

motivation that started me on my journey that brought to light this love addiction of mine. Also, it has opened my eyes to a family that had sex and love addiction (my mother's real motivation).

I got through a divorce and ended up finding the job that "fit" me instead of trying to push myself into something I was not. I feel gratitude for the way all of the elements came together to create a layer of consciousness that I will take with me all of my life. I am striving to learn more spiritual lessons each day. Thanks to S.L.A.A., I am

learning for the first time in my life how to make true human connections and to learn what healthy intimacy is.

One last bit of gratitude is for surviving not one but two people like my mother (being able to recognize unhealthy behavior early on and shut down these relationships before they got serious).

Thank you for the blessing of remembering all of this. It has been rewarding writing this article. I truly am blessed.

—Lois T., Cincinnati, Ohio

Learning Personal Responsibility

When I became physically disabled from multiple sclerosis in 2000, my need for a fix became worse. I desperately wanted someone to love me and 'rescue' me. The Women's S.L.A.A. meeting that I loved was in an old church on the second floor and there was no elevator. I remember how difficult it was to walk up those stairs to get to a meeting. I got angry because we were on the second floor. Of course, I got angry about almost everything back then. I remember I dated some nice men who I turned into jerks because I was so awful towards them. I felt like the world should accommodate me and fix me.

A few years earlier, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and I wore it as a badge of honor as if to say, "See, I told you there is something wrong with me; I told you I was different; I'm manic; of course I have lots of

sexual partners."

Thanks to my work in S.L.A.A. and Al-Anon, over the years I've learned about personal responsibility. Bi-polar disorder is my responsibility to manage. Perhaps, it played a role in my hyper-sexuality, but my willingness to ratchet down my behavior by using the medications and techniques available was my responsibility to help me fit into society and to live a more balanced lifestyle.

I used to dump all of my disabilities on people like a resume when I'd meet them. Basically I was saying, "Here are all the reasons I am unlovable and you should feel sorry for me." No wonder guys would take off running!!

I find it is an ongoing struggle to keep my disabilities from defining who I am and how I live my life. It is similar to doing a 4th step inventory every day and remembering to list my good

qualities. My Higher Power blessed me with a lot of talents. People who get to know me are always amazed at my talents in spite of my disabilities.

A survivor from the concentration camps said – "The last of human freedoms is to choose one's own attitude in any given circumstances." In other words, no matter how crappy I think my life is, I can still choose to be happy. No matter how many times people stare at me in a wheelchair, avoid looking at me, push me when I don't need the help, act like I have a disease they may catch, I can still be happy. This attitude then changes the way people react towards me. When I stop acting miserable and different, people often stop treating me different.

Over the years, I've met many people in the rooms who approach their "differentness" with a range of attitudes. Those who don't have a chip on their

shoulders, like I did, seem to move through life with grace and dignity. There will always be people who are uncomfortable with those of us who are different. I've learned it is about their personal insecurities and

desperate need to belong and be right.

Diversity provides my life with an opportunity to learn from others and to recognize that the differences in people can enrich my life. I don't have

to understand why people are different. I just need to accept them as God's unique children who are struggling to find love and joy in this life just like me.

— Anonymous, MT

Trading an "F" for a "T"

I am 50 years old. When I was 18, I took a propositional logic course in college, where I learned that "the negation of a falsehood, 'F,' is a truth, 'T'" or "(F) = T." I got an "A" in that course, and I thought I was pretty smart. Although I have always been "book smart," it has taken me 32 years to graduate from college to "spiritual kindergarten" and to have the maturity to finally negate my "F," the belief that birthed my victimhood, and find my "T," the realization that being responsible is a better option and necessary option.

Basically, my "F" resembled this: "I can be the opposite of my dad and still have the success and respect that he has."

My dad was a minister who was very regimented, organized, and responsible. Consequently, he never lost a job in 40 years. However, he lost my respect as a child because the face he presented at home was frequently totally different from what his parishioners saw. Home life was very rigid. My dad was a "clean freak," and at times I felt he tried

to shame me into cleaning my room.

I dug my heels in and developed a habit in childhood of living in clutter. I would show him who was in charge, by golly! Likewise, I refused to dress snappily like he did. I wore jeans, t-shirts, and scuffed-up tennis shoes. When he suggested I clean my shoes, I got angry. "All you care about is how I look to people who you want to impress." I never said that to him, but that's what I thought.

So, I acquired a habit in my teenage years of disregarding my appearance and my grooming, and I carried that into adulthood, choosing as a 20-something to wear jeans, t-shirts, and tennis shoes in a government office that I worked in for nearly nine years.

I was a "slacker" there because I refused to emulate my dad's work ethic. I worked in a dysfunctional group led by a boss who set the tone by walking around talking to anyone who'd listen about his child's extracurricular activities. Thus, I was able to get away with only

really working two hours yet get paid for eight. I was earning a living without having to mimic the integrity my dad had tried to model for me; it was the best of both worlds for me.

I bought my first car in 1990 using a \$700 down payment loan from my dad, who was worried about money. I promised to pay him back. Instead, on paydays, I would run to the record store and buy two or three music CDs, which would amount to roughly the minimum payment due on one of my credit cards. I was shunning financial responsibility and ruining my credit, which caused me shame, but the long-term pain of my short-term gains weren't clear enough to cause me to seriously change my ways.

I was not going to stop flipping the figurative bird to my dad...or anyone or anything that represented authority. I would fight authority, the icons of responsibility, and I would win!

But things started falling apart when I met my first S.L.A.A. qualifier, "Sara," in October 1996 at age 32. I started a descent into



an emotional hell I could never have imagined. Sara was “arm candy” that I never believed I could attract; however, once we became a couple and started having sex, I developed a sweet tooth for her that grew into a soul-rotting abscess. Sara had the body and the sexual gusto of my favorite porn actress, so I was able to act out many sexual activities I had watched my porn goddess perform.

I became hopelessly hooked, even though Sara was verbally abusive. “You’re a boy, not a man,” she’d say. When Sara gave me a “Dear John” letter in June 1997, I became suicidal. I went to a 12-Step group seeking relief; someone there mentioned S.L.A.A. but I ignored that suggestion. My psychiatrist advised me to leave town and go home to my family, which I did. When I returned from my two-week convalescence, Sara popped up one day as I was gassing up my car and asked me where I had been, which befuddled me

because two weeks earlier she had broken up with me.

Plus, I had not told her I was leaving town. She got the apartment leasing office to tell her I had gone out of town. In any case, that carrot she offered at the gas station was enough for me to take off down the rabbit hole with her again until November 1997, when she forced me to make a decision. I opted out.

She had tried many times to make me get her pregnant, but I didn’t want a child. I tried a career change as Sara and I were splitting up. In the following 30 months, I lost 6 jobs because of my emotional instability. I moved back home to live with my parents temporarily. I frequently pondered suicide in the most violent ways I could imagine so that I could punish myself for being “less-than-the-man” I thought she wanted.

I told myself stories that robbed me of all self-esteem, which I repeated as I lay

depressed in bed for hours at a time. But the world didn’t stop for my broken heart. Prior employment troubles had increased my financial unmanageability, lowering my sense of worth more.

I secured a job in mid-2000 that I held on to for the next four years, which I had to do if I was going to have any kind of future for myself. I had health insurance, so I went back at age 35 to a psychologist who had treated me for depression when I was 18.

That helped some. I paid my dad back the money he had loaned me in 1990. Then, while in graduate school, I racked up more than \$65,000 in student loans, money I used to live “the good life” that I had felt deprived of as a child.

With no job in sight after graduation and financial unmanageability looming, I didn’t think any woman in the U.S. worth her salt would want to date me, a “loser,” so I started

looking online for women abroad, thinking I could hide my unmanageability that way. In August 2005, I found one outside the U.S., “Julia,” a self-described adult child of an alcoholic, who said her favorite topic was sex.

I went to meet her. We went to a gym with an outdoor track. Julia and I walked around the track, and she asked me about all my sexual likes and dislikes. I had found someone as “perverted” as me! We slept together on our first date, even though I had said I wouldn’t do that, that I’d wait a few months. Julia was even more sexually adventurous than Sara, once even proposing that we make a sex tape together. I had fancied myself something of a skilled sexual cowboy, but I had gotten involved with someone whose unbridled passion for sex exceeded that of any of my previous girlfriends. She became my second S.L.A.A. qualifier.

Round #2 with the disease in 2005 was worse than the first in 1997. I knocked on the gates of insanity stronger. I alternately pined for her like a lost child and fantasized about punishing her à la the Spanish Inquisitors for her past sexual “sins.” I had sleepless nights, screaming into my pillow to try to relieve the tortuous thoughts about her running through my head, about whom she might have been sleeping with after me and who she had slept with before me.

I had no S.L.A.A. fellowship to turn to. So, I drew stick-figure drawings in notebooks while at work to try to manage my thoughts and emotions; somehow, I wasn’t fired. I tried inducing a heart attack I hoped would be fatal by running furiously up staircases in a 10-story building, but it didn’t work. So, I self-destructed by eating myself into oblivion, eating bowls and bowls of cookie dough, gaining 80 pounds. I had said, “I will never ever get as fat as my

dad was,” yet that is what happened.

He, on the other hand, had become fit and healthy by 2005 by eating responsibly and working out two hours a day, lowering his resting heart rate to 50-60 beats per minute, an amazing achievement for a 66-year-old. My heart rate went up with my financial stress levels, which were exacerbated by a vicious cycle of income-sucking payday loans that I started in 2005 and wasn’t able to get out of until late 2010.

Meanwhile, my dad was growing his retirement fund. He had money in the bank if he needed it due to his financial discipline. In contrast, my checking account was often overdrawn due to my never taking charge of reconciling my statements.

I once figured out I had paid more than \$4,000 in overdraft fees after I moved back to live near my family.

So, with the overdraft fee money and the \$8,000 or so I paid in payday and high-interest loan charges, I could’ve bought a new car in 2012 to replace the 1997 model I had that had a badly faded paint job and the upholstery inside falling off.

I managed to get my financial house in enough order to move back in 2012 at age 47 to the city where I had met Sara, who had found me via a social media site in 2009.

I reconnected with her for about a year, thinking she had changed. I had visions that we’d go out and I’d “get it right” the second time around: I’d pick her up in a limo, go to a nice Italian restaurant and eat dinner, and wind up at a nice hotel making love (in contrast to the “F” word). However, her mean tiger stripes came through again and I stopped communicating with her in 2011. My move in 2012 wasn’t to pursue her again but to pursue a career.

My old 1997 car passed away on my second day back in town. Despite a bicycle being my primary means of transportation, I got my desired career started. But it became apparent recently that I can’t make the kind of money I want to earn nor have any benefits I need in order to enjoy a comfortable standard of living, the kind of life my dad has enjoyed for a long time.

The resentments I had with him when I met my Sara nearly 20 years ago are outweighed by the fear I have now about my future as an old man, something brought into focus last year when my best friend, a model of responsibility who had climbed his company’s ladder, was killed in an auto-related accident. It made me reflect. It’s inevitable that my parents, friends, and dog will die one day. And so, what will I be left with? A pile of spite-laced poop...or something that reflects “good orderly direction”? My dad’s habits helped him get the latter, and I am now left scrambling to put something like it together.

Thus, I have successfully found 32 years after leaving home that my “F” did not work. I discovered no “higher potential” in that “F,” only victimhood. My “F” has been negated and transformed into my “T”: “Being organized and responsible leads to serenity and happiness.” So, I echo as a prayer a famous philosopher’s words: “May I see as beautiful that which is necessary.”

Truthfully, I often want to go down the same childish pathways my “F” grooved in my brain over 40-plus years. But when I have taken ownership of my thoughts in favor of my “T,” I cut new grooves of beauty where I can boogie like I never could with Sara or Julia or whomever. And the boogie is beautiful.

— Steve M., Texas

Two Areas of Victimization

There are two areas of my life where it could be argued that I was a victim of my circumstances.

I was born into a family where my mother was very controlling. It wasn't a matter of if my mother would get her way, it was when. While my early childhood felt very loving, by the time I was entering pre-adolescence, the anger against her strict inflexibility and emasculating nagging was beginning to boil over.

My father, as was typical with WWII generation, was a good provider but emotionally detached from day to day issues. Therefore, there was no recourse in him. Mom was in charge and the deep seated belief worked into me that "I am not important; my thought, beliefs and opinions don't matter" is a permanent groove that I continually have to use the tools of the program against.

It was in this environment that I figured out that the only way around the system was to be creative and sneaky. I developed a system of stealing candy and sweets (highly restricted – I wouldn't even think of buying a candy bar with my own money for fear of getting in trouble).

I would find a way to sneak into her candy or sweets, hide it in various places in my room and then hide the candy wrappers by shoving them down the razor disposal slot in the medicine cabinet. I remember one time when my dad was working in the crawl space above the house and he was genuinely perplexed at the stack of candy wrappers down between the walls.

My sophisticated operation



certainly wasn't as renowned as it felt like in my head. I was basically just ripping off fun size Snickers and hostess Ding Dongs. Nevertheless, it was this pattern of "I'm so strategically wise to work around the rules" that set me up to find my way around the Adult scene later in life.

Years later in recovery, someone made an off the cuff remark in a meeting saying, "The statute of limitations of what my parents did has expired." While it was interesting to make the connection between my childhood environment and how

it evolved into my acting out, the truth is, I decided to walk into my first adult movie theater all by myself. Further, understanding the principles around resentment in Step Four helped me affirm that my parents were doing the best they could with what they were dealing with.

I didn't understand as a child the extent of the health issues and depression my mother had that drove her. I had to put into perspective the different world my father grew up in where he simply did not have the tools to connect on an emotional level or manage the strange new issues of

the 1960's and 1970's.

Further, while I may have had a perfect set up to become a sex and love addict, I am in recovery now and have the tools to carve out a different life. I may or may not be able to completely remove the wounds of my mother but I certainly have the tools to manage them.

The second area where I think I was a victim was when I was deepest in my addiction. If I was driving by a massage parlor, I would literally fight with the steering wheel of the car. I would hear in my head, "You can fight it now but you know you will eventually give in."

I knew the voice was right. I

could put off acting out once or twice but eventually I would just be inside the place feeling as if I had never left. Resistance felt futile.

It was my sponsor who helped me see that acting out didn't "just happen". Fighting the acting out beast at that point of conflict was a losing proposition. In fact, acting out was the culmination of weeks of resentments, fantasies, entitlement, and obsession that was running rampant and unchecked. Over time, as I began to deny myself these luxuries and to deal with my thought-life earlier and up stream, I didn't have to battle with the steering wheel outside the massage parlor

– in fact I found that I rarely found good reason to drive by.

Sobriety and serenity really messes up acting out. There may have been a point in my career where I was a victim of my own obsessive mind and really did not have the tools or the ability to keep myself from continually violating my own moral standards. But now I really don't have an excuse. If I act out, it is because I choose to – I reject the set of tools that the program has given me and I engage in the type of thought patterns that brought me to despair in the first place.

— **Anonymous, Boone, NC**

Identified Patient to Identifying with Patients

Recently receiving a phone call from a sponsee who had stopped calling about 5 years ago, I learned that she had relapsed with her alcoholism/sex and love addiction, had hit a very low bottom, and was climbing out of that dark deep pit into the light again, this time with humility and hope.

My partner and I had just returned from the IRC (International Recovery Convention) in Houston where I attended some very interesting workshops, one of which had two triangles on the floor, indicating the OLD way of addiction and non-recovery: (Victim/ Persecutor/ Enabler) to the NEW way of recovery: Mediator/Negotiator/ Deep Griever (I may have adapted the titles to my own process).

The same week, as a helpline worker, I received another call from the past, a woman who'd been in S.L.A.A. and R.C.A. with us, but she had slipped away from active recovery and was now

desperately in pain, wanting the S.E.S. Anorexia meeting.

For these two women, I IDENTIFIED, not as the identified patient such as I was before recovery, but as identifying WITH them, remembering what it was like for me in the depths of my disease, my own deep pit of alcoholism and sex-love-romance-rehearsal addiction.

In my active disease of Victimhood, I was always COMPARING myself with others, and coming out "less than," in shame, guilt, remorse, and resentment, or I would bounce over to "more than," in pride, arrogance, and control. The slogan, "*Identify, don't compare*" means so much here.

I don't know how it happened, but gradually, over time, and a few 24 hours (times 365) of recovery, I can feel a shift, a gradual transformation from that "identified patient" I was, always the drama queen, feeling bruised and hurt from "What you did to

me"....to an attitude of "identifying with the other," in a way that has become much more compassionate and accepting.

And it is thanks to this spiritual Program, of people who enter the 12-Step community, admit our powerlessness over our brokenness, are welcomed with compassion and hope, that I/we have been able to be transformed from this identified patient to identifying with the "other" who suffers.

Oh I will struggle with the old victim/persecutor/enabler within me until 15 minutes after I'm dead. But gradually, the mediator/responsible negotiator is slowly, slowly taking over....

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of S.L.A.A. always to be there, and for that, I am responsible. (The Responsibility Pledge of A.A., adapted).

— **Beth L. Montreal**

Rationalizing Irresponsible Behavior

Let me give you an example of how I moved from victim into responsibility. When I went through my past history I knew one of my main patterns of addiction was acting out with married men whether I was in another relationship or not. Among other behaviors, I was unfaithful in my relationships which included flirting with men who had a partner and using "naivety" and "innocence" as an excuse for my behavior.

If a man invites me for a cup of coffee I have in the back of my mind that there's a possibility he might be interested in me for more than just a coffee mate. After using the pamphlet "Setting Bottom Lines" as a tool, I found that my accessory behavior to rationalize interaction with married men was that I didn't make the first move. Well, I did. The accessory behavior was to be "naive". I thought, "He kissed me first. How could I be responsible for that?" I was a victim of getting into a sexual relationship as a mistress to the married man. Today, I know that I used naivety as an excuse to act out. Back then, I also knew I didn't take responsibility for my part. I wouldn't see myself as a "bitch" but as an innocent little girl (even though I was a grown woman). My responsibility of saying, "No," and backing out of situations wasn't an option. He wanted me and I enjoyed seducing him into unfaithfulness. There's a song from the early 80's with the lyrics: "I'm a family man but if you push me too far I just might..." I loved to push them.



For that, I'm responsible.

Maybe they were easy to push, but I'm responsible for doing it. I could have stopped it if they couldn't or wouldn't, but I wouldn't. Entering S.L.A.A. made me want to change. Being in fellowship with others

wanting to change their behavior and managing to do so with the help from the 12-Step programme supports my recovery from old habits and staying away from my bottom lines to the best of my abilities.

— **Anonymous, Denmark**

Responsible for My Recovery



A generally accepted definition of victim: “a person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action or agency: 2. a person who is deceived or cheated, as by his or her own emotions or ignorance, by the dishonesty of others, or by some impersonal agency:”

When I see myself as a victim, I continue to suffer and identify with that suffering. When I view this in the S.L.A.A. context, I consider myself to be a victim when I seek “comfort” or “escape” through the self-destructive patterns of my disease. In this mindset, I usually think that I am faced with a situation over which I have no power or recourse, except to “numb out.” These “numbing

out” behaviors are characteristically very selfish, and further my own pain, and that of others.

A generally accepted definition of responsibility: “The state or fact of being responsible, answerable, or accountable for something within one's power, control, or management.

In recovery, I learn “serenity to accept the things I cannot change/courage to change the things I can/and the wisdom to know the difference.” While I can't control what happens in the world, I have learned that I can control my responses to it.

Often, I am presented with a “choice point” for moving from victim to responsible behavior. I can either engage in the well-

known, self-defeating patterns of the past or I can choose differently, in ways that support my highest good, and that for all involved.

These different choices become available to me through working the 12-Steps of S.L.A.A., as my consciousness of my Higher Power's will for me increases. (i.e. that I don't have to hurt myself by acting out in order to face and deal with the highs and lows of life.)

Furthermore, acting responsibly usually requires new and sometimes scary behavior, with which I may be unfamiliar. Still, I have found that the integrity, self-esteem and growth which new, healthy choices bring are well worth the risk.

A brief to story to illustrate this growth experience:

I have been sober in S.L.A.A. for 3 years and have experienced the “psychic change” as described in our Basic Text. I am free from my addictive patterns (largely anorexic behaviors), have clear definitions on bottom-lines, middle circle behavior, etc. Most of all, I feel very clear on what is (and is not) respectful and appropriate behavior (including attitudes) towards myself and other people. I strive to treat myself and others with respect and no longer feel trapped in seeing people as objects that exist to solely to meet my needs.

Recently, at a 12-Step meeting in another program I attend, I was touched inappropriately by another member. In a separate room at the same meeting, another member made an inappropriate and suggestive comment to me.

I was livid, scared, and confused all at the same time. However, thanks to S.L.A.A. recovery, Higher Power, and my support system of fellows, I didn’t have to figure it out all at once. I knew how to take care of myself in the situation without lashing out. Once I was ready, I made several outreach calls to program fellows to process and get support about what I had experienced.

I talked about my feelings of anger without needing to seek retaliation or punishment (a big pattern of mine from the past). I also talked with them to clarify right action moving forward.

After having processed these difficult feelings with these level-headed folks, I returned to the meeting the following week with a plan in place. I confronted the person who had made the comment to me, informing them – in an appropriate tone and fashion – that what happened was not okay, that I felt threatened, that I am not interested, and that I need them to refrain from such behavior moving forward.

I shared at the group level during the announcements that I had experienced both inappropriate touch and commentary during the meeting the week prior. I succinctly shared my feelings with the group, also stating that I feel this behavior threatens our program’s primary purpose.

I also shared my concern that if this behavior was being done to me, it was

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most likely being done to others, citing again our primary purpose, and asked the group to question, “Are we creating a safe environment for newcomers?” I finished my comments by stating that I appreciated their attention and that I would be sharing these concerns with the group’s GSR, because I felt they, too, should be made aware.

Thanks to recovery, I was able to follow through on this statement. I actually shared it with the contact person to whom all Group Representatives report. This person followed up by attending the group’s next meeting. On their own accord, they were hosting a business meeting where they focused on the concerns that had been presented.

They addressed the specific individuals’ inappropriate behavior in an atmosphere of transparency and concern for all involved. Concluding, they discussed actions that they could take to prevent this scenario from happening in the future.

Things worked out very well, all things considered! Still, no matter what others had done or not done with the information I presented, I knew I could rest knowing that I had at least done my part.

And there is a peace and serenity that comes from that which is unshakable. Moving into responsibility doesn’t mean that I can control all outcomes, or make everything go my way. It means that I show up and am willing to “change the things I can,” as the Serenity Prayer tells us, let go of the results, and keep moving on in a direction that will best serve my life and my recovery.

By moving from a place of responsibility, I refrained from my old addictive pattern of 1) withdrawing and thinking I had to figure a problematic situation out by myself; and 2) resenting the parties involved and using this anger to keep me “safe.”

Instead, I: 1) assessed the situation with the guidance of loving S.L.A.A. friends; and 2) chose how to respond

appropriately in addressing inappropriate sexual advances/behavior in a fashion that supported my well-being and that of the group.

I used the feeling of hurt — i.e. “victim” — to move me into “responsibility” — i.e. right action for myself and all others involved. All of this is made through recovery, a loving Higher Power and the clear lens of S.L.A.A. sobriety.

Thank you, S.L.A.A.! I am not responsible for my disease, but I am responsible for my recovery. The world continues to expand as my recovery progresses. No longer am I stuck within the shrinking circles of my disease.

With program, a loving Higher Power, and the grace of being connected with myself and my fellows, I am no longer alone in facing any life experiences.

I have my inner wisdom, and that of countless trusted others to help me face and make decisions. And that’s what true responsibility is about!

— C., Indiana

Service opportunities for *the Journal*

The Journal is a basic recovery tool for S.L.A.A. groups and individual members, and it is a key out-reach tool into areas that do not yet have an S.L.A.A. presence.

We’re looking for people with writing, drawing, out-reach, web design, production, and printing skills to assist in the creation of the new, deeper, more refreshing publication.

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