

the Journal

Issue # 165
Single Issue \$4

A large sculpture of a hand holding a heart, made of dark, fibrous material, set against a stone wall. The sculpture is the central focus of the cover. The hand is positioned as if holding the heart, with the fingers slightly curled. The heart is a simple, rounded shape. The entire sculpture is made of a dark, textured material that looks like fibrous glass or a similar synthetic material. The background is a light-colored stone wall with a dark, rectangular plaque or window opening in the upper left. The ground in the foreground is gravel.

Letting Go of the Outcome
Easier Said Than Done

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.

© 1990 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved

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.

© 1990 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

4 Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

4 The Twelve Steps

5 Letter From the Editor

6 Question of the Day

Theme: Letting Go

11 Me and My Green Card

12 The First Step

12 Letting Go of Strong Desires or Important Outcomes

13 Higher Power Does for Me What I Can't Do for Myself

14 Nights in The Big City

15 Letting Go of the Strong Desire to Have a Relationship

16 The Remedial Class for Love

17 Letting Go of the Outcome: Easier Said Than Done

17 Cutting the Weight Off

Share Space

19 Highs and Lows of Sober Dating

21 Relentless Pursuit of Recovery

22 My Visit to the Fundamentals Group-S.L.A.A.'s Original Meeting

22 Don't Even Know I Am Lying

23 My Wife's Anxiety

24 The Lesson of Risk

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.

©1985, 2003, 2012 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

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.

* ©1985 The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved. The Twelve Steps are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps does not mean that A.A. is affiliated with this program. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only. Use of the Twelve Steps in connection with programs and activities, which are patterned after A.A., but which address other problems, does not imply otherwise. **THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS** 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — 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 Him. 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 Him 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 God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His 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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

I always heard in meetings, “Let go and let God.” I believed that other people were able to do this but it wasn’t in the cards for me. I believed more that, “You can’t stop dancing with the gorilla until the gorilla wants to stop.” I had a negative view of life (especially one I couldn’t control). I’m glad Higher Power proved me wrong.

We got so many great responses to the question of the day this issue that even the short answers take up seven pages! The longer articles are written on some pretty important life problems and human needs. I gained strength from the answers contained there. Letting go is never easy but hopefully this issue of *the Journal* can help or offer insight.

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.

© February 2017. The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Stories, interviews, personal testimony, and other content contained herein are authored by members of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. The opinions expressed in *the Journal* are not necessarily the opinions of The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc., F.W.S. office, Annual Business Conference or any other Conference committee including the Conference Journal Committee or *the Journal* production staff. Motions adopted at the 1989, 1990, and 1991 Conferences chartered *the*

Journal, but it is impractical for all of the content of a periodical such as *the Journal* to be Conference-approved. Each recovery group can determine its own position on the use of content from *the Journal* at its meetings.

The Augustine Fellowship, S.L.A.A., Fellowship-Wide Services, Inc. 1550 NE Loop 410, Suite 118 San Antonio, TX 78209, 1-210-828-7900 Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. CT except for holidays (fax) 1-210-828-7922. www.slaafws.org

For subscription concerns, please visit: <http://www.slaafws.org/subscriptionhelp>

Managing Editor

Lisa C.

Art Director

Fiona

Proofreaders for this issue

Andrew K.

Beth L.

COVER PHOTO: 165 SALISBURY CATHEDRAL, SALISBURY, ENGLAND

Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

DESCRIBE YOUR PROCESS OF “LETTING GO” OF STRONG DESIRES
OR IMPORTANT OUTCOMES.

My biggest process was creating a personal version of the Third Step prayer. When faced with a strong desire or trying to control outcomes, I say the prayer and turn my will to align with my Higher Power. If still in self-will, I get to a meeting, do outreach calls.

— **Dave G., Los Angeles, CA**

I listen to my Higher Power through prayer, meditation, program fellows and my sponsors — sometimes literature as well. Then, I create boundaries, separating myself from the situation. Finally, I get involved in self-care and top line behaviors.

— **Jean, Seattle WA**

Letting go is not an easy thing for me, but I'll gladly write about what worked best for me so far. If I don't want to let something go, that usually comes with a strong reason. It's good to think about what I desire or what I'm lacking. What helped me most is not to fight the feeling but go through it. I try to go inside the feeling as much as I can, even forcing it on myself. If something hurts, I try to truly experience pain. The more I get into it, the faster it passes in most cases. Often, I'm surprised how fast it wanes. Sometimes diverting my attention through work, though not all the time.

— **Greg, Budapest, Hungary**

I simply accept what is the desire before me. I focus on the solutions and hope of an outcome versus trying to predict it.

— **Andrew E., Pittsburgh, PA**

Letting go of watching porn via my cell phone and in the porn shop has been an evolutionary process. My sex and love addict was immensely obsessed and compelled addictively with porn. I had to first admit I was powerless, and my life had become unmanageable. Then I had to seek the help of a Higher Power. I had to write frequent prayers asking God to eradicate and curtail my compulsions and obsessions for porn. I had to meditate. I had to be very honest and accountable about my feelings and notions with my sponsor and accountability recovering friends through texting and phone calls. Working the Twelve Steps with my sponsor is vital. Lastly, asking God to remove my character defects: anger, resentment, self-hatred, slovenliness, pride.

Letting go is a slow evolutionary process. I often fall like a child learning to walk. But I get help from God, sponsor, my support group, recovery friends, and therapists to help me let go of porn. I have let go of rationalizing, self-entitlements, and my lust for porn. Remember, God loves you unconditionally. And- be very gentle with yourself. Handle your recovery with gentleness!

— **Louis, Philadelphia, PA**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Describe your process of ‘letting go’ of strong desires or important outcomes.” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: #166 — Thirteenth Stepping — How do you recognize/avoid “thirteenth stepping.” and #167 ABM issue** What Makes a Person Emotionally Available? — How do you recognize signs that a person is not available, what does it mean to make yourself more available to others in a healthy way? — The deadline for submissions is May 15, 2017. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

99.9% of the time when I sit still with myself and ask my Higher Power to remove or replace a desire or thought it happens. That is a major tool of letting go for me.

— **April, Houston**

Constant mantra of “Let Go and let God,” to surrender.

— **Earl D., Houston**

Prayer – talking to a sponsor. Reviewing how well it has worked for me in the past.

— **Anne K., Tampa**

I ask myself, “How important is it?” I visualize physically letting it go into a river and watch it dissolve.

— **Danette S., Seminole, FL**

Action. Getting out of the situation and doing something productive towards my recovery gets me out of the mindset that, “I must do/get x, y or z.”

— **Sarah C., San Antonio, TX**

I’m forced, via a Power greater than myself, to remember that the universe, and my small figure in it, is intelligent and orderly. That’s how I let go.

— **Jason S., Sacramento**

I find that the longer I try to control outcomes or other things in my life, the more painful my life becomes. Letting go becomes easier when I can no longer stand the pain.

— **Phillip W., Little Rock, AR**

It is a process. More than anything else, it is focusing on bolstering my trust in God and facing my fears. I cannot, on my own, believe that everything will always turn out okay, but if I give him a chance, God will walk me through it.

— **Steve B**

Pray. Meditation.

— **Dave, Ireland**

Letting go is when I turn over my worry to my Higher Power, knowing that I can trust him and the process.

— **Anonymous**

I ask my Higher Power for help in prayer and working Step 3. Then I take an action of going to a meeting, calling a program fellow, and/or being of service. The prayer and action relieve the obsession.

— **Jim B., Huntington Beach, CA**

When I figure it out, I’ll let you know! Trying to work with something along those lines this week.

— **Matthew N., NY**

In the end, I must decide how truly important something is. If it will not aid in my recovery, I need to let go of the outcome.

— **Rich K., Worcester, MA**

Question of the Day

Praying and handing it over to my Higher Power. Acting “as if,” even if I don’t trust yet or believe I will be taken care of – experience of God’s will working in my life helps me let go.

— **Faye, Dublin**

The process of letting go got easier and easier once I did it two or three times. All I had to do was get over my defiance defect and the belief that only I know what’s best for me. I had to get a strong faith that the universe can sustain me and make me thrive without my “help” that in reality turned out to be interference.

— **Suzanne, Los Angeles, CA**

Sit with it for three days and speak to my sponsor (if I can get ahold of him). Do outreach. By that time, it’s sorted itself out anyway.

— **Paul T, London, UK**

A big part of my sex and love is about not being impulsive around my addiction. I must practice H.A.L.T. and reflect before taking the next steps to ensure I have right-sized and honest motives.

— **Jaki Jo, London**

I always try to realize that there is Higher Power and a greater good working out there for me. My sponsor always asks me, “How important is it?”

— **Gabriel G., Sacramento, CA**

Whenever I have an expectation, I am usually stressed and in danger of a slip – plus I don’t get what I want. When I give it up, every single time God has given me something better for my life than I could have imagined. So – my process is: panic, pout, think about what my past experience was, then ask God to remove my expectations and sit back to take right action!

— **Trevor G, Seattle**

When in fear, I ask myself from where it is rising, then reflect. Is it ego? Insecurity? Lack of connection to Higher Power? Or, is it healthy fear keeping me from harm?

— **Amy G., Austin TX**

Clinging is fear. My ability to let go is based on my reliance on God and faith.

— **Anthony P., Chicago**

I am not very good at letting go of strong desires on my own. I must surrender to my Higher Power and to the program. I move consciously towards a contrary action by doing the opposite of what I normally would do. I also consult with and follow direction from my sponsor when I do not necessarily want to. An example would be jumping head over heels into a new relationship. The contrary action is to take things slowly and be conscious of my feelings and actions and avoid becoming enmeshed with a new partner. I trust that my Higher Power has a plan and I put my program before strong desires.

— **Nora, Riverside, CA**

Hitting my head against a wall until I hear my sponsor telling me that I’m hitting my head against the wall and deciding to stop.

— **Anonymous**

I say the Third Step prayer.

— **Tim C, Cincinnati, OH**

I breathe and pray, think it through, write and share.

— **Amalia, Waltham, MA**

I let go of my expectations by staying in the moment, let events unfold naturally and avoid thinking too many moves ahead. When things are not going “my way,” I make outreach calls to my fellow travelers and my sponsor. I have a list of numbers and call them all one at a time until someone answers or replies. Consulting somebody who is not emotionally invested in my issue calms me down and helps me accept what is. If no one is available to talk to, I excuse myself from the situation if need be and take a long walk or meditate on the issue and pray. This is more of a regrouping than a retreat. This keeps me from potentially making the situation worse for me and others.

— **Tony, Orange County, CA**

First, I must admit to myself, God and another person that I have an expectation. Then I pray for the grace that I may be present, curious, kind and willing to give God back the reigns.

— **Bahia, Los Angeles**

Prayer, meditation, service to others.

— **Tom, Los Angeles**

I tend to desire control often. I want group projects and dates to go the way I want. But, that leaves partners and teammates angry with me or resentful. I’ve learned that calling people, being there for others, meditation and prayer help – it’s what everyone says is the formula. But you must do what works.

— **Alessandra R., Los Angeles**

First, I repeat, “I choose _____” (whatever the desire is fills in the blank). Then, I choose not to be consumed by that obsession. This gives me ground to interrupt addictive thought patterns.

— **Justin, Los Angeles**

Acceptance – I read the A.A. Big Book chapter on that prayer. Surrendering control.

Mindfulness, re: my sadness that I can’t control – relief that God is in charge.

— **Suzanne, Los Angeles**

Praying and handing it over to my Higher Power. Acting as if, even if I don’t trust yet or believe I will be taken care of – experience or God’s will working helps me let go.

— **Faye, Dublin**

I used to feel recovery was living happily ever after and having all my character defects go away. Now it is about relationships and it’s a moment at a time. When I feel I can’t get the love I want from a person or situation, for a moment I feel angry. Then I move to serenity and even unconditional love. I receive love from others in my life and I accept that the unavailable person doesn’t love me the way I want. I see that every person is loving me with all they have, the best way they can.

— **Dion M., Orinda, CA**

Question of the Day

If I'm in trouble, I pray, go to a meeting, start translating work, call a fellow or try to think of something I can do for someone else. With positive things, I try to leave the outcome to God.

— **Maarten, the Netherlands**

Rational thought process. I look at risk vs. gain and believe that a Power greater than myself will guide my decisions.

— **Joseph A., Philadelphia**

I just know that it's God's will, not mine.

— **Michael S., Philadelphia**

My processes vary with my energy level, location, and activity: 1) Journal 2) talk with my sponsor to work the Steps 3) share at meetings 4) feel my feelings 5) take 12 deep breaths 6) contain reactivity at all costs.

— **Nancy G., San Diego**

Praying to my Higher Power for humility helps a lot.

— **David F., Poland**

I imagine a big silver platter in my mind and place my urge/desire/compulsion onto it and hand it over to my Higher Power. This way I pray and envision at the same time.

— **Rick B., Largo, FL**

Meditation. Sometimes I take a rocket ship 3 or 4 galaxies away and then I slowly come back to earth. Letting go is difficult!

— **Seth, Boston/Newton**

Trust is the most important factor for me in "letting go" of strong desires and important outcomes. I strongly believe all things happen (or don't happen) for a reason and I must trust that Higher Power will take care of things far better than I can alone.

— **Becca M., Rhode Island**

I pray a lot. I do outreach calls. I cannot let go by myself, I need my Higher Power to do that. For triggers, I use the 3-second-tool which is built on identifying the trigger and I pray for help.

— **Gunilla, Sweden**

The first step for me is to recognize that I even have the desire. I get clarity on that through free writing. Then, after I've exhausted myself trying to manipulate or coerce other people and situations to secure my desired outcome, I finally surrender to my Higher Power and turn my desire over. One way I let go is by writing down the desire and putting it in my God box.

— **LH, Los Angeles, CA**

Me and My Green Card



I recently completed online traffic school after I got a traffic ticket for failing to come to a complete stop before turning right on a red. American friends laugh. It's almost impossible to live in Los Angeles and not get some sort of traffic fine. But living in the purgatorial pressure cooker of applying for a green card makes it feel like a life or death situation.

A traffic violation is not a deal breaker unless it falls under the criminal category (DUI, driving without a license that sort of thing), but my nerves are so frayed it feels like one.

It is a strange time to be an immigrant in America. Will the universe let me reside where my

heart already tells me is home? Will I pass muster when the official goes over my petition with a fine-toothed comb to check if I meet the criteria? I was warned that it takes stamina and tenacity to go the full hog with a green card application. I won't bore you with what's required but let's just say it's not a simple case of form filling.

It comes down to being a peculiarly inexact science: the strength of my case can be given the thumbs up or the thumbs down depending on the temperament of my immigration officer.

I've been living in the U.S. for two years but my time has always been marked with an expiration

date. In April, my visa expires.

I am passionate about staying here. I have dedicated so much to this life goal including selling my flat back home.

Relocating to a foreign country has required me to move outside my comfort zone and engage in hands-on emotional risk-taking.

My biggest defects of character are trying to look good and wanting people to like me which has made it even more demanding and brutal. Starting over requires a ton of trust, patience and perseverance, and that has taken its toll on my nervous system. My ego has taken a battering too.

Fortunately, I am teachable and I recognise how fortunate I am to have been given this chance

to live in the place I always longed to live. I hope my green card will be granted but it's a costly gamble.

There is no guarantee. Weirdly, the things I am obsessing most about are the apartment I lovingly furnished and the car I'll have to let go of (which happens to be my first car).

These are problems. But in April there is a chance that I must return home and rekindle relations with a network that has left me behind.

What keeps me pining to live here? Everything that I hold dear

is here. I speak less and less to those I don't see every day back in the UK. People I once considered trudging buddies have fallen by the wayside. Lives move on. But I was fine with that because I was moving towards something bigger. Going back home, and letting go of the people I love here, will be heart-wrenching because I chose this life. The life I had before happened without any effort on my part. To put everything on the line and risk losing everything took blood, sweat and tears. It's demoralizing and frustrating to be

living in limbo. It's hard to relax in a world that I might have to renounce in six months.

But that feeling of belonging I crave so deeply is not location specific, even though it feels like it is. Los Angeles doesn't have a monopoly on joy. It might not be what I envisaged for myself but my life is controlled by something far bigger and more significant than the petty details of my lofty aspirations.

— Anonymous

The First Step

We read Step One from our Basic Text at a recent meeting and I was struck by how letting go of the outcome is one of this Step's foundations.

Admitting powerlessness means, to some extent, that we are letting go of what we thought or hoped our future would be. We

have decided to let go of using sex and love addiction as our mechanism for dealing with our past or current pain and emptiness. In the words of the Basic Text, we let go of using "physical and emotional intensity from a sexual or romantic 'hit' to penetrate and animate our

progressively deadened, dissipated beings."

However, anyone who has tried to take Step One knows that this type of letting go is easier said than done.

— Chris D.

Letting Go of Strong Desires or Important Outcomes

My process for letting go of strong desires or important outcomes varies with the desire and the outcome. My first step is to notice that I have the desire for a favorable outcome.

In and of itself that is a huge breakthrough. Then I consider what impact that desire could have on me, my loved ones, others, the world in general. I consider how

important it is given my ethics and values and whether I feel mandated to pursue it.

By this time, sometimes a few seconds, sometimes longer, it becomes clear that I should let go and so I then engage in actions that permit me to do that – I breathe deeply, meditate, 'give it away', or identify the underlying feeling associated with it and live with that for as long as it takes to

dissipate.

For the most part, this process allows me to let go of strong desires that are not healthy and even many that might be healthy but are not mandatory. It also allows me to let go of outcomes that appeared important but, given space and time, are proven unimportant, or at least not as important as I initially perceived.

— Anonymous

Higher Power Does for Me What I Can't Do for Myself

Personally, letting go has the feeling of it “being done unto me” rather than me trying to manufacture my ability to let go. As I reflected with my recovery partner on what brought us into S.L.A.A., I realized it was that we hit rock bottom. It was our inability to stop behaviors rather than any ability that finally brought us into this program of recovery.

As I started working the Steps along my spiritual journey, I began to realise more and more that recovery was done unto me. All I had to do was show up each day with humility, openness and willingness to allow someone else to take the driver's seat. So often I go through my day with an agenda, trying to change this, fix that, manipulate outcomes and control reality.

Now I try to go through my day with an openness towards reality, trusting in the perennial goodness of reality. This allows something to teach me, change me and help me see myself as I really am. I don't always adopt this posture perfectly, but what helps me are two practices.

Firstly, I acknowledge my humanity when it shows up in my imperfections.

For example, when I behave selfishly, dishonestly, or when I slip, I allow it to remind me of where I truly am in my journey of



recovery and my constant need of my Higher Power to do for me what I can never do for myself.

Secondly, my morning and evening 10 minute meditations help me practice detaching from my thoughts/ego/self and become a compassionate observer instead.

This helps me feel connected to my Higher Power and to the rest

of the world, thus helping me see through the illusion of this small, narrow, self-created world and to awaken to my true self which is inherently, objectively and forever connected to my Higher Power and to everything else.

— Adrian (Singapore)

Nights in The Big City

My sponsor told me that at any given time I am either working my program or preparing to act out.

As I was driving into Charlotte on a dark, wet evening, I was preparing.

I was already battling a post-holiday depression and the weather was getting me down.

Driving at night was the riskiest for me.

I felt empty and lonely. I wanted to believe with all my heart that something out there would make me feel better.

I typed in the words Adult Video in my phone GPS and to my “surprise and shock” there were several to choose from in this large metropolitan city. In fact, there was one five minutes from my hotel.

After I checked in to the hotel, I felt even more unsettled.

The call to hop back into my car and drive by the video store to “just look” was intense.

I paced to my car and then I paced back. I went into my hotel room and locked the door.

I thought about how someone from the program in Charlotte had called me out of the blue that morning.

I then left a message with my sponsor and he called me just as I was leaving to come down to the big city.

God is certainly gracious to commission two people to initiate calls to remind me that there is sanity outside of my head.

But the longing, the wishing, the frustration was still there. I knew that if I didn’t leave the hotel room, I couldn’t hurt myself or others. Outside those doors, there is no telling where I would end up. I went to bed and thankfully fell asleep.

The next day was a nice day of

Why does my addict think that when I go on business in a big city I need to paint the town? It is the opportunity, I suppose — the “this is your last chance” lie.

work. Why does my addict think that when I go on business in a big city I need to paint the town? It is the opportunity, I suppose — the “this is your last chance” lie.

It is the belief that something in the darkness will cure me of my feeling that I am lesser-than everyone else that lurks about

within me.

After work, my dinner with coworkers got cancelled. I muddled through traffic to South Charlotte to a meeting. It was big city meeting full of addicts like me.

They understood me. They knew the struggles. We talked about the powerlessness.

I bought a book from the literature table. Afterwards, I walked into the quiet church and read the chapter about being an addict. I wish I knew how to cry. I wish I knew how to feel.

Yet something in that book and in that church said, “I know you.” And I knew I was known.

On the drive back to the hotel, I passed an off-ramp where I knew there was an Asian massage I had never tried.

Nearby was another venue that I had gone to. I knew exactly what I would get, how much it would cost, and the risk was relatively low.

Further on, was an adult bookstore that would cost less, saving me money, but had higher risks of disease.

Inside, there was a feeling of wishing I could pull off to one of those places. Yet within there was an even greater sense that I didn’t need to. I drove back to the hotel to eat a salad and write my share for *the Journal*.

— David in Western NC

Letting Go of the Strong Desire to Have a Relationship

Hello, I am MP, gratefully recovering sex and love addict. When I think of this topic, what comes to mind is my strong desire to have all of my work in S.L.A.A. result in a successful, happy relationship.

As a newcomer, I wanted to be sure if I was going to do all this hard work, I would get a reward – i.e. a shiny new boyfriend!

While some people do get into relationships as a result of working the Steps, I no longer believe the goal of the program is to partner up.

It can be very destructive to imply that those who are in partnerships are the winners, and those that remain single are the losers or are somehow not working hard enough.

My mind definitely worked that way for quite some time, but today I no longer work the program with the stipulation that it must result in a certain outcome.

To me, sobriety is its own reward.

A relationship is not guaranteed, but what is guaranteed is freedom from the mental obsession, the grinding, relentless slavery of fantasy and acting out.

It's so easy to compare myself to others who are finding success in their sober dating process, and to come up short.

But to do this would be to ignore the miraculous changes that have taken place in my life as a result of program.

For one thing, today I am surrounded by loving, kind and generous fellows who I stay in constant contact with. Whether I am single, in a relationship, in withdrawal, or experiencing the daily highs and lows of sober dating, my fellows are there for me, cradling me if I fall, encouraging me, rooting for me and supporting me.

I never had such unconditional love in my life before and it chokes me up to write about it. I have truly found “my people”, my family. God has made this possible. I am no longer lonely, in fact it is a struggle to return all the texts and phone calls I receive from people in program.

Life is so rich in the fellowship. Every week I go out to brunch and dinner with people from my meetings and there is so much nourishment in those connections. Human warmth.

Also as a result of program I have embarked on a journey of meditation, going inwards and discovering the joy of conscious contact with a Higher Power. As a newcomer, I never imagined such a thing would be very attractive. But meditation is soul-fuel. A way to charge up spiritual batteries.

Music has also come back into my life as a result of working the Steps. Singing and writing songs has provided a new sense of peace and pleasure that is infinitely wonderful. The beauty of life and of all its creatures, all its expressions is within me. I am

whole and I AM love.

These experiences were entirely unimaginable to me in the beginning of program, as I could only imagine my happiness coming as the result of a relationship, or from outside me. Today it is quite different. I am sure a relationship will come to me in time, but it no longer seems like “the prize” in program.

The prize is recovering oneself, falling in love with oneself and with life, and experiencing true connection with other human beings and with God – becoming whole.

How does this happen? It happens gradually as a result of practicing all Twelve Steps, especially Step Twelve – giving back what was freely offered – doing service – taking on commitments – writing for *the Journal* – sponsoring – sharing. fellowshipping—reading the literature – praying – meditating – observing top lines. Basically, it happens when we are doing everything that is suggested as a program of recovery. That way we are happy, joyous and free regardless of the relationship outcome. Single or in partnership, we have a purpose, a plan for living that we can rely upon.

May all beings be at ease. May all beings be happy. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be loved! Happy New Year.

— MP

The Remedial Class for Love



Love is my enigma, yet love is also my desire.

I lost the love of my father to Corona and Dos Equis, and never really had the love of my mother as it was forever stuck with her demons. That set the stage for the eternal quest for love.

I married my high school sweetheart, wanted to be sure to scoop up someone who loved me right away, waste no time. Alas, love was not enough for the two of us. Then, I met a lovely man who would do anything for me, but I broke his heart with what I thought was love with another woman. I did not love myself enough to leave that relationship when I needed to do so.

Ten years later, I woke up and realized that my love, the love inside of me, deserves to be given to someone more deserving. And therein starts a journey to find love that may never conclude. I've realized I am not only learning how to love others, I am learning how to love myself. No wonder I

struggle with family, friendships, and relationships. It's not just about finding a boyfriend. Gosh, finding a boyfriend seemed like the ultimate solution long ago in 1991. I find a boyfriend, never leave him, marry him, and stay together forever. I thought that was the recipe to life and life-long love. But, no, love is much more than that. It's more than just staying with someone. It's acceptance, kindness, tenderness and more of which I have no clue because I am still learning, and may always remain in the remedial class for love.

These days when I struggle in my lessons on love I have to remember this: I must not go back to *the well of love that did not work*.

Do...Not...Do...That. Easier said than done. I am lonely, and want to love. But I must not go back. There was a good reason for the end of all of those relationships. Go forward ... forward! It's scary because

forward is the unknown, whereas *the well of love that did not work* has some inherent comfort in that I know what to expect from that well.

I will not text the ex-husband. He is married, unhappy, but married, nonetheless. And I know the two of us never would have married if it had not been for the fact that he rescued me from my wretched childhood home. I'll be grateful for what he did for me, and accept that he is not my lifelong love.

I will not flirt with the ex-boyfriend down the street. He loved me, but did not see me as his equal. He will always try to parent me, and I deserve an equal. I'll cherish the memory of him appearing at my apartment with an ice cream cone when I was going through a hard time. I will also cherish the time I called him in a PTSD moment of fear, and he showed up at my apartment in his flannel pajamas, and got in bed with me so that I would be less

scared. These are beautiful moments, but they don't make him my lifelong love. I will treasure his friendship, and move on.

I will not Facebook message the hotel concierge from Dublin. Yes, he did give me his biography of Michael Collins, a most thoughtful gift. I can still see him standing there on O'Connell Street in Dublin as we part for the final time, his last words ringing in my ears, "As you know, love, it is a sad story. Be sure to be in a good place

when you read it." I've not yet found that "good place" in which to read it. I do take it out, and hold it all the while thinking of us walking in the Garden of Remembrance. The only connection we had was a mutual love for the Republic of Ireland. I was right to move on from him. Keep going forward.

I must not listen to Adele's "Hello from the Other Side" and then proceed to email the drummer that couldn't handle my PTSD. He helped me find the

spark to write again, and he helped me find my voice. No doubt he was the best reader of my work. Yes, I left him, but he had already left. I was the one with the guts to put everything on the table. As much as he touched my soul, he will always be a leaver and a heart breaker. I must go forward into the unknown. It's the only way I'll have a chance of cracking the lifelong love lesson.

I shall reread this when I forget everything I just wrote here.

— **Veronica C., Guilderland, NY**

Letting Go of the Outcome: Easier Said Than Done

As an addict and co-dependent, I struggle with attachment to outcome. I want to control and direct the universe; I want my fantasies and wishes to become reality. One of the only practices I know that works to counteract those

tendencies is prayer and surrender to my Higher Power. So, every day I say a morning prayer that includes these words, "God, grant me the courage to accept your will, to surrender my own will today, and to trust that at all times you know better than I do what I need

and are bringing it to me." It reminds me that I'm not in charge anyway, so I may as well surrender and go with the flow. And that, even if only one day at a time, brings relief.

— **Karen T, Palm Beach, FL**

Cutting the Weight Off

Some years back, I was convinced by a salesperson that DIY wallpaper sticker is a walk-in-the-park. I bought a roll, intending to transform my daughters' wardrobe panels from boring white to sweet floral pink. It was a walk-in-the-park alright, in New York Central Park.

Here's what happened.

Before the Cut

I roped in my family to assist me in this home improvement project. Things were going swimmingly well...for the first five minutes. Soon, creases and folds began to appear and no amount of smoothening, re-sticking and "cajoling" can bring it back to original smoothness. As my frustrations grew, I began to lay

blame on my wife and daughter, "You're not holding it right...You have to tension it more...You are pulling it too tight...We should have gotten a professional...We should not have started so late in the evening."

As the evening dragged on, my tone got more critical, my stares got more murderous. Everyone was having a miserable time. The

wallpaper was obviously having a mind of its own and a time of its life (at our expense). From a few creases, it soon grew to resemble textured paper.

After the Cut

Half-way through the roll of wallpaper, I decided that enough is enough. I took a penknife and made a clean slice, separating whatever was left of the roll from whatever had been pasted. Taking one last look at the disastrous top-half, I took a deep breath and started anew on the bottom half with the remaining roll. Surprisingly this time around, we were able to do a fairly decent job, having learned from the previous encounter.

At the end of the 4-hour walk-in-the-park, we were left staring at a top-half of crap, blending with a much more pleasing bottom-half. Needless to say, it was a disaster and so was our evening.

— Lesson 1: As much as the

wallpaper has frustrated me, it has taught me a great lesson. I learned that once a fold or crease is allowed to set in, it becomes persistent. No amount of smoothening, or stretching it out will help. It'll take on a life of its own and it can only get uglier, messier and larger. Sound familiar?

— Lesson 2: I've also learned that the way to get out of the rut is to make a clean cut and start all over with what's left. I recalled that the decision to make that slice is not an easy one. I knew that once I cut it, there would be no going back.

The scar would forever be there, the top-half of imperfections could never be undone. In many ways, I was getting out of self-denial and into grudging acceptance. Sound familiar?

— Lesson 3: The third and final lesson from Mr. Wallpaper is this.

After the cut, the journey was much smoother and end result much better. There's a reason for this.

Having been through the disastrous first-half, I was very mindful of the earlier pitfalls and was able to steer clear of them. I've also learned to communicate with my team better and was thus able to get better support.

Most poignantly, the load was lighter. Before, I had to manage the entire roll of wallpaper and its weight compounded my incompetency. After the cut, I carried a lighter load and was able to do a much better job. Sound familiar?

Life's Parallels

If any of these sound familiar to my fellow warriors in active recovery, I want to say this – that the wallpaper exercise has mirrored my life journey, before and after my decision to seek help.

I would also like to encourage all of us to find inspiration from everyday occurrences, for even from inanimate objects, one can find life lessons.

More than just finding parallels, I've also realized that in this exercise, my self-centredness has returned...in full force. There I was, the one in charge, the one who's confident of pulling it off, but yet I was very quick to blame others for my failings, my incompetence.

That night, I couldn't sleep as I was burdened with loads of shame and guilt.

The next morning I apologized to my family for behaving like an ass and made a promise to do better, not in managing the wallpaper but in managing myself.

I am happy to report that, with my family's permission, we're keeping the ugly wardrobe panel to serve as an in-your-face reminder. Humbly in service ,

—Andrew



THE INSPIRATION LINE

Your 24-Hour Sponsor

215-574-2120

CELEBRATES

200,000 CALLS!

Greater Delaware Valley Intergroup, originators of the Inspiration Line want to thank Fellowship Wide Services and the Journal for supporting the Inspiration Line. GDVI wants to acknowledge the 15 volunteers from all over the US & Canada that leave inspirational messages on the Line and credit them for making this huge milestone possible: Alicia, California, Alyce, Montreal Canada, Alyson, Pennsylvania, Bob, Pennsylvania, Brenda, Maryland/Florida, John, Florida, Kip, Connecticut, Leah, New York, Mark, New Mexico, Matt, Pennsylvania, Michael S., Pennsylvania, Mike M., Pennsylvania, Natalie, Pennsylvania, Rich, Massachusetts, Sean, New Mexico, Shelly, New York, Steve D, Pennsylvania and Zoe, Pennsylvania

Share space

Highs and Lows of Sober Dating

Hello, I am MP, a low bottom sex addict who through the grace of a Higher Power, has come to enjoy the highs and lows of that dreaded catch phrase “sober dating!” Now, I can tell you that there was a time I would have laughed in your face if you told me I would one day be happily sharing coffee for one hour with complete strangers with no physical contact, intriguing or propositioning.

The very thought of that was alternately mind-numbingly boring, or nauseating. Or both.

I can remember being asked on a date once and saying, “No,” at which point the guy asked me if I wanted to have a one-night stand. Within a week, I was pregnant. And that was how most attempts at dating went for me, sadly. Sometimes I would try to date people after we’d had sex. That was a sad scene indeed. There was nothing to talk about, as we had already accelerated the relationship to its demise, sometimes within a mere 24 hours.

So, the first thing to absorb about sober dating is that the rate of getting to know someone is quite slow. In movies, the characters must progress through their love affairs within two hours or less, and this fantasy world has subtly influenced our ideas about relationships.

In real life, two hours is an



extremely short amount of time to know someone. It's like two seconds. It takes weeks and months to get a fuller picture of an individual in terms of their values, lifestyle and personality and to account for the fact that most people show themselves at their very best at first, gradually becoming their more ordinary selves over time.

Thinking back to my very first sober date, I was petrified. I went to a meeting beforehand and was just sweating bricks. I felt I was going to the guillotine. "In fear for my life" as they say. The date went fine, the guy was much shorter and smaller than his picture, but very nice and kind. After that it got easier. I went on about 25 first dates, and then met my ex-boyfriend.

He was late to the first date. I brushed it aside, because: very sexy. He also chose a restaurant that had nothing on the menu I could eat. This too I brushed aside.

Before I knew it, I was in a full pattern of not expressing my true needs and wants. I was being inauthentic.

But I was just so relieved someone finally wanted me. I had the feeling I should keep sober dating, but I was too lazy and tired, and I wanted to get the accolades of what I felt would come to me if I was "successful" in S.L.A.A. at getting a relationship.

So, within a few weeks, he had asked me to be his girlfriend. I cut the sober dating process short, and proceeded into the relationship. Six months later I was back in withdrawal, shaking my head. So, I learned the hard way that sober dating will test me along the way to take shortcuts through the process — to get off the sober dating train early and try to nest up with someone rather

than continue the endless awkwardness.

A word about awkwardness. I can tell you, during one of my first sober dates, I once brought up an article I had just read about prison rape. Somehow I thought that was a good topic to discuss on a first date with a man. I've also gone on dates and discussed child abuse, or topics like being born in a cult. Today I keep it "light and bright" on the date. I talk about puppies, or movies, or food, or even puppies in movies eating food, but I keep the dark, death metal side of me in the wings. I do not discuss my exes, or my toxic family, or politics, or anything (including how much I hate Hans Zimmer because there are so many other overlooked film composers) that brings stress or excess depth.

First dates are meant to be fun. I usually try to schedule them for coffee, or sometimes with an activity like ping pong or air hockey. Something that keeps me in the shallow end of the pool. I had to read "Small Talk for Dummies" and learn how to discuss the weather. I've discovered that small talk is very useful and it has a place in my life. I've also learned that first dates should be fairly short, no more than one hour. For me, that is a way of expressing gentleness and not overwhelming myself or the other person.

Also in recovery, I've come to let men pay for me on dates. Not sure why, but I used to get a huge thrill from denying them the chance to do that, and proving I could pay for myself, or that I don't need a man to take care of me. The truth is, it feels kind of sweet to have the check picked up, and as old fashioned as it is, I am okay with some of these gendered dating rituals. I just say thank you,

rather than trying to start a feminist riot on every date.

As for encountering active sex and love addicts on dates, wow that's a tough one. I've recently had a guy ask me back to his place after our first date and I got so triggered I had to go to bed at 8:30 p.m. on a Saturday night to keep from acting out. But over that long sleep, I realized that my 12th Step work doesn't stop just because I'm on a date. I was able to email that young man and tell him I was in program and express powerlessness to him. He thanked me, and apologized for being so aggressive. To me, that is a miracle. That I could stay sober, that I could be honest, that I could share the solution, those are huge gifts to me, a low bottom sex addict who is beyond human aid.

At any rate, I am still sober dating, learning more about myself each day and continuing to say the Set Aside Prayer:

"Dear God, please help me to set aside everything I think I know about dating, romance, sex, love, intimacy and relationships so I may have an open mind and a new experience. Please help me to see the truth about myself and my dating partners. AMEN."

If you're reading this and just starting your sober dating process, I wish you great courage, self-love and patience. We in the program are right here with you, supporting you and smiling at you from afar. We know the bravery it takes to step back into the ring with the tiger. But one day at a time, tigers are growing into very fine ladies and gentlemen of honor and integrity. It's happening right before our eyes. Higher Power is stretching our hearts and minds and no doubt has a hand in all our affairs. Good luck!

— MP

Relentless Pursuit of Recovery

As a recovering addict, when I reflect about how powerless I was and how unmanageable it all was, I'm reminded not only of the things I actually did, but I'm also reminded of the things I was capable of doing if I hadn't surrendered when I did. That realization goes a long way to reminding myself that I really have no choice. I can't go back. Clearly complete self-destruction would result. The only real choice I have is to move forward in this program. Recovery must be pursued. My life depends on it.

This hard truth was revealed to me as I was working Step 1. A workbook posed this question: *What were the most difficult things to write about in your sexual history?* My answer was sobering. The most difficult thing to write about was the desperation – realizing that I was so out of control that I would have sex with anybody.

It was also painful to see that I had such little regard for myself that I was incapable of having safe sex, as I needed the most intense addictive hit I could get.

The pursuit of the high was more important than my very health.

It is difficult to write about how out of control I was.

It is difficult to write about how I literally turned into an animal when having sex because all I wanted was that intense high, that was, in the end, so empty.

It feels so painfully discouraging to realize that I was that much of an addict.

I will violate my values, risk my physical and emotional health, all in pursuit of the sexual high.

Everything about writing my history was painful. I am addicted



to sex. I am out of control. It seems so hopeless. I am trapped.

There is no way out. It is far more powerful than I am.

And now I am going to have to deal with this addiction for the rest of my life.

There is no cure. I can't do what I did in my 20's when I came out of treatment, as I convinced myself that I've recovered enough, time to move on.

That didn't work then and it

won't work now.

I have so much work to do to recover from both sex addiction and from the childhood trauma that drives it.

It is difficult to come to grips with the fact that I'll be battling my demons for the rest of my life. I can't afford to take any break.

The pursuit of recovery has to be as relentless as the pursuit of the sexual high.

— Craig G.

My Visit to The Fundamentals Group- S.L.A.A.'s Original Meeting

The buzz was in the air once the sign up list was announced—we were going, I was going, to the place where we officially gathered for the first time — December 30, 1976.

As we exited the freeway, my intuition said we were getting close. I started to take photos of all the street signs along the way. My hope was to capture the exact corner that lighted the way for so many suffering sex and love addicts over the years. Three photos later, we were stopping. I was home.

We were greeted by a recognizable member and were corralled sans delay because there was a newcomers meeting finishing up. He got us into the room and you, I, could feel the gratitude. Smiles abounded, you could have cut the gratitude with a knife.

Greeter: “This is the room of our first meetings. The carpet has been changed a few times, the wood is all original (the church is very old, mind you). We added the ceiling fans because it gets too hot, and when the meeting is too big,

we move into the main chapel.”

After some milling about, the visitors exited and moved into the main chapel for the start of the meeting. As I, too, made my way to the meeting, my last thoughts were:

“I bet they would have never imagined, that almost 40 years later, the Fellowship would need a school bus to transport us all here — here, to where they got us started.”

— Jason S

Don't
Even
kNow
I
Am
Lying

So as “they” say; “Denial is not just a river in Egypt.” It is flowing through my head at regular intervals too.

Due to this, and the fact that I finally was able to admit that to my sponsor, I was asked (voluntold if you will) to write about it. Maybe someone else will be served by my relating it as I work through it myself.

I seem to find so many ways to deny what I am experiencing in life, especially as it pertains to my addictive habits returning.

Well they're only hurting me, right? Well that would be one of my big self deceptions that does not want to retire fully.

I know it is not true as I write this.

I cannot see that when I am in denial mode, as I now know I have never managed to leave until now, at least for today.

Part of my issue is that as I have grown from the Program's help, I

have stopped beating myself up over mistakes.

My sponsor also encourages this and helps me look at the positives. Somehow, I (my addict) took that good thing and twisted it just a hair.

Now, when I make a mistake, I say to myself, “That's alright, I'll do better next time.”

And because it is “alright” I don't acknowledge that I need to share it.

See, denial does not have to be over a big thing.

Small things add up until I'm not slipping once in a while, but almost every day. Because I have managed to train myself in this denial of small things being an issue, suddenly I do not see totally how lost I am getting from the recovery of the program. More messages start getting twisted and tweaked.

When I can start to see that I am possibly in trouble my thoughts go to, “Well it is only a little bit of time, not hours” or, “Well I'm only doing it just before

bed so it is not affecting anything, as my day is over anyway.” And so I fail to see how it is starting to impact my life.

I start not getting out of bed in time to do yoga to start my day (healthy activity gone). I don't make any connection between the two actions. I think I am sleeping better, but how long does it last until I am fighting with being overtired and losing my desire to take care of myself in healthy ways? So I'm lying to myself when I say it is okay to not get in my healthy activities as I need my sleep more, and why do I need more sleep? Let's not even look in that direction. This is the self deception.

I am fortunate that I do have

regular meetings that I go to and program friends that I talk to fairly regularly.

I am fortunate that I talk to my sponsor on the phone every week and send messages to him (almost) every day. I read recovery materials almost every day too.

All of that fortunately keeps me from falling too far into denial, which would be so easy if none of them were in my life and providing me with endless clues and messages that get me to see the truth behind my denials. It is not always fast or quick, but it does happen.

Are there only one or two causes for denial running in my life today? I don't know. Did I

somehow set up my bottom lines so that I have chances of still having “addictive hits” some other ways I have not defined? I don't think so, but after this latest run with denial, self deception and lying to myself, I can not rule it out.

So I'm starting over from the beginning with my sponsor's help (wasn't my idea, but my ideas are not that great lately). We will see what is what together and what I need to do besides just admitting that I am a sex and love addict. With the help of the Program, my sponsor, my Higher Power, my Fellowship family and my letting go of the wheel, denial will once again only be a river in Egypt.

— Stephen F., CT

My Wife's Anxiety

My wife had an anxiety attack the other day. It was the same sort of attack she always has. So I did what I always do, which was to ask her why she was anxious. I was going to try to be helpful, but she gave me the last answer I was expecting, and it showed me more about myself and how wrong my reactions have been over the years, than anything else she could have said. Her answer was different than it ever had been before.

Previously she had always tried, perhaps humoring me, to answer the question. Perhaps she actually thought I could do something about her anxiety. I don't know; I can't speak for her. But her new answer was very simple.

To my question, “Why are you anxious?” she said, “because I

have an anxiety disorder.”

It's true. Though no shrink has ever diagnosed her on paper, it is clearly based on her level and frequency of anxiety. There are triggers, but triggers don't explain the anxiety, they only explain the threshold. The same sorts of things might happen to others without this reaction.

She deals with it the best she can, and it passes. She has to modify her life in some ways to account for this passenger in her mind and body, and does an admirable job. She doesn't think so, but we humans seldom see our victories except in hindsight. I don't know if I could handle her level of anxiety, so from my point of view if the attack subsides, it's a win.

But this essay isn't about her. Its about me and my naiveté and my arrogance around her anxiety.

I'm not going to use cliché words like co-dependent, or Twelve-Step phrases like, “life on life's terms.” I say naiveté and arrogance because I want to name names. There is/was also fear there for me, but that pervades everything, so its obviously involved.

I have a mode I go into when my wife has an anxiety attack. It's designed to streamline the attack so it runs its course quickly. I ask her why she's anxious, remind her she isn't alone, and that I am present for her. These things may sound good, but it's a relative thing. Because if it doesn't work, I get testy, which can grow to anger if I'm not aware of myself.

In my head, it becomes my job to solve the anxiety attack as if it were a puzzle, as if there were rules I could learn and abide by, and the attack would just evaporate. That's the arrogance

right there: thinking I can solve my wife's anxiety attack. But that's not how anxiety works. There aren't rules; there aren't durations.

There are triggers and there is living through it. There are things that MIGHT help the living through it part, but nothing solves it. It's not a puzzle.

The naivete is that I think her anxiety should abide by the pattern I see, a pattern which really is only relevant (if at all) to the initial trigger moment.

I have been operating under the mistaken idea that the only reason she has anxiety attacks is that I can't prevent them, that I can't solve them.

And I beat myself up mercilessly when (read "every time") I can't. It's not conscious, but it's true. That's what I realized when she said, "because I have an anxiety disorder."

Several things suddenly became clear: her anxiety is not something I can prevent. It's not something I can streamline. It's

not something I can learn the rules to. These are all truths. But there are more and worse. I make things worse by demanding explanations. It doesn't sound like help to the victim when someone asks her to explain her reasons for anxiety in the middle of an attack. All she can usually do is shake. It isn't even relevant, in that moment, what started it, But that's what I am concentrating on. In so doing, I make it about me.

My testiness and anger are about me.

How could she not let me help her (as if that were possible)? How could my "method" not be helpful?

How can I be helpless in this situation if I'm always ready to swing into action? And how could I hurt her if I'm trying to help her? How I feel about myself in those situations depends entirely on whether I can fix it for her. Rather than really being present, my mind is locked into that, and whether she will hate me for my powerlessness. She won't, but I

learned to fear that from someone in my past. I learned that weakness is the same as powerlessness, and that love is conditional.

What my wife needs to hear in those situations is that I love her and am there, even if I can't do a damn thing about her anxiety, even if she thinks I will be mad at her for having an attack, even if others have sent her away for having one. She needs to hear that my love isn't conditional on knowing answers to any of the stupid questions I am asking. She also needs me to not ask those questions. In those moments, people want to be spoken to with love, not be asked to explain themselves. Asking questions raises doubts, but attending with love is a way of saying it doesn't matter how long it lasts, we will get through it, because I'm right here, and you don't have to say a word.

—Anonymous

The Lesson of Risk

Shortly after I got sober again (I had been acting out in secret for a year before my wife caught me for the second time), I took a risk. There is irony in the fact that as an addict, I tend to be extremely risk averse when it is about being real and genuine with the people I love, but took all kinds of risks when it comes to acting out. This essay is about the former rather than the latter. First, here was the situation.

I'd been sober for three years and had gone back to acting out. There were reasons, but the important piece is that I wasn't

sober.

I was doing it stupidly and out in the open, just like before, and my wife caught me, just like before. I was terrified that she was done this time and that we were going to divorce because I couldn't keep it together. We didn't, but that isn't the point. We very well could have.

She said to me, "When this happened before, I asked why you couldn't be honest with me. I understand the shame, and the fear. And I know you understand the sense of betrayal I felt because we've talked so much about it.

"But I also said that if you slipped you needed to be honest with me.

"Why didn't you just tell me after it started again? All I wanted from you was honesty." She really said the word honesty that many times.

I knew I couldn't have told her, but I didn't know why. I also didn't really know why I'd gone back to the old behaviors in the first place.

Two things happened after she caught me. First, I started seeing a sex addiction therapist.

Second, I got a new sponsor. I'd

let my previous sponsor go over a trivial issue we couldn't resolve about phone calls, and I hadn't gotten a new one.

It was a justification. I was really just scared of him, for reasons you'll hear below. I didn't know what the biggest reason was until after I took my risk, which I will explain now.

I was shopping on Sunday afternoon, maybe a week after my wife caught me again. As I was shopping I felt a tap on the shoulder.

I turned around and found myself face to face with someone associated with people I used to act out with.

I hadn't seen this person in four years, and I was in shock when I turned around to find him there.

He was not someone I'd ever acted out with, but we both knew all those same people and I didn't associate with him because there was no way to do it without having them around.

He asked why I hadn't come around or called, and updated me with some information about those people, while I stood staring and not knowing what to say. He told me to call soon and to come over for some hang out time. I said I would so I could get away, and finished my shopping feeling like my stomach was in my socks (I never did call him).

I was in a quandary. I told my wife that I would be honest with her about anything that happened around my addiction, and here now was something.

Not something big in the grand scheme, since I never did anything with him, but he was someone we both associated with past bad behavior. I spent the rest of the day freaking out about whether or not to keep my promise and tell her.

I was terrified that this was somehow my fault, that because he tapped me on the shoulder our

marriage was over.

That's how distorted my reality was and how alien transparency was to me.

Finally about 10:30 that night, after my wife had gone to sleep, I took my risk.

I was still awake, and by this time was a crying snotty mess.

I don't remember ever feeling as scared as I did that night (except the first time I fessed up to my secret life). I woke her up and told her what had happened.

She listened and I wept because I was so scared.

I apologized over and over and told her I understood if she wanted me out (this was a bit of trying to control outcomes, but that is another essay).

Luckily, she said that she understood that it wasn't my fault, and that she wasn't going to throw me out. We were still okay, and she thanked me for telling her.

Even if she hadn't stayed with me, that decision, that risk, changed my program for good, and here is why. It also explains why I went back to acting out after three years sober.

What I had done, regardless of outcome, was VOLUNTEER information about myself that could make another person hate me before my back was against the wall by being caught.

In the next day or two I came to realize that honesty had been non-existent in my life. When I was a kid, my dysfunctional parents had demanded honesty but never really wanted it.

They weren't honest with themselves, each other, or me, so I grew up in a culture where it wasn't nurtured or practiced.

This meant that for the first three years of program, I'd been trying to do what I always had before: tried to look honest, seem honest, and sound honest, thinking that's what I thought people actually wanted.

I "knew" enough to know that

no one ever really wanted the truth. Except they DID want it. And they deserve it. And I deserve it.

The reason I went back to acting out was because fundamentally, being in program without understanding the need for real honesty, was not really different from living dishonestly outside recovery.

After the initial blush of feeling good that there were people who understood me, believed in me, wanted me to "win", as it were, being in program felt just like being out in the world except I wasn't acting out.

And that situation has a limited shelf life. It was just another kind of secret life where I contribute in a limited way and hope to look good doing it.

I wasn't sharing my real self with anyone in program, just like I hadn't been sharing my real self with my wife.

The kicker is, I didn't know I wasn't, until the second time around. You can't really know it if you've never experienced its necessity.

It took a year long slip and facing the possibility of losing everything again, for me to really get how important sharing myself is.

My program didn't even become real four years in (three sober, one secretly acting out) until I took the risk to actually BE honest.

From there I started risking other things: daring to share my feelings, asking for what I need, and being vulnerable to scary feelings in general.

What I know now, is that honesty, vulnerability, and sharing are all parts of recovery, but the willingness to risk breaking the code of the addict (hiding it all inside) is essential.

Without it, I wouldn't have been able to touch those things.

— Peter V.

