

the Journal

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Anorexia and Dating

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:

The article in this issue and the responses to the Question of the Day supply tools for everyday living and dealing with anorexia in the dating world. I was lucky that I had a sponsor who didn't allow me to give in to my anorexic fears around dating : "It's too soon in sobriety to start dating; I'll slip if I start dating; If he breaks up with me I won't be able to handle it and I'll either slip, become suicidal or leave the program."

All are fears that can be dealt with through working the steps, inventory, and contact with fellows. I had to rely heavily on my Higher Power and sponsor guidance. I remember hating my now-husband on our second date and telling my sister-in-law that I was going to quit dating him!

He didn't do anything wrong and I really liked him, so I told the anorectic voices to shut up and I stuck to my healthy dating plan and bookending with my sponsor. It was a difficult battle but well worth it!

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

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

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“IS THE PLAN OF DATING DIFFERENT WHEN AN S.L.A.A. MEMBER IS ACTING IN
INSTEAD OF ACTING OUT?”

How is an anorexic’s plan for dating different than acting out?

A plan to date takes both courage and faith in the anorexic’s recovery process. Contrary to other S.L.A.A. members, breaking out of the confusing cycle of isolation and social/sexual avoidance is a real challenge. Dating can be a positive step forward in creating a new and healthy behavior.

— **Thom L, Monterey, CA**

For me, acting in and acting out are two sides of the same coin. Collapsing and losing my voice, isolating has the same avoidant impact as the artificial high of acting out in any addictive behavior. In dating, I must stay connected to myself and share my truth.

— **Nancy, San Diego**

I find that depending on my sobriety, the acting out is variable. If I’m needy, my old acting-out behaviors surface. If I’m travelling okay, I tend to potentially act in.

— **Jane, Sydney**

I am a Sexual Anorexic...I have no idea how to approach this question. I do not want to go back to “romance factory” fantasy land. Each and every time I start getting to know someone of the opposite sex that I might remotely be interested in (never mind dating), I have started seeing a counselor at the very beginning— even when hanging out with a member of the opposite sex. Why? I cannot tell the real love from the fake. Also, I need the help of a therapist to prevent myself from reading more into situations than what they are on the surface.

My current “solution” if you can call it that, since I’m financially in a bind right now, is to avoid looking at it all together. Also, I am confused as hell about masturbation since it seems you need the element of fantasy to do it. Having the “romance factory” take over my life and sexually objectifying every person of the opposite sex that comes near me is not what I wish. My solution is to go about life as if I do not have any sexual parts. I know it’s sad and it sucks. But I have no other options right now. Approaching this without mental health counseling is going back to insanity. Believe me, if I could have solved this on my own, I would have done so already.

— **Lois T., Cincinnati, Ohio**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, — “Is the plan of dating different when an S.L.A.A. member is acting in instead of acting out?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #159 — Dealing With Triggers — “How do you deal with triggers in your recovery?” — The deadline for submissions is 1/15/16. Issue #160 — S.L.A.A. in the Senior Years — “How are we making our lives enriching for ourselves and others? How do we “practice the principles,” and what wisdom can we offer to the younger among us who may come into this time of life?” — The deadline for submissions is 3/15/16. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

I’ve got more of a problem with acting out. The difficulty is in figuring out when I can trust myself. Am I sober when dating, or in my addicted self? I think anorectic persons have the same problem, but in the opposite: When they feel distance, is that soberness or anorexia? The solution for me: Trust God and take your time while dating.

— **Maarten,
the Netherlands**

My experience is that in dating, acting in comes to the surface, by not acting, not having a voice, not being seen. In a relationship ways I’ve found to combat this is by practicing assertiveness, spontaneity, taking the lead, having faith.

— **Paul T., London, U.K.**

Yes. The plan of dating should address the needs of the person in recovery. Do we have “standard/best practice” here? But the plan needs to address my bottom-line behaviors.

— **DJ, Houston**

Yes. For me it was. I really have to push myself as an anorectic to see it thru on dates and develop a relationship rather than running.

— **Liz, Dallas, TX**

Yes! Anorexics need to get out there. Our dating plans should be centered around gentle nudging into extroversion to help break our avoidant patterns.

— **Madeline S., Los Angeles**

Yes, I have to have a game plan as an anorectic. “Stages of dating” helps me to move forward and trust the process. I can walk through my feelings of fear.

— **P.A., Houston**

A dating plan for anorexia includes constant contact with a sponsor and outreach partners so that I can make sure my reality corresponds to the real world. “Acting in” expresses itself when I make up what’s happening in dating.

— **Anonymous, Seattle.**

In dating, my anorexia looks like: not returning messages or phone calls. In online dating, it looks like: not messaging people who interest me, or deciding that no one is “good enough” to message or “giving up” for months or years on dating. In order to move through anorexia, I have to make dating a practice, with the goal of meeting new people and taking weekly action, remembering the slogan “progress not perfection.” I recently dated someone who told me he was invested in the relationship, but kept cancelling dates last minute. Over and over, my feelings got hurt when he didn’t show up the way I expected. Finally (after considerable pain, sponsor/program calls, and prayer and meditation/Step work) I realized that he wasn’t available for what I wanted, and ended the relationship. I stopped being mad at him, stopped making him “bad” for not being who I wanted and that was so empowering.

— **Diana, Oakland, CA**

Dating from an Anorexic Perspective

According to our Basic Text and the pamphlet “Anorexia: Sexual, Social, Emotional,” S.L.A.A. members who act out sexually while putting up walls to intimacy also qualify as anorexics. I tend to swing back and forth instead, so I am the garden variety anorexic: I act in. I’m not frigid, and I’m not just having a dry spell. My condition isn’t just temporary or by choice. I automatically put up sexual, social and emotional walls to men and women – even when I don’t want to. So my dating plan has to deal with my automatic walls.

Until recently, I hadn’t dated for at least two decades. I went to 12-Step dances for the high I received from the music and step improvisations. I didn’t socialize with others, so I usually left the same way I came – alone (by choice, I told myself). After I joined S.L.A.A., I began to see that there were times I had no choice. Sometimes I even cried about my inability to say “Yes” to joining others.

When I took Step 4 on the anorexic part of my addiction, my counselor, who specialized in sex and love addiction, explained that I was anorexic because of the abuse I had received – sexually, physically, racially and emotionally. By the time I concluded Step 4, I had relocated. However, I carried that counselor’s findings with me and slowly began to make changes. I began to date myself: I bathed, dressed up, prepared myself a nice meal, and enjoyed my company. That helped me to replace the decades of negative messages about myself with positive ones.

Through my inventory, I realized that I had no passion in my life. I was unemployed again, so I began to seek work for which I had a passion. I chose acting, which helped me stay in touch with my feelings. Since many roles didn’t pay the bills, I created an online gift shop that focused on items related to my ethnic heritage. That shop helped me to feel even better about myself.

Then I learned about boundaries. I could set limits so others would not be tempted to abuse me. I learned to say “No” in a way to improve my recovery. My resentments decreased as people honored my limits. I developed the courage to remind those who ignored my boundaries. I also stopped volunteering until I established what I



would and would not do.

For a love addict, who looked for acceptance, boundaries were not easy. As an anorexic, I felt the pull to isolate. Instead, I learned who had authority and who actually did not. When immediate supervisors did not honor promises for my safety, I went to administrators who could. I began to put myself first.

Most of my free counselors, who didn't know much about addiction, were content to find fault with how I coped in my work relationships. But the last one listened, referred me to a 26-week training to deal with my emotions, and eventually urged me to date.

I made excuses. I said I didn't have time; I'd do it after I retired. When my counselor suggested I try online dating, I said, "No way!" Our compromise was that I would go to one social event per month. The events I chose were barely social: I attended because I was interested in them, not because I might interact with others.

The therapist prodded me to continue socializing. She also validated my concerns about work. Because of the intensive training that she'd referred me to, I began to take risks. I forced myself to have lunch with people who had gossiped about me and taken sides with my perpetrator. I began to pay sincere compliments and to set deadlines for decisions. Eventually, I began to feel accepted.

My relationship with my Higher Power improved because I had found one of my own understanding. I surrendered more after I finally acknowledged that I lacked the power to change things on my own. Eventually, I wanted to be around people – not for long, but for a little while. For someone who was used to people not liking me, this desire was a big change. Maybe it wasn't; maybe it had been clouded by the protective façade that I didn't need anyone. So my dating plan required that I practice the Steps.

As my retirement loomed closer, I decided that I did not want to be alone. Attending events had not produced the effect I wanted. Offline dating was not happening on its own. I had no idea how to change my situation. So I surrendered my loneliness to my Higher Power

and journaled about the type of man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.

At 70 years old, online dating began to peak my interest. I still was uncomfortable about e-mailing strangers. I browsed dating sites, and was attracted to one that focused on fun activities – especially since an association of retired people had a link to it. But when I did a free search on that website, I ran into technological problems.

First, the men were too young. After several e-mails, the website helped me change the age range. When someone in the correct age group replied, I was confused about how to respond. After several vague answers from the site, anxious unconventional attempts, and more scrutiny of the rules, I finally realized that I had to subscribe first. So I signed up for three months.

The fun activity I offered was dinner on Easter at my favorite vegetarian restaurant. The man, who was not vegetarian, offered to meet the following week. We, both nervous and bewildered, met at a vegetarian bar, ate and talked about things other than ourselves. In less than an hour, he had scolded me for interrupting him and told me about historical tours that his company offered. Despite the red flags, we exchanged e-mails and phone numbers. As we walked to our cars, he asked if I liked plays and then complained about not getting a kiss. I reached over with a smile and hugged him. Then I walked a few more steps to my car and waited for him to leave: I didn't want him to see my license plate. He finally drove away in exasperation.

Despite the lack of chemistry, I sent e-mails via the site and his business e-mail, saying I had enjoyed talking to him and suggested groups he might want to contact about his business. He thanked me two weeks later and promised to meet again. Several

weeks passed before I realized that he was probably only interested in me as a business client.

I'd taken steps in the dark, but I was paralyzed with fear about this unknown. The website offered a guide book, and I'd checked it out at the library.

A Christian book site offered a book with additional tips. I eagerly read both, and then I prayed. I learned that I could not shortcut when dating. I needed to converse a while on the site before meeting.

I needed to wait before providing contact information besides my name. I also needed to promptly respond back to queries or explain my delay. In other words, I had to kiss dishonesty good-bye.

Needless to say, I angered others because I delayed responding. Some members gave me the opportunity to set limits on their age, distance or inappropriate advances. Others set limits on my age, sense of humor and ethnicity.

Some were looking for mates; I just wanted friendship. I learned to ignore a couple instances of sarcasm, but to stop responding if this became a pattern.

During that time, I'd found a vegetarian meetup on the internet with a host of social events – free or discounted.

I met other people in person who didn't think my food fare was strange. When I became more involved, I didn't feel pressured, and I enjoyed not feeling like a freak. So group dates made me feel comfortable.

I decided to try online dating again at three other sites – an ethnic one, an ethnic Christian one, and an all-inclusive one. I spent a month apiece with the first two. No one local responded from the Christian site. The one local who responded from the ethnic site was angry because I didn't provide my phone number.

I accidentally subscribed to the all-inclusive site for six months. (A God thing?) At first it yielded more local men with similar interests, but none I selected responded. However, others not selected were interested. I liked the attention, but I still had problems: I never learned the difference between a favorite and a flirt; I still don't know how to chat online. I finally realized that I needed more help than books.

I asked a younger S.L.A.A. to be my recovery partner for online dating. At first, she was reluctant because her experience had not been rosy. When I pointed out that she could alert me to what not to do, she agreed. Later she made me aware of things she'd found addictive. She suggested that I bookend my dates with a call to my sponsor. Mostly, she cared enough to stop driving and take my phone call.

Fellowship Wide Services offered the CD Dating: Age 50 and over, which I purchased online. One speaker suggested writing out marriage vows to myself. So I did. I read them before I leave for a date.

Ongoing patterns of my anorexia are fears that the date will use or reject me. I have to

remind myself that his past behavior contradicts that notion. Maybe the belief that I am not worthy to be happy has also reared its ugly head. Whatever the case, I have to share my fears either with my recovery partner or my sponsor. I also have to surrender them to my Higher Power.

For this anorexic, masturbation and/or fantasy are just another way to isolate. When I masturbate, I am less willing to reach out to others. Since fantasy deals with the past or the future, it doesn't help me deal with the present.

I need to be mindful on dates so that I take in the current kind of person I am with. I also need to focus when I am e-mailing a possible date or am on the phone with someone I am dating. If I don't want to deal with the here and now, I don't need to date.

Before I go to sleep, I ask Higher Power to give me the willingness and the direction to live sanely through the night. I also ask for help to avoid masturbation. When I listen to the CD, I sleep better — masturbation-free. When I awake in the morning, I ask for the willingness and direction to live sanely through the day.

How have I fared? I've met nice and not-so-nice people online. At first, I hollered at the not-so-nice. Now I block them if necessary, or I just stop communicating.

I don't have to have the last word, nor do I have to waste my time. I need to surrender the disappointment and resume my search. Usually, that is difficult, but referring to my journal description of the man I am looking for helps to keep me on track.

Some of the nice people I met stopped communicating because we had no chemistry. Others I met, and we planned to meet again. By surrendering the outcomes, I've had my surprises: one man who liked to dance disappeared after there was sickness in his family. Another, who barely dances anymore, I continue to meet.

We aren't clones, but we have similar experiences, interests and values. We don't try to change each other. I care about him, and we're both surprised. Is he "the one?" I don't know, but I'm not worried. I'm just glad that I have rejoined the human race.

– Carmelita, Chicago, IL



Share space

I Am Powerless But Not Helpless

As I contemplate this question, “how was I able to discover and move from victimhood into responsibility,” my mind drifts back to a few significant moments when my role of being a victim became glaringly apparent, and I realized that I was the only person capable of challenging that role. There is a wisdom to recognizing that “I don’t know what I don’t know,” that it takes time for me to see where I have lost my power, where I am stuck, where fear and limitation dominate my self-perception, where and how the beliefs and feelings I have about myself and others keep me living an existence of being a victim. The old cliché is: “I am powerless but not helpless.” Yet the inability to see my part in things, my difficulties nurturing myself into new behavior, into new roles in life is an unfolding, unending process of awareness and change.

My old roles and patterns of being have held on long and hard, and they’ve protected me

and helped me before I developed the many helpful tools and skills needed to function in balance, which I’ve learned in recovery.

These old roles became a problem when I got stuck in them, when life demanded different reactions and skills. Most of these old roles, patterns and coping mechanisms were incorporated into my personality as a child. They helped me then but were not healthy coping tools facilitating growth, and they didn’t help me to evolve more skills or to become adaptable.

I do want to emphasize something that is very important to me, to my recovery and coping skills today. My ‘feelings,’ were the foundation upon which my intellectual perceptions have been built. Long before I could analyze and use reason to come to an understanding of what was happening, what needs I had and how important family relationships were forming the perception of myself, my

emotional life was busy creating an ‘emotional intelligence’ an understanding if you will, of who I was and how it all worked. My emotional identity was being built. I tend to be an emotional being first, gathering my sense of meaning, purpose and sense of ‘self’ from the emotional aspects of my experience.

Then I make sense of these feelings by creating an intellectual understanding of things which backs up and supports my emotional reality. I do this less now because I have a complex ‘thinking brain’ helping me to understand and cope. But is it my emotional experience of who I am, in other words, my damaged self-esteem and shame that I carry that has provided the shaky but formidable foundation upon which my thoughts and behavior have been built?

Life in recovery from sex and relationship addiction, and certainly my social, emotional anorexia has been about undoing these well ingrained



‘emotional’ beliefs about who I am. This has been an amazing awareness, the realization that my emotional world was assembled within my brain, as a part of my personality, long before I was able to understand in an intellectual capacity the workings of who I am and how I fit in. My limited emotional experience, which was defined by fear, shame and loss became a significant factor in the evolving perception of who I am. In simplest terms, I was what I felt. If many of my thoughts have been assembled in order to explain and validate my emotional experience, then changing what I think is an important part of becoming unstuck, of becoming less like a victim. This is only a piece of the solution though, as is changing my behavior. Certainly, my thoughts and behaviors are vital areas of change for me to work on.

But not working to change my emotional experience of me—my emotional reality—

leaves me vulnerable to return to being stuck, continuing as a victim and to the dysfunctional cycle of reacting to life rather than coping with it.

My thoughts and behavior need to be changed in order to allow myself to move forward, through my grieving process, healing the emotional experience of who I am and creating a new emotional experience of “me.”

So moving from being a victim has closely followed my emotional grieving process.

As I have gone through deeper levels of letting go and understanding my powerlessness, I have grieved my losses and grown more capable of becoming whole.

This has required me to face denial head on, and to face my limitations.

I’ve needed to be willing to look at my behavior, the obsessive-compulsive behavior in every area of my life, which is put there to keep me from truly being quiet. It is put there to

keep me separated from my most essential experience of the “self” as a part of, and inseparable from, the “Self.” Maybe you’ve heard that before.

The little “s” self is my humanness, while the big “S” Self is that eternal, power greater than me, God if you will. I become “whole” as I bring my emotional and thinking self into my awareness, each playing an important role in making choices today.

And yes, early in recovery, one of the only tools I had was the ability and willingness to change some of my behavior (or my surroundings if I couldn’t change my behavior) so that I had the hope of changing my emotional experience.

Eventually, I did come to believe that my thoughts could somehow realign themselves into something constructive.

My brain didn’t have to flood with destructive, unhealthy, disconnecting intruding omens of impending doom. I began to let go of, or learn to live with,

my deepest fears.

Understanding how I have been a victim, and maybe still am, is a profoundly involved process taking time to see and alter.

At some point in recovery I felt that being “stuck” that being a “victim” was about the most unattractive and distasteful ways of being a human. I loathed it. I clearly remember this after I worked on my First Step for the first time and upon completion of my first relationship romantic/sexual history and when I worked on my first Fourth Step. After a few years in recovery, maybe five or seven, I would see or hear victims everywhere in the rooms.

As I listened to others and when I offered requested suggestions and help, I often heard a “yes, but” mentality or the “I’m different, I’ve had it harder than you,” response. I had been there and would have similar feelings on and off for many years, but I’ve come to realize the journey is not a “rational” healing.

It is an emotional one. The role of victim in my life has, coupled with it, a deep and resilient resistance to becoming whole. I have to look at where I am setting myself up to live in shame to come to grips with changing my victim mentality. I have to look at my perfectionism, procrastination, work addiction and a host of other character challenges.

How does it go? Service keeps me sober. It’s helpful for me to witness the struggles of others. Sometimes I can offer them a little more loving compassion than I can offer myself even though one of the profound paradoxes of life is that I can only love someone to the degree that I love myself. Giving is a powerful tool that helps me grow because I am

always teaching the lessons that I need to learn. I keep going to meetings.

I keep trying to share even though what I need to share has changed dramatically over the years. And I need to be reminded of what it was like, not because I might slip and suddenly find that I am transformed into the stuck addict that I was when I entered the rooms 26 years ago, but because I need to be connected to the pain of what I have lived through. I need to remember what I was like so I remain connected to who I am today as well as the feelings and losses that I’ve had.

People that I love and respect in and out of recovery overwhelmingly affirm a way of life characterized by moving out of my so called, “comfort zone,” one where I push myself to grow, a life where I challenge myself to open up to the will of a Higher Power.

To do this I need to let go of my perception of what Higher Power holds for me and become receptive to living a life where I make effort to open myself to discovering a “Higher” will, to the unfolding mystery of what lays a head. I then look at the areas in my life where I have embraced change, where I was able to “act” rather than react, where I developed clarity of my thoughts, emotions and of my needs.

Doing this increases my ability to move into new behavior. I am emboldened to change. I can grow! I am powerless over so much, but I am not helpless. I can become a person capable of living a healthy life and of making healthy choices.

There is something nagging at me which feels missed as I listen to my gut and think of how I’ve “moved from victim into responsibility.”

With time, like so many things in my life, clarity comes to me at a pace that my Higher Power prepares for me. A few years ago, I would not have written this next part.

Like the deepest truths of my life and of spirituality, something calls upon me to connect these two parts of myself, the victim and responsible person that I am and can be. It helps me when I can see them both as valuable and intrinsic to my being. One cannot “be” without the other. Just like the 1st Step and the 12th Step, these two parts of me cannot exist without the other. I need to validate this for myself.

I must reconcile the juxtaposition of victim with being responsible. Recovery is a transformation of vast internal and external metamorphosis. The changes are so subtle, so continuous and so pervasive that I really can’t explain what the process is like or how the processes works.

Of course, the Steps and the breathtakingly beautiful spirituality encompassed within them are the scaffolding around which this awakening, this metamorphosis is both built and around which it is coalesced. I like the idea of healing and transformation happening as a coalescence, it takes “my doing” out of the experience, allowing something bigger than myself to grow within me.

I know that I need to recognize what I can change and be willing to change what I can. When I am a victim, I am overwhelmed and feel powerless. In recovery I learn to understand what I am truly powerless over and what I truly have the capacity to influence, what I truly can do even if that means spending the rest of my life having measured progress and incremental successes in my ability to be consistent.

I may not ever become competent in areas of my life that I work on, but I can learn to better manage my needs, to create internal boundaries with myself and to do my part to create boundaries with others that help me to feel comfortable and cared for and that help me to feel caring and responsive to the needs of others too.

Ultimately, if I am loving myself, I am not being a victim. I am being responsible for myself. I am not acting out on others or acting in and avoiding the care that I must take to meet my own needs. And when I am triggered I can speak up, say that I am feeling uncomfortable and risk being vulnerable.

When I can do that, I can look at what is going on for me. I can have compassion for my reaction to life, my feelings that are stirred, the many thoughts that can flood my consciousness. Some are shame based while others are grounded in recovery.

I don't have to be a victim at

the hand of my own self-cruelty. Instead, I can practice creating an accepting and loving emotional refuge for myself, one that is tolerant and that is resilient, an internal emotional home that sees and understands my historic struggles and has an enormous amount of compassion for the long learning process involved with changing what seems to be my natural reaction to life's stresses.

I've learned that I can truly change deeply-rooted ways of thinking and feeling, one day at a time, one small step at a time. The most profound change that happens within myself is the capacity to love and forgive myself. Forgiveness, self-forgiveness fills my heart and body with the "feeling" of love, which (and I know this sounds extreme, but I really believe it is true) seems to be able to change me on a cellular level. An important thing for me to remember is that it takes a long time. It takes as long as it takes.

I can't rush the process. Healing in recovery is more of a journey than a destination. I learn to love myself, to be forgiving and self-accepting which brings about a warm loving relationship that is with me in every moment of my life and can help comfort me and empower me.

I move into wholeness, not really leaving anything totally behind. But my wholeness is the beginning of a new part of me. It provides me with many tools of empowerment and can help me obtain clarity and my truth.

The process is a "life process," one that I do not finish, one that I do not graduate from, one that is evolving into a relationship, a partnership with myself and a Higher Power that is loving, nurturing and forgiving, a warm comfortable existence within my own skin that becomes a peaceful life.

— **Brian R., West Palm Beach**

The Making of a Sex Addict

Editor's Note: This article contains language that may be triggering to some.

My sex addiction is all rooted in childhood trauma – particularly complete emotional abandonment. It is but a symptom of a much larger problem.

The overriding emotional trauma of my childhood was my father criticizing me. The hurt was so overwhelming that I'd

run off to my room to cry. No one came to check on me. The message I got was that my feelings and my sensitivity is shameful.

I was so hurt, that as I lay on my bed crying, in so much pain, I felt powerless to escape this family that I was so dependent on. The core beliefs that I

adopted while crying on my bed, so alone, were to shape the rest of my life.

I internalized that people hurt me – therefore I must isolate and avoid people so I don't get hurt. I must continually be vigilant that I'm going to be hurt. I can't put myself in situations where I can

be hurt.

So I became a loner with few friends, a lost child, as the coping mechanism I adopted from my traumatic childhood became my life script. My thoughts were, "People will hurt you. Avoid them. Isolate. You don't need them." I became fiercely independent and completely isolated.

Because I was so isolated, I had no peers to teach me about sex. From puberty until 22 my body was completely shut down sexually. In some respects it was a blessing, as the demands of college required much more of my time. I had a difficult enough time with my other escape (manic outdoor recreation) that interfered with my studies that to add sex and dating would have been too much.

At 22 my body would not stay sexually shut down any longer as the erotic dreams ramped up. I had my first conscious orgasm thru masturbation. In that absolute isolation, by the 3rd lifetime orgasm, I was a sex addict. Orgasms are my sleeping pill – they relax me and put me to sleep. Orgasm is my drug of choice. When I sleep I don't feel the loneliness or the crushing responsibility of life. I escape. Escape was to become the central theme of my addiction.

Everything was fine until 1989 when at 25 I was having a real hard time understanding who I was. I was reading self-help books about sex and relationships trying to figure it all out. I wanted an intimate relationship so badly, to connect with another, and relieve the crushing loneliness. Nothing I did worked. I felt even more alone and defective. And as I was to learn later in life, whenever I feel disconnected, the addiction takes off.

That summer the masturbation got compulsive as



I spent whole weekends masturbating, then sleeping to escape my loneliness. I quickly felt powerless. The powerless feeling tapped into the childhood feeling of powerlessness; and all that unresolved childhood pain came bubbling up. I was in so much pain that I was crying at work. I had to do something. I ended up going to a treatment center for a month. At treatment, I realized that if I don't connect with people, I'm literally going to die. I came out of treatment and found my first boyfriend.

Now that I had someone in my life and felt connected, I suspended my recovery program in S.L.A.A. and fired my psychiatrist for having the audacity of asking me to abstain from masturbation. The masturbation was once every night, but it wasn't compulsive like before. It felt different, as I wasn't using masturbation to escape crushing loneliness. I stopped going to meetings within 3 months of coming out of treatment and did no more work on my childhood issues, so they stayed unresolved, continuing to sabotage my life

as an adult.

For some strange reason, I never retained the message that I heard at the treatment center that I would be dealing with this shit for a long time. Between 1990 and September of last year, I had a manageable addiction and periods of healthy sexuality with long term partners.

Masturbation was still once a night like clockwork, but it never escalated and I never had obsessive thoughts about it. Last September, I was starting to gradually feel less and less connected to my current partner, and to life in general, as I had turned 50 and was reflecting on my life. The despair was creeping back in. I convinced my current partner that masturbating to porn every night is just what I do. I'd come to bed afterwards, turn my back on him, and fall asleep. The childhood tapes were still being played. People will hurt you – isolate – even from your partner.

In the last year and a half, the seeds from which this addiction could quickly sprout were planted. Whenever I had a weekend away from my partner, I would masturbate compulsively all weekend long. I was doing it every 3 hours. It was the very definition of addiction – complete isolation, porn, excess and incredible intensity. The seed was planted that if I could do others like I do that toy....

In August of last year I downloaded the hook-up apps and my manageable sex addiction of once a night masturbation became something totally unmanageable. I got on the apps innocently enough, trying to connect with people to go to the beach with or do outdoor activities with, because I had few friends. When I didn't get any response, I made my profile obscenely sexual, which turned out to be a terrible mistake.

I got responses then from those who required my services, as graphically advertised in my profile. I was ecstatic at first as I hadn't had many sexual experiences with different guys and was learning so many new things. It felt like personal growth and not addiction. But within weeks it became out of control. I couldn't leave the phone alone at work, as I had to check the hook-up apps. Talking sex on the hook-up apps actually made me high with the intrigue and my newfound power.

I made these guys come to me. I was getting off on my power over others as a top. My addiction was no longer about escape and sleep. Now power and intensity were added to the addiction. I was escalating. The small highs of the sex talk sustained me until I could get the full blown high of risky unprotected sex. I was even escalating the masturbation by getting up in the middle of the night because I knew the porn was on the computer downstairs.

I'd lose 3 hours of sleep a night. I had some encounters where I realized I'd have sex with anybody. I needed the intensity fix that badly. It was then that I started feeling out of control. And just like at 25, the powerlessness of the addiction tapped into my childhood feelings of unresolved powerlessness. I was crying at work once again. This is when I started S.L.A.A. and therapy. My partner stood by me as I was honest with him through most of it. During my acting out, he was so concerned about my safety, that he went with me on my hook-up forays, as it was supposed to be a threesome but was actually a twosome. Unfortunately he got to see my addict in full regalia - having sex like an animal in pursuit of mind numbing intensity,

chasing the high to the bitter end.

Towards the end of my acting out, I tried to change my hook-ups into something not as emotionally damaging by insisting that I wanted to stick around and cuddle. True to form, the first guy I cuddled with gave me crabs. I told the people I respected about the crabs but didn't tell the ones that were stepping out on me or who were the one night stands. I could see that the people my addict hung out with had no qualms about hurting me and I likewise had no qualms about hurting others.

This was not the kind of person I wanted to be. The last time I cheated on my partner before admitting complete powerlessness was very telling as to where this addiction was headed. I was literally insane, almost attacking the guy and it was some of the most intense sex I've ever had.

The secrecy amplified the intensity. And when I started to go again and he resisted, I felt in that moment like I could rape. I could feel the loss of control. The escalation scared the hell out of me and I just couldn't do it anymore. I surrendered.

One of my strengths is that I love to write, as I use writing to work through my feelings. When I started hooking up I immediately started writing to try to figure out what I was looking for. It took a while to break through the delusion, but I continue to write and reflect. I wouldn't be this far in my recovery if I didn't. When I started S.L.A.A. in November 2014 I immediately put down the porn and masturbation and have not acted out in those bottom lines since.

My partner kept discovering new hook-up apps on my phone, as he demanded that I immediately delete them. But I couldn't delete them, as I needed that fix so often. I tried

frantically to find a way to hide the apps on my phone, but he always found them. He actually threatened to smash my phone.

The hook-up apps and anonymous sex were harder to give up, but by late December 2014, I had let those go. The threesome with a friend I respected was the next to go. I was feeling calmer and more at peace after I surrendered each of these behaviors. I was left to only have sex with my partner. But the addiction was adapting. I could tell I was as detached with my partner as I was with my hook-ups.

I was using the same porn fantasies every time we had sex. I was planning and pushing for sex. I literally was still acting out, but only within the confines of a committed relationship. The addiction had chased me and was now seeking to destroy the last important thing left in my life – my committed relationship. Drastic measures were needed. I needed a time out. At my sponsor's urging, I agreed to a 30 day celibacy from all sex. It was to be the best thing I've ever done.

The calmness was immediate. It was pointless to think about sex, as there was no sex to plan for. When I emerged from celibacy, I learned some very powerful lessons. The biggest thing I learned was that I don't have to have an orgasm every day. I didn't go crazy with horniness during that celibacy period. I could go weeks without sex and not be climbing the walls. I no longer had to push and plan for sex. I could live life in the moment. Since I was not escaping and medicating myself during the celibacy, my feelings started to thaw out. When I first had sex after celibacy, it was incredible. I was present with my emotions, my love, and my affection for my partner. It was the first time I ever had sex and actually felt truly connected –



giving and receiving love. Now all of me is present when I have sex. I thought I was having the best sex of my life with my hook-ups, but sex when I'm tapped into my emotions has far surpassed that. And I'm only just beginning! Also my thawing feelings have allowed me to be vulnerable and to truly connect at S.L.A.A. meetings. I am not alone.

I feel safe and accepted. This is where I belong. The more connected I feel, the less I want to act out. I don't want to do anything but have sex with my partner. Sex is no longer how I medicate the pain away. Sex is how I connect from the core of my being and express love. That's what it really is all about – love. Love of yourself, love of others and love of this beautiful world that our Higher Power has blessed us with. Through S.L.A.A. I'm finally opening up to love. I am so grateful for this program.

What Recovery Means

What recovery has meant for me: The minute I stopped acting out a calmness started to sweep over my life. Life in the addiction was so manic. Actually this new feeling of

calmness and being grounded went a long way towards keeping me from acting out. I didn't want to lose this peace. I didn't want to muddle my thoughts with sexual obsession. The insights I was gaining into myself were so exciting. Because I was no longer medicating and escaping, I started to work through the feelings I was running from. I started to literally thaw out.

From a cold calculating unfeeling addict who used others, I changed into a warm caring person who was feeling his emotions, connecting with and helping others. It literally is a miracle. As I get further into my recovery, my bonds to the people in my S.L.A.A. groups have become even stronger. I am part of something much larger than myself.

I can be vulnerable and honest. I won't be hurt. As a matter of fact, in S.L.A.A. I am accepted unconditionally and loved for who I am. S.L.A.A. is my new family. They know everything about me – my fears, my shame, my joy. I feel safe. I feel loved. Finally I am home!

— Craig

Being Gentle on Myself

Someone in the rooms once said something that made her my hero. She said that we really need to be gentle on ourselves because there is so much shame involved in sexual addiction. I love this saying, and tried to incorporate it into my thoughts and my shares. Needless to say, it takes a while for me to fully understand many concepts such as this, as I have had a long time to practice negative thinking, getting down on myself, and reinforcing that through active addiction.

Today, I read something in a daily meditation that radically jolted my perspective. The person wrote, “One evening I was taken by surprise when another member complimented me. I was very uncomfortable with this gesture of kindness, feeling that I didn’t deserve it. When I tried to talk her out of her kind words, she would have none of it. She said I deserved her compliment,

as did others. It was only then that I realized how far down my low self-worth had taken me.”

I have a profound habit of minimizing the affirmations of others, and don’t give myself credit where credit is due. I am a terrible critic of myself, and I have a deep sense of shame especially when I have a relapse, or any setback or shaky time in my recovery journey. This, of course, extends into the outside world as well. My supervisor, a mid-level manager, was a good friend before I started working with the company I’m presently with. He does my annual evaluations; he is fair and impartial given his character, and has no hesitation about bringing up issues. Having said that, I consistently get great evaluations. However I get a conversation going on in my head during my review that I don’t deserve this or I’m not as good as that. Here I am again trying to dismiss the

positive opinions that others have of me.

Then morning meditation concluded with two thoughts: First, even if I don’t feel deserving of the complements of others, I can be grateful for their kindness. Second, this person’s sponsor suggested that they make a list of qualities that they like about themselves. I am creative. I am loyal and dependable. I enjoy the arts, and am grateful that I was brought up to appreciate them. I am handy at fixing things around the house.

I am finding that this meditation is an important part of a journey to return to being human. It’s a reminder to me that this program is not about stopping the sexual misbehavior, but regaining my humanity and joy in life.

— Dale B.

A Recovery Miracle

An old-timer chastized a newcomer who was talking to another member during a meeting. “There’s no crosstalk,” she

whispered.

“How is that crosstalk?” the newcomer countered.

“The time when people share is golden,” the veteran member

answered, “and needs to be kept silent.” The newcomer shot her an “Are you off your rocker?” glance.

Later in the “Getting Current”



portion of the meeting, the old-timer shared that she was short \$565 for band equipment for her son. “The first payment of \$100 is due soon,” she lamented, adding that her disease suggested that the answer was simple: just find a well-heeled man.

The lack of funds bore heavily on the old-timer, a single mother.

As the meeting broke up, the newcomer came up to the old-timer and thrust a crumpled bill in her hand. “I can afford this,” she said, “and we recover together.”

The old-timer was speechless and ran out of the meeting to her car. There she unfolded the bill, it was \$100, just what she needed. She sobbed for five minutes as she realized once

again the truth of what her sponsor always told her: “Your Higher Power will take care of you.”

Just one of the miracles that happen every day in meetings and in the lives of our members! Miracles we would not have known how to ask for!

— **Anonymous**

Letter to Shame

Dear Shame,

You and I date back many, many years. I must admit, I didn't know what you really looked or sounded like because you were so intrinsically morphed into my daily routine of inner chatter. I thought you were a normal part of life. I now know that what you helped me to normalise, wasn't normal at all.

I particularly feel your presence when I am requested to share my inner thoughts with a crowd greater than two or three. Its ironic that for someone who chose being on stage as their career, that there is where you find me, shame. I suppose it is when I have to craft my thoughts or feelings of an intimate nature without a script or reference point in front of me, that I really feel you. This dates back to being told I wasn't clever enough, articulate enough, perfect enough and just wrong for being born (as my mother put it). Of course we cannot ignore the various reinforcements from my father over the years. It has certainly allowed me to live my life based on these core beliefs. And how engulfing they are!

You were always there for me when I interacted with people too. Where everyone else had their exclusive memberships all tied up and I could find no way in, I always had you to turn to.

I may not have belonged anywhere but with your help, I

could feel quite unique, different, 'gifted' even!

I suppose you've always been opportunistic — particularly when it comes to conflict. Anytime I felt attacked physically emotionally or mentally, you have been a trusted servant to help shut me down or discombobulate me to the point of gibberish or rage. When things don't go to plan (as so often they don't) especially with my parenting, I've noticed your presence more and more. And actually, that is beginning to really make me stop, take note of what is happening and try a different tact.

In fact, since I've become aware of you, I've realised how much I don't need you. I don't even like you. The extent to which you've monopolised my life so far is a hefty price to pay: A missed childhood, a series of mistakes and huge risks that were potentially life altering, if not life threatening, the various addictions and fantasies that kept life shut out. I may have told many in the past how "colourful" my life has been. There have been some ripe and joyful experiences thrown in, for sure. But the misery and shame have quite a partnership that I want no more of.

I'm on a different trajectory now. I know this because I am seeing you appear as unpredictably as always but I

know it's you and I know where you came from. My father can have you back. I do empathise with his arrested emotional development at 8 years old, due to his Austrian Jewish heritage, but it doesn't mean I have to carry the burning torch for him. I will wish him wellness and love as his health deteriorates (and his behaviour along with it) and do my best not to take it personally. It feels much easier to know this about him and you as it gives me a new perspective on where my mother's rage seemed to come from. You were quite attached to her too, weren't you? And as we know from the subsequent shame inducing behaviour that my older sister re-enacts, its easy to stick with what you know because that's what you've been doing all along.

Well, I don't want you anymore, I'm certain of this and I certainly don't want to pass you on to my kids either. I won't delude myself that you'll be eradicated altogether, but I will keep working on the tools of recovery at my disposal, however slowly or long it takes. I'm becoming more creative and perceptive about my inner needs now that I'm clearer about your various disguises. But I see you and when I do, I will pray and I will meditate and I will be mindful to notice you and put you away again. I may even have to excuse myself from physical situations or conversations but that's okay too.

I deserve self forgiveness. I'm not used to it, but I'll keep working on that. No more self flagellation — that's an important objective because I'm quite good enough without you, Shame.

With respect,

— Sue, London

Step 1: Realizing Unmanageability

Soon after joining S.L.A.A., I set my period of abstinence at 5 months. It just seemed too long of a time. I thought it would be annoying and frustrating to go without sex, but not difficult. A month into it, I was at a party and met a guy I liked. I spent 12 hours high on coke and ecstasy, spilling my life's secrets and passwords to a man I just met. After ingesting that truth serum, I still kept my boundaries up around sex.

But as the night passed and the drugs wore off, I began to feel weak in body and spirit, and I finally gave in. I couldn't keep up my abstinence even for myself. I was devastated. Only a month into this abstinence, I had to admit my powerlessness over sex and love addiction and I cried for a day. I sat outside and people walking by would ask me how I could be so sad, and I would just keep crying. I couldn't say, "No" to a man.

My realization that my life was unmanageable came pretty early on, after only a few meetings. I had a lot of ways for justifying and rationalizing my behavior. I would have sex with someone on the second date

because I would be considered a slut if I slept with someone on the first date. And of course the definition of "date" started to become more vague over time. If I met my date in a bar and played 1/2 a game of pool it became a so-called "date." And the definition of a day as 24 hours turned into 15 hours. Finally I had to admit that 12 hours is not a day. And of course the definition of sex could be skewed so that as long as I didn't have the strictest definition of sex within the first 12 hours of knowing someone I was okay.

But I wasn't okay. I'd go through bouts of managing networks of 5-6 guys bouncing from one to the next and back. It was a mess, keeping secrets and splitting myself into all of these different pieces in order to accommodate all of these guys (the pain I was avoiding was that deep dark hole inside myself.)

I identify as a sex and relationship addict. My sexual addiction consists of not being able to set sexual boundaries whenever I needed to, and using sex to cover up or soothe anger, frustration, and sadness. And

my relationship addiction consisted of having "comfortable" relationships with men who I saw no future with and not being able to get out. But as the hierarchy goes, the last rung is "love." I used to say, "I hate love," which was really a way to feel control over a fear of intimacy. In my relationships, I'd withdraw emotions and know that I didn't want to be with a person but not want either of the 2 other options – 1) sexual acting out or 2) being alone. I'd tell myself that I was really searching for love, but in the meantime, I'd have "fun" with sexual liaisons.

In that unmanageability of liaisons, I realized that promiscuous sex and unwanted relationships block my path towards love – self-love and love from another. They take time energy and self-confidence. And the only way I can be involved with people in this way is if I check out of my body or cut off my heart from making decisions. That's how I slept with all those guys, I ignored my heart.

—Anonymous

Service opportunities for *the Journal*

The Journal is a basic recovery tool for S.L.A.A. groups and individual members, and it is a key outreach tool into areas that do not yet have an S.L.A.A. presence. We're looking for people with writing, drawing, outreach, web design, production, and printing skills to assist in the creation of the new, deeper, more refreshing publication. Please assist us in creatively carrying the message of recovery.

Please go to <http://www.slaa.fws.org> to submit your writing.

UNITY IN SERVICE



The Truth of the Rubber Ducky: Sociopaths and How They Affected My Life



I have always thought of the truth to be similar to the rubber ducky that I used to play with in the bathtub when I was a child. No matter how hard I tried to push it down and hold it under water, it always seemed to float to the top. I now understand that the truths surrounding intimate relationships in my life are starting to float to the top. The common ground is that I still have anger towards my mother for her constant

attempts (and one time success) at manipulation. Two guys who were drawn to me and I to them have (as I now have discovered) traits of being sociopaths.

The anger at my mother stems from her as they say “pulling the wool over my eyes” when she showed me the first inkling of kindness as an adolescent by giving me Harlequin Romance novels. I realize now that she did this to cover up the fact that she was

encouraging me to be addicted to “love” and “romance” so that she could continue her sex addiction.

My mother used her children (I am the youngest of six) to feed her other addiction — work anorexia — which means she basically just sat around all day and did nothing on public assistance (welfare).

I now know that when we went off to school she would secretly go to my room, grab a

book off of the shelf and drift off to la-la land until we came home. My brother and I were the only ones left living at home and when we opened the door after school she would rage, yelling, "Go to your room," at the top of her lungs. We had interrupted her euphoric recall daydream. She had been ritualizing. She would ritualize for decades after.

I truly believe in what Patrick Carnes calls "Betrayal Bonding"... since that is what I have done for most of my life. I would work for toxic employers who would promise one thing, but the reality of the job would turn out to be totally different.

For years, I lived in my anger monger of what I call VERBAGE...Victim Entitlement Rescue me or Blame cycle. I took out the unjust way of being treated by taking it out on my spouse (at that time), friends, and any co-workers who wanted to bitch along with me. I even took it out on my employers and got fired from more jobs than I can remember. I would just go back into the same type of job since that is all the work experience I had...and do the same crap all over again.

I did not, at the time, want to see my part in the mess. In 2009, after the economy hit a wall, I and my spouse were unemployed. It was then that I discovered this almost insatiable appetite to figure out what the hell was wrong with me. I started attending Al-Anon, Adult Family Groups, and even A.A. meetings — even though I was not an alcoholic.

I did not discover the "love" and "romance factory" addiction until 2013 — the same year I had left my spouse and was preparing to live a single life again. The same month that I moved out, I started attending a grief workshop with my friends. The facilitator of this workshop was good looking, had a very nice deep voice and he made sure he

"looked good" at all times. He saw that I thought he was cute. He milked this affection with very slight seductive remarks and actions. Needless to say the "romance factory" went into full gear. I started pouring myself into the work.

I wrote poems about the work and sent them to him. He had me on a string, and boy, was he playing a tune with me (or at least up until the last assignment). We were supposed to pull all the most painful parts of all the work we had done and consolidate it into one piece of work and then read it out loud to the group. I could not do it.

One thing I learned from growing up is that you did not make yourself totally vulnerable to any one person. So to share the most painful parts of all of our work in front of someone that I was vulnerable to — that was impossible. So I ended up telling the grief facilitator this and coming up with my own version of the last assignment. He said my work was "sweet" but he did not want me to read the letter I had written. He suggested I come early to the next class and we could work on the letter together. I agreed — with much trepidation.

About half way through this work I told the grief facilitator that I was going to quit because I was developing feelings for him and couldn't continue (he wore a wedding ring).

The class that night was tight with tension and I thought at the end of it, the proper thing would be to thank him for his time. When I went up to his desk, he refused to look at me but thanked me for my appreciation. As I was walking out, I kept thinking, "What about this scene is so familiar to me? What was really going on?" I could not rest that night.

Something was up. Then at 2 a.m., I sat bolt upright in bed. Now I knew what it was. The grief

facilitator acted like he was totally disgusted in having me in his presence when I thanked him that night. It dawned on me — this is the same way my mother would act when she could not manipulate me to do what she wanted. She would just look away with disgust in her eyes. It was like a flower unfolded and I saw that the whole time he was acting nice and caring, it was just a "game" to him. I was being manipulated.

I ended up doing that last assignment the very last class. I was able to do the assignment since he no longer was someone I was vulnerable to. I knew what he was now. That night at the party we had, the tension from him was thick. He stayed in the opposite corner away from me. I remember telling the group I would not be back.

The second guy was very similar in nature. We met in an ACA meeting. He was a real charming, down to earth guy who made you feel at home when you talked with him. I felt a bond with this guy but no sexual pull. I could not understand why he too, shamed me. I allowed it to happen because I was in a "disassociated state" (my counselor called it this).

The relationship started out with him wanting to see me every other day. I now know addictive types of "love" come on fast and furious. "Addictive love" crashes just as fast. A good friend and a co-sponsor made me realize my life was suddenly starting to revolve around this guy. I have had enough co-dependency in my life to recognize this was not good. Then he shamed me, he apologized for using the wrong pronoun then said, "It's all about you, isn't it?" He never really apologized for shaming me.

He had moved across country to get away from a 5 month marriage that crashed and burned and ended in divorce. I see this is a pattern for this guy.

Also, it was a real red flag for me when he kept wanting to complain about how “She did me wrong.” And yet he did not want to see HIS involvement and HIS side of the story.

I called a halt to our relationship. I stayed away from that ACA meeting on purpose for about 5 weeks. During that time, I told the second guy that no communication would be appreciated. He still tested those boundaries by texting a couple of times. I stood firm and did not respond. I missed him, not him really. I missed the person he could have been. I went back to that 12-step meeting hoping his “higher self” would somehow emerge.

He offered to let me borrow his car. Then, when he brought it over for me to get used to driving it, he “took exception” to something I said. I was hurt by this and when discussing it with my counselor she stated that this was a simple ploy of manipulation: to offer something, then nit-pick a little at the person in the hopes they would decline the initial offer. I

emailed him that I felt I was being manipulated. He denied it. Then the waiting game came. I kept waiting for him to come over, call, or text to say, “Let’s talk.” Nothing.

I stopped going to that ACA meeting and started one in my neighborhood. Also, during our short and fast relationship, he had admitted he had a problem with empathy. I found some information on Alexithymia (a psychological term for someone who cannot feel compassion nor empathy for another). I emailed the second guy with this information. I got no response for almost 2 weeks. What I got in return is was a very sarcastic “joke.”

The joke did not hurt as much as knowing this guy spent days looking for just the “right type” of joke to get back at me. This cemented the fact that I would stay away from him.

I emailed him, telling him to not to come to the ACA meeting on my part of town that I had started, and to take me out of his email contacts — that I never wanted to get another “joke” like

this again.

That ended the relationship. I thought both the grief facilitator and the second guy were misogynist men who hated women. That was until I was in an S.L.A.A. meeting and heard a guy say that he had to read a book on the life of a sociopath, since his brother was one. Then he proceeded to go into detail about how his brother made an art form out of manipulation and would never take responsibility for his actions. The wires were tripping in my head. This is what the second guy did — ding, ding, ding.

I am writing this big long story to warn others. In ACA it states “we confuse love with pity” and in S.L.A.A. we confuse “seduction” a.k.a. “romance” for true love. There may be no romance in this life for me. I now understand why I was so drawn to these sociopaths (my mother may be one). If all I do is learn to love myself and the few fellow travelers that attend the 12-step meetings that I go to, then so be it.

— Lois T., Cincinnati, Ohio



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Spiritual Anorexia

SHARE: Spiritual Anorexia is when our spirituality and in particular our religious practice entails distancing ourselves from contribution to civilisation and service to humanity. Spiritual sobriety is freedom from self righteousness. It is humility and self abnegation. It is not blind imitation of others in the manner of religious observance. It is freedom and sanctity in both inner and outer expressions. It is chastity and purity. It is not fundamentalism nor fanaticism. Glory be to God alone, above myself and all that is in heaven and on earth. It is moderation in all things. Thank you for reading my share.

—Tahi

The Light

I have learned to dance
To dance within the light
To cast away the shadows
And to fight the good fight

Each day is a battle no more
As it once had to be
Now there are days I can dance
And feel absolutely free

Today I may see shadows
Just around the way
But I know to find the light
And to make it bright as day

I know that if the darkness comes
If I don't want to dance or fight
that around me is a circle
that will help me break the night

For today I am not alone
And never have to be again
There is always light to be found
Even within a friend

— Anonymous



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