

the Journal

Issue # 146

Single Issue \$4



After Sober Dating:
Not Losing Yourself in the Relationship

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:

“After Sober Dating: Not Losing Yourself In The Relationship,” is the theme of this issue. Before I entered the program, I always thought, “Sober Dating? Boring. Doesn’t fit in with my rebel image.” And I thought if I was willing to abandon myself in favor of the relationship that meant it was a match made in heaven. Boy, was I wrong!

In the “Building Partnerships” chapter of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text it says that in sobriety “relationships have taken a more realistic place in the vast arena of self-expression which is called life.” It says, “We were right that a meaningful life is one filled with love, but we had distorted that meaning with selfishness, seeking only to ‘get’ rather than to ‘give,’ to ‘rip off’ rather than to contribute.”

It speaks of closed systems (“one in which there is no energy exchanged with the environment outside the system ... Two individuals rely completely on their relationship to be the source for all personal identity, life-purpose and meaning”) and open systems (“Energy is exchanged ... Two individuals could be nourished by each other and also exchange energy through experiences outside the relationship... Their ability to function would be only partially dependent on the other, and so they could adapt more easily to changes of all kinds... The loss of the individual’s own autonomy, and the forfeiture of personal dignity and wholeness would be seen as being far worse than the loss of the relationship.”)

With the help of S.L.A.A., each individual, if they choose to be in a relationship, can find the support to build an “open system” relationship full of intimacy, enrichment and potential. If someone like me can find it (thanks to God and S.L.A.A.), anyone can!

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

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Question of the Day

& Answers from Yesterday

“HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE TURNING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP INTO A CLOSED/ENMESHED RELATIONSHIP? WHAT TOOLS DID YOU USE TO STAY HEALTHY?”

Yes, PHONE, making program calls, reaching out, admitting I’m struggling, asking for support, getting encouragement from meetings, seeking sanity, serenity and sobriety through prayer; communication with my Higher Power — God.

— **Kathleen, San Diego, CA**

Always. That is love relationships. Friendly relationships don’t trigger my addictive behaviors as much. But in love relationships I have to really rely on sponsors, meetings and outreach calls not to control or to lose myself in distorted perceptions. And it helps miraculously!

— **Tom B., Los Angeles**

I am in a healthy relationship for the first time in my life. Sometimes I become afraid. I think: “What if my partner can’t be trusted? What if I get hurt?” Then I start having a strong desire to start controlling so I can be safe. Then it occurs to me, I have a Higher Power, and I thank Him for how it’s all going to turn out.

— **Anonymous**

Commitment, honesty, transparency.

— **Jim B., Hamilton, Ontario**

Every relationship, romantic or otherwise, can turn closed for me. I work closely with my sponsor and network. I also talk to the other person (people) so that they can help me stay accountable.

— **Juanita, Hyattsville, MD**

Staying Enmeshed, yes. With my daughter, I had to fight the urge to enmesh and make her my friend, confidant. However, sponsoring others showed me how detrimental that would be to her. I regularly went to my support group and peer relationships for that relationship need, not my daughter.

— **Elizabeth P., Houston**

The No way. After reading Chapter 8 of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text early in recovery, I learned a closed relationship wasn’t a good idea. The tools to stay healthy included couples therapy, joining Recovering Couples Anonymous (getting a couple sponsor), having good boundaries in S.L.A.A. (since we are both members), and remembering who my partner is — the woman I love and adore.

— **Rita H., Montreal**

For You mean it is possible not to? Seriously though, the key to me is to approach all relationships with strong boundaries from the outset. For example, I have a habit of mentioning my wife in a positive way in my first conversation with any female I meet.

— **Steve B., Sunrise, FL**

Yes, Yes, stay connected to my Higher Power, keep in my prayers, open talking to my sponsor and to fellowship friends.

— **Jay G., Philadelphia**

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Have you ever felt like turning a healthy relationship into a closed/enmeshed relationship? What tools did you use to stay healthy?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: Issue #147 — Fantasy versus reality, “Do you find it difficult to live in/see reality? What helps you stay out of Fantasyland?” — The deadline for submissions is 1/15/14; and Issue #148 — Breaking Up... with a Sponsor, “Have you ever found it necessary to break up with a sponsor? How did you come to this decision and what happened?” — The deadline for submissions is 3/14/14. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

Yes,

Yes, I did. I know today I was not totally responsible. It takes two to dance. Today, I practice healthy relating with sponsor, sponsees and friends. I am just beginning my journey with anorexia.

— **Anonymous, Dallas, TX**

Staying

I have, just this past week, felt that way. I crazily thought that faking happiness would keep a (so far) healthy relationship that way. I turned to my sponsor and my Higher Power, got back into integrity, and let my partner know where I was. He told me I had hurt him by not being my true self. And we have made plans to call each other out when either one of us feels distanced.

— **Anonymous**

Staying

Absolutely. Service commitments enrich my life, remind me of where I have come from, and expand my support circle. They offer a healthy sense of purpose and belonging that otherwise I would be tempted to pursue through a romantic relationship.

— **Monique S., Los Angeles**

For

Call my sponsor. Journal. Meetings.

— **Pam M., SugarLand, TX**

My

My boyfriend and I committed to go to a therapist every week because we were getting co-dependent. We were grumpy and sniping at each other. But we both prayed and the therapist got us completely straightened out. We both are committed to a healthy relationship and are willing to pay this therapist.

— **Alice, Los Angeles**

Staying

Ahhahahaha — every day!
I manage to not get enmeshed, but I’m not sure what tools I’m using. I really don’t want to go back into an enmeshed situation and my girlfriend is wonderful on her own.

If I get enmeshed and wriggle my world into hers then I’d be interfering with and altering her life. She has her own Higher Power and life path.

At times, I want to jump in and save her from making mistakes, but usually doing so would be my own mistake. I guess I do have the tool of asking whether my input and involvement would be helpful in a particular situation.

Sometimes, when I’m very worried and wringing my hands, I ask in a calm voice how she is feeling and if there is anything I can do to help. The less I get involved, when I’m extremely anxious to get involved, the better off we both are.

— **Jax**

Staying

Coming across a letter of Bill W., co-founder of A.A., he says (As Bill Sees It) “when I am troubled with relationships, I go for long walks, I pray ‘God, Grant me serenity to love their best, and never fear their worst.’” (letter of 1962).

Yes, especially with my partner, I can default to the fearful, shame-based, co-dependent, trying to fix, playing the shame-blame game.....We use the Tools of S.L.A.A. applied to RCA (Recovering Couples Anonymous), i.e. a “meeting of two,” giving I-messages, keeping the focus on my own side of the sidewalk.

Being friends with both Bill *and* Lois (founder of Al-Anon), as well as Rich and Kate (Chapters 1,2,3 of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text), using the tools of all 36 Principles applied to relationships helps.....Concepts 3, 4 and 5 are great tools for relationships.....

— **Beth L, Montreal**

With S.L.A.A., I Give Love (and Dating) a Good Name!



Before I found S.L.A.A., I definitely gave love a bad name (as the song says). But with a lot of help from my sponsor and recovery partners, I've made great strides.

Today, I have 17 months of sobriety in S.L.A.A. and am miraculously in a very healthy and happy relationship for the past three months. Yes, it's still young, but after being divorced for over 13 years, I've had tons of first dates. I've only dated a handful of men for one month, another handful for two months and only one for over a year. So to make it past the two month mark in recovery is huge for me.

To practice sane and sober dating has not been easy. I've been used to seeking the high I get from making men my everything. But that pattern always leads to the fall when they turn out to be human and the high plummets to an all time low. With the help of the program I am so happy that I will never have to repeat this painful cycle again. I sure don't miss the despair and frustration it brought me.

Here are a few of the lessons I've learned and tools I've used for sane and sober dating:

- *I had to begin by clearly defining my dating intentions.* What were my intentions for dating at this time in my life? I was looking to date someone that could lead to a long-term relationship, possibly marriage. I was not looking to casually date. (Can we sex and love addicts even remotely do this and still be sober?) This intention set the tone for me on every date.

If there was something about the person that I felt was not a good match for me as a long-term relationship, then there was no point in me going out with them a second time. Of course, I had to be careful about my perfectionism, but overall honesty and facing reality helped.

- *My Higher Power, my program and my life have to continue to be my focus — not the person I'm dating.* If this is not

the case then I am not ready to begin dating. If at any point I see I'm unable to keep my focus on my life, my program and my Higher Power, I need to take a break. This is demonstrated by the number of meetings I attend, the number of phone calls I continue to make daily and by my dedication to my daily self-care and responsibilities. It is a red flag on me and my recovery if any of these change due to dating.

- *I had to give myself permission to make mistakes and learn as I go.* Dating is absolutely not for the faint of heart. Our Basic Text says that "getting into a new relationship is like putting Miracle Grow on our character defects" and it is very true. Dating is the equivalent to telling an alcoholic to go into their favorite bar and have a drink or two and then stop and go home sober. Hellllloo! I don't know many recovering alcoholics who would like to try that one on for size!

Therefore we have to know and accept that we are going to make mistakes. We analyze the situation and have a plan for it, so that at best we can minimize the challenges and issues, but we can't prevent them completely. So give yourself permission to make mistakes and learn as you go...just don't lose your sobriety over it. It is often stumbling before it is graceful.

- *I have to be capable of knowing when to and how to set firm boundaries for my safety and comfort.* My first summer in S.L.A.A. recovery, I went on a business trip to New Orleans. My hotel was three blocks from Bourbon Street. I met a very nice man in the lobby of my hotel and he invited me to dinner and to go dancing. I accepted. He was a perfect gentleman and we had a lovely dinner then had a blast together dancing the

night away.

Around 1:00 a.m. my feet were in excruciating pain. We had to stop dancing and I needed to go back to my room. I had to take my shoes off to walk back to the hotel and he told me he wanted to give me a foot massage. I was in so much pain that I agreed to let him come to my room and give me a foot massage.

I knew I would not allow things to get heated and turn into anything but that. I was confident. He came to my room, kissed me lightly a few times, gave me a great foot massage and then left. He wasn't even in my room an hour. The next time I spoke to my sponsor I proudly told her of this experience and waited for her accolades.

Instead, there was this long silence before she calmly replied, "Mary, you invited a stranger to your room. You didn't know this person in the slightest and he came to your room alone. You can't do that." I can't tell you how sobering her words were. Did she ever burst my smug little bubble. She revealed a pattern for me. I was way too trusting, way too soon. And I didn't set boundaries for my safety.

I was also known to get lost in relationships. I knew this tendency of mine long before I discovered S.L.A.A. but I had no idea how to change it. Boundaries provide us protection and care. They are a gift that I give myself to help me stay sane and sober while dating. They give me the freedom and structure my disease needs to be able to enjoy dating! Here are a few boundaries I've needed to be firm with: The time I need to be in my own bed asleep and alone; when I'm available to talk by phone and when I'm not; how far I'm willing to go physically.

When I first began dating my

current boyfriend, we were staying out too late, attending special events in neighboring cities. I was exhausted because I was frequently getting to bed too late. I phoned him in exasperation one morning and said, "Tonight I need to be in my bed alone by 11:30."

He was very accommodating. We changed our plans a little and when he dropped me off at my house we sat on the sofa talking. At around 10:45, I saw him look at his watch and say, "I want to make sure you get to bed on time." And that is precisely what he did. It was such a gift of setting the boundary and asking for what I needed. It gave me the opportunity to see that he could think about my needs even if he wanted to spend more time with me.

He wasn't selfish and self-centered.

• *I had to learn to aim for spaciousness and avoid enmeshment.* Enmeshment is intense. It is the difference in painfully pouring down the packet of Crystal Light powder in your mouth vs. pouring the Crystal Light packet into a glass of water and enjoying how refreshing it is. Relationships are not supposed to be that intense.

Enmeshment is the cornerstone of the phrase, "We addicts don't have relationships, we take hostages!" This is one of the biggest gifts my final qualifier (the man who got me into the meetings) gave me. He told me, "You are intense." No one had ever told me that before. Now I've got an "intensity monitor" going on

in my head at all times. I'm always looking for moments where I up the intensity instead of decrease the intensity.

Enmeshment is demanding of the other person's time and attention. It is jealous of how and who they choose to spend their time with, instead of spending it with me. I am only supposed to be a companion or girlfriend, not a jailor, dictator or terrorist taking a hostage.

Spaciousness is freeing. I get to keep my life and enjoy getting to know someone else at the same time. With enmeshment and intensity, my world becomes tiny and entirely consumed by someone else. I am consumed with being with them, controlling them, knowing everything about them. I have to know where they are and what they are doing at all times. They have ownership of my life and I try to take ownership of theirs. I'm not even aware of the moment I do all this. Awareness of the intensity I create, or allow the other person to create, helps me to keep on solid footing with my sobriety and my program of recovery.

At first it was uncomfortable, and I would have to tell myself that this is what spaciousness in a relationship feels like. I don't know where he is or what he is doing right now, and he doesn't know where I am or what I'm doing right now and that is fantastic (even though it felt very strange)! This is how it is supposed to be. We are in a relationship; we don't own each other.

He is not my hostage, nor I, his. He is free to come and go as he pleases. I do not have the right to dictate who he sees, where he goes or what he does. Nor does he have the right to dictate any of these for me.

Before S.L.A.A., I thought enmeshment was the sign of a great relationship. Now I recognize it for the burden it truly is on me and the man I am dating.

• *I have to constantly be aware of and avoid the need to seek validation from a man.* I try to be constantly aware of the buzz, the high, the hit, I would get off of dating, compliments and attention. If you are aware of it, you can see your disease in action and take the appropriate measures to stay grounded in reality and avoid getting sucked into the disease's downward spiral. We cannot look to others, especially those we are dating, to give us validation. We have to look to our Higher Power, to our recovery partners, to the program and to our own self-care and self-love to validate us.

• *I had to learn how to go slow and consciously practice healthy pacing in dating.* I've had so many people tell me to take it slow for a change and I really, really wanted to take it slow, I just had absolutely no idea how to do that. I'm a sex and love addict, for Pete's sake!

So, before my recovery, I always ended up going too fast and burning out the relationship before it had the chance to get on solid footing. I thought having relationships at break-neck speed was the only way to go! As



sex and love addicts, we have our own brand of “speed dating.” There’s no way for me to be sober and build a solid relationship “speed dating.”

I had to learn to set boundaries for myself in the areas of physical contact, phone contact, email contact, text contact, when to say “I love you,” and when to introduce my child to the person. I decide these things. They aren’t haphazard. They aren’t random. They occur by my choice and when I’m ready, not when someone else is ready. Here are a few guidelines I use to practice healthy pacing while dating:

I next to never call a man I’m interested in dating. And even when I’m in a relationship, I monitor it carefully allowing him to continue to pursue me and to be cautious of creating an enmeshed relationship. Too much contact too soon creates enmeshment and it is very difficult to get un-enmeshed once you are. So it is far better for me to resist my need for tons of contact and cultivate spaciousness from the beginning.

I don’t get off of calls just to take their call.

I call them back by the end of the day or within 24 hours, not immediately unless absolutely necessary. Think pacing and spacing.

If a man I’m dating calls me too early in the morning or too late at night, I don’t take the call (even though I may want to). And I don’t return the call until the next day or an appropriate time for me.

I discourage texting by saying early on, “I’m not a big texter. I prefer to have predominantly phone communication and to use texting for brief communications.”

I reply to texts eventually, and rarely immediately.

Instead of getting into an im-

portant conversation via texting, I will frequently text, “Call me when you can talk.”

I do not engage in long email communications even if they do.

I do not engage in any sexual activity beyond holding hands and kissing for a minimum of 30 days. That means all zippers stay zipped, all snaps stay snapped, all hooks stay hooked, and if you haven’t gotten the point yet, all clothes stay on! Yes, that’s a tough order, but it is one of my bottom lines and it can be done!

I do not engage in any sexual activity without a verbal conversation about the relationship in the light of day with both feet on the floor. We need to know each other well enough to feel comfortable committing to monogamy and not dating anyone else.

• *I dress conscientiously.* As I’m dressing for a date I ask myself, “What am I communicating about who I am and the kind of woman I am? How on earth can I expect a man to take it slow when I’m baring $\frac{3}{4}$ of my breasts over dinner?” Now, I prefer to go with classy sexy vs. blatantly sexy. And just as a side bar, I always go to my S.L.A.A. meetings dressed as conservatively as I possibly can.

• *I practice impeccable self-care all the time.* In the past, when I’ve gotten lost in a relationship, I’ve given up important steps in my own self-care — particularly sleep. Or I don’t take such great care of myself when I’m not in a relationship because it doesn’t matter anyhow. I don’t value myself so much unless I’m in a relationship. Not anymore. I take care of myself no matter what.

My self-care is non-negotiable. I don’t give up me to take care of thee/he. I have to take care of me first. Here’s what I need regularly: The time necessary to work my program of recovery aggressively every

single day, to make my recovery calls; to get adequate sleep, rest, nutrition, exercise/activity; and to have a peaceful environment and moderate pace of life to flourish in.

How I feel and what I think matter the most. I cannot change who I am to make certain he likes me. I have to be me and take care of myself and if he likes me great. If not, that’s great too. I get to move on to someone who will be more appropriate for me.

• *I stay grounded in reality and avoid getting into my fantasy at all costs.* Enmeshment and fantasy are the deadly duo when it comes to dating. I make certain I see myself for who I am and that I see the person I’m dating for who they are, not what I want to make them up to be in my diseased mind or not who I wish they were. I’m dating a real person, not a fantasy person. I need to keep my feet firmly planted in reality. Working my program diligently every day helps me to do this. When I see red flags, I have to admit them to my sponsor and most of my recovery partners. This helps me stay in reality.

• *I avoid drinking alcohol on most dates.* It is impossible for me to keep my boundaries, practice healthy pacing and keep my focus on reality if I’ve had even one glass of alcohol. Therefore I choose not to drink on most dates and when I do I only have one glass of wine.

This is a gift I give myself. I also like to see the reaction my date has to my choice to abstain. Their response is a huge indicator of how important drinking is to them. If they are uncomfortable with me not drinking, that’s a red flag to me.

• *I avoid slippery situations at all costs.* My sobriety comes first. If a situation doesn’t feel right, then it probably isn’t. I

have the right to be comfortable and to feel safe. When a guy tells me he wants to cook me dinner at his place early on, I see the reality of the situation and tell him I will definitely look forward to that when I've gotten to know him a little bit better.

• *I accept that if I can't break up then I'm not ready to date.* Breaking up and moving on is just a part of healthy dating. Not everyone is perfect for us. I knew my breakup skills had to be excellent otherwise I would stay in unhealthy or inappropriate relationships too long. And just avoiding their phone calls is

not acceptable for me.

• *And finally I practice "The Hippocratic Oath of Dating," which is, "Above all else, do no harm."* When it comes to dating, it is definitely a jungle out there. I do my very best not to be one of the many crazies who makes life miserable for others.

I like to take the high road. After all, it is much less crowded up there. I try to keep it light and fun and take my time getting to know someone. There is no rush and, just like car collisions, the faster you go, the more damage you do. Dating is the same way. All of these points

tie together to make for great damage control. I take care of myself and in that process I'm usually taking better care of the person I'm dating as well.

When I put all these items into practice I have serenity in dating. I have fun and I don't give love such a bad name. These tools help me to stay sober and actually enjoy dating whether I make a "love connection" or not.

**—Anonymous,
Orange County, CA**

All I Want Is a GPS Relationship!

Dating sucks! I've been on almost every dating website out there. (Although, I'm very proud to say I never went on any of the more shady websites. But that's precisely what my sex and love addiction wants me to do.)

Once I got into the program, I settled into eHarmony. It seemed to have the least amount of insanity involved and it seemed to trigger my addiction the least.

Nevertheless, it is challenging. After tons of first dates that were not followed by a second, I've come to one conclusion: No more OMG chemistry that leads to WTF relationships and tons of SOS calls to my sponsor and recovery partners! No more!

Now all I'm looking for is GPS chemistry that leads me to a Graceful, Peaceful and Serene

relationship with a quality man.

With GPS chemistry, I'm still attracted to the man, but not so much that I want to leap over the table and into his lap while he's still buttering his bread. OMG chemistry is crazy-making and sets me completely off balance to the point where I can't even sleep at night because I'm thinking about him so much. It usually triggers all the magical thinking that I have to work hard in my recovery to avoid.

GPS chemistry is self-loving. It gives me the ability to honor my #1 bottom line for dating: To stay grounded in reality and in my own life. GPS chemistry is calming and stable. It allows me to continue to work my program, live my life to its fullest and still look forward to the next date. GPS chemistry truly guides me in the direction

that is best for me instead of me getting lost in the insanity of dating.

How much chemistry there is between me and someone I'm dating plays a significant role in my recovery. OMG chemistry does not support me in my recovery. It is very distracting. GPS chemistry empowers me to be the best woman I can be and to act like a lady so that I can attract the best man for me in my recovery.

Ultimately my Higher Power is in charge of this GPS chemistry instead of me. With this kind of chemistry, it is easy for me to stay connected and let my Higher Power guide me. It is easy for me to surrender my will and my life when the relationship begins with chemistry that is graceful, peaceful and serene.

—Anonymous, CA

Share space

Lifeguarding: Save My Own Life First



Ilifeguarded Sunday for the first time since spring. It felt good. After 4 months of no contact with my qualifier, the bondage of her control over me had shifted to bondage of wanting her control over me, and then to trying to live my life based on how she would have me do things, and finally, to living based in my identity, my needs, and my self-care.

This was a good day to be alive, and a beautiful summery day to top it off.

I was feeling back in my skin again, and back in a bikini, wearing an official uniform, carrying a lifeguard rescue buoy, at the ready, and completely trained and prepared. I may, perhaps, have been a bit eager to demonstrate my ability to perform in a sudden emergency.

At 4:30 Sunday afternoon, I was in the lifeguard tower on the beach near the pier. The beach was emptying out and I was tidying up the work space, lifting awkward equipment overhead, trying to fit it into the storage area when a familiar presence swarmed my awareness.

I hardly needed to look, except to verify the incredible. Whom do I see pedaling down the bike path right toward the tower? You guessed it. My qualifier, Foffie.

Balanced, kneeling on a chair with my arms outstretched over my head, it was too late and impossible to hide. I prayed furtively she didn't see me and pretended not to see her.

She stopped right behind the tower and called my name. This could not be happening. She called my name again. From years of experience I know that there is no stopping her from getting what she wants. She will get it, and non-compliance only adds ire to the unpleasantness. I climbed carefully off the chair and walked outside silently, stiffly.

She was sitting on a new-looking beach cruiser ladies' bicycle with feet firmly on the ground. She wore a white low cut top and cream or gray cotton pants and a white cap.

My mind was shattered and the pieces of what my senses reported to my brain made no sense. The visual details have

been pieced together after the fact. My mind was completely fogged, seeing only gross shapes and colors, hearing nothing, but able to respond to sound.

She gave me the finger. I turned and numbly walked back inside.

She must have called my name again, for after a few moments I was numbly drawn outside again, this time walking the other direction to the back of the tower in case she had pedaled a bit. She hadn't budged.

There was a pause, either before I walked out, as I was walking, or just after becoming visible to her. I don't know exactly what was happening, but I know her. She said querulously, "Aren't you even going to say 'Hi?'"

Halfway through that question, I said, "Hi." Just in case she couldn't hear me over the sound of her complaining, I repeated myself.

There was another probably tiny, but intolerably long pause, and I felt the fog start to clear, replaced by anger and the red flag of fear.

A trickle of unidentifiable feelings (or were they thoughts?) welled up from somewhere near my ankle bones.

Bbrrring! The lifeguard landline rang loudly. I automatically turned and went back inside to answer, duty calling. Even Foffie would understand and approve of my need to turn away from her. It was dispatch with my end of shift time.

The call took less than 10 seconds. I headed outside again, a little more lucid this time, and ready to try to give her a piece of my mind. How dare she give me the finger. She probably expected me to apologize too, and after all her lies and

manipulation, financial trickery, and all she put ME through?

But she was pedaling away. She had taken and kept the power once again. She couldn't waste time waiting for me to get off the phone? I looked again or maybe just had the idea to look again. And then I forgot to look longingly as (presumably) she smugly pedaled into the distance. Bye.

Then the shock of what had happened kicked in. Rapid breathing, heart racing, narrowed vision, sick stomach. Emergency. I reached for my phone to call my sponsor.

It rang for 2 years and she didn't pick up. The outgoing message took another decade and by then my supervisor was driving toward the tower and would soon catch me using my cell while on duty, a big no-no, unless I was very quick.

I had 10 seconds, 9, 8... the message finally beeped and my mouth was cardboard. I inhaled and forced cold air out of my lungs, moved my paper lips and fat tongue making the shapes that paired with the sounds trying to come into focus.

A circus of fear and crisis in my head. How? Why? What just happened? I couldn't see straight. Just communicate the basics. What were the basics?

Oh, God, what if there are kids in the water? Perhaps the resulting message I left resembled the sound of venting. Later, my sponsor told me she had deleted the message believing it to be an accidental pocket-dial.

The lifeguard truck pulled up. I tried to look unperturbed. Imitating myself, I reached for the rescue can deliberately, hoping the slow motion would come off as confidence rather than shell-shock, and prayed that my face wasn't noticeably pallid.

I hopped down off the tower to greet him at the truck window. It was a careful re-enactment of a movement I've done a thousand times.

No breeze. I was silent and cold in the afternoon sun. Mercifully, the supervisor just confirmed the end of shift and didn't ask anything requiring brain cells.

I carried my body like a marionette back into the tower. I was still mostly numb and starting to slump. Somehow I was still functional despite having no functional mind.

But the sprinkle of consciousness starting to creep up from that place in my ankles was toxic, and in high enough doses, would be deadly. I pulled out my phone once again and made my fingers push the names on the recent call list.

My fingers were wooden blocks, no dexterity, and it was worthless to even try to scroll for the persons who could relate to this best. With God's grace, my finger-blocks managed to text enough of a synopsis to get a response and sent it to the last 5 S.L.A.A. members I had spoken with.

I was not safe in my head and needed help. Whomever was around to read it would help me through this, I figured, even a sponsee. No need to do this alone, and too risky to try. Then, from nowhere, a loud and enthusiastic "Hi, Dear!"

If my body were awake, I would have jumped in fright and crumpled in relief. OMG! My mom came to the beach to surprise me. She had been so happy for me that I was working again and back into the swing of things.

"Hi, Mom!" I came to life and jumped to the sand and gave her a hug. I felt my God was working in my life one more time.

Only 75 minutes until the end of my shift. My mom was appalled about Foffie and was angry and upset.

She called Foffie a nasty liar (she claimed to have broken her leg, so how was she riding a bike?). The relief started in my forehead and loosened the skin on my face, moisture returned to my mouth and eyes, and shimmied all the way down.

Ten minutes later, my girlfriend appeared. She wore a super cute tank top. She had gone for a run and met me for a hug and to hang out for the end of the shift. I was safe.

My protectors were with me like knights in armor. I knew I wouldn't have to do any part of the grieving, the worrying, the internal fighting, or anything, alone.

About an hour later, Foffie's bike riding doppelgänger pedaled up. My girlfriend and I saw her at the same time and both of us froze. A moment later, she was close enough to see that her face was different, and my girlfriend and I laughed, our first chance.

Soon, it was 6 o'clock and time to drive home. The car tires were not slashed. A bomb did not explode upon starting the car, and my girlfriend and I talked openly.

She hugged me tight while I sobbed. It was a happy cry at first and then I remembered how Foffie used to hold me like that, but her hefty (ahem, fat) frame was more cushy and comforting. Despite the resentment, fear, and tangled mess of every other emotion, I missed Foffie.

So tight and safe in her huge arms. My happy tears turned sad. My girlfriend could detect the switch. I couldn't tell her why and gave a half-truth that was more of a half-lie. Maybe she knew anyway because she

said, "What you miss is a memory, there is no human like that today."

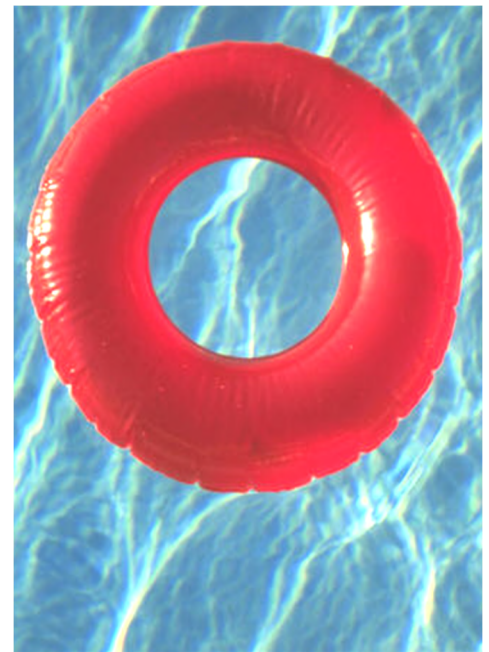
She is right. I miss a memory. I wish today I could splice together the precious few tender times with Foffie and the kind beautiful nature of my current girlfriend. Maybe I'm greedy.

Looking back on that chance encounter, now 2 months and another withdrawal later, I know that the person that I grieved during the first withdrawal was not the Foffie of today.

I grieved a string of isolated experiences that occurred over a span of 10 years and were spliced together in a way that made them flow through my recollection as if the heart-warming closeness and giggle attacks happened just yesterday.

These good memories are now filed in chronological order alongside the mundane, the bad and the ugly. Foffie is safely stowed in the past, just for today.

—Anonymous



Thank You for Your Help and Acceptance

Thank you so much for accepting me in this hard time that I am going through. I have had two months sober from my bottom-line (which is contact with my ex-boyfriend who is very unhealthy). I have been dating (if that's what you can call it) one of my best friends.

We are great for each other (other than the fact that he doesn't show me attention like my bottom-line [ex-boyfriend] and I don't get the same satisfaction as I would with my bottom-line). I had been going very strong until about a week ago. I have been comparing my present to my past more and more.

I don't ever want to hurt anyone, especially the person I am with now. That is why I am asking for help to recover from my old habits and fight the temptations of what I think I want, but that I know isn't good for me. Thank you for taking the time to read this and help me through these times of painful recovery.

— Jessy



Grace in My Addiction



Editor's Note: Step Three states that we "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." This is one S.L.A.A. member's concept of God.

My name is John Doe and I am a woman addict, rooted in a hyperactive sexual desire disorder.

I feel powerless, out of

control, and sexually compulsive when it comes to certain women and I act out in the following ways:

- Frequent self-gratification and compulsive sexual behavior.
- Emotional dependency on women I hardly know.
- Obsession with online dating websites and other outlets to seek the attention from attractive women including serial dating, Facebook messaging, and

texting flirtatiously.

- Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results....Yes, my behavior is psychotic.

- Entertaining the idea that sex and attention from women is a mood altering drug.

- The disregard of boundaries of female friends and acquaintances on a physical and emotional level.

I have been dishonest and emotionally manipulative to

gain the attention of women.

So far, I am 4 days sober, and I am grateful for our Heavenly Father's loving discipline and furious love for me to beat this. I am grateful for my church and the support of friends and family around me.

What my addiction is NOT:

- I am NOT a pervert. Most women I know and interact with are safe. This is NOT pedophilia in any way, shape, or form. This is a chemical imbalance rooted in feelings of inadequacy, depression, and anxiety in my interaction with specific women in their 20's. In my case, I am considered a level one addict. Level one addicts have a specific drug, therefore I have a very specific taste in a type of female. It is a mild case of a very progressive disease, in which I am capable of setting boundaries with women I do not find appealing. However, when it comes to the women I find attractive, I am willing to cross

the line into inappropriate behaviors in order to achieve the high, which comes from attention and sexual arousal.

This arousal releases the same chemical in the brain as cocaine. The most fortunate factor is that I am tackling this addiction and recovering early, whereas if I hadn't, this could have progressed into a world of no boundaries. Recently, I've attended Sexaholics Anonymous meetings and I have seen what I could have become 20 years down the road — or 10 years, 5 years, 3 years, a couple of weeks? It terrified me.

My road to recovery is not based on a set of religious, legalistic rules. This is based on the opposite — the grace of God. I've been reproached about this issue in my life in the past, but by a spirit of religion. I ignored it because it put a bad taste in my mouth. Behavior modification based on a sin management program — there

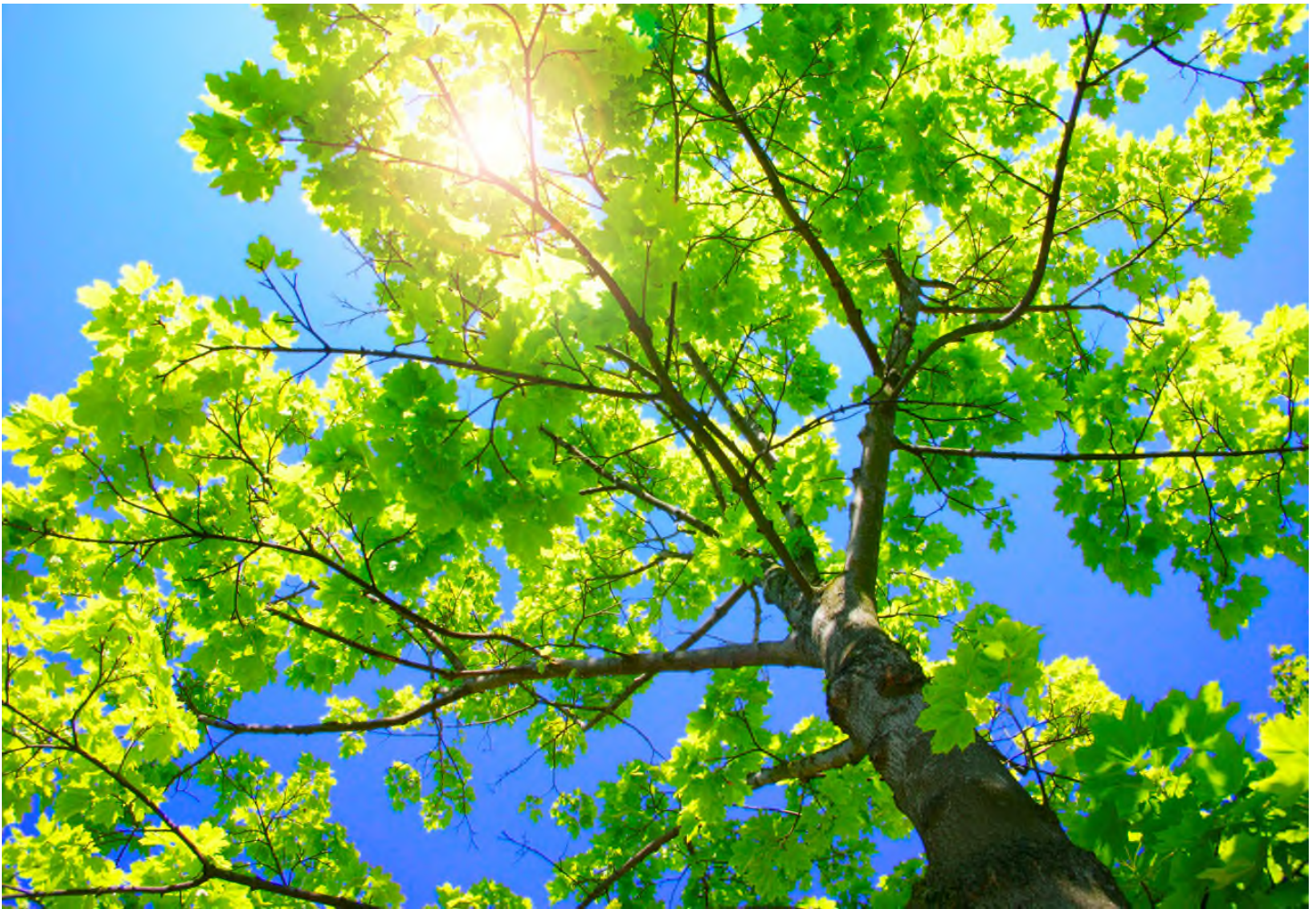
is no love in this kind of reproach. Fix yourself and draw close to God? No way. Fix yourself because God is already in you. My mind is changed. I now realize this area of my life doesn't need to be conformed to be a 'better Christian', but because I already have Christ in me. It doesn't fit with who I really am on the inside — my identity in Christ.

Jacob cheated. Peter had a temper. Noah got drunk. Jonah ran from God. Paul committed murder. Moses stuttered. Miriam gossiped. Thomas doubted. Sara was impatient. Zacchaeus was short. Abraham was old. Lazarus was dead.....I'm an addict of women and sex.

God doesn't choose the qualified, He qualifies the chosen.

— John Doe





“Basking in the Sun”

To be a tree
Strong
Tall
Rooted

To let my branches spread
My leaves flutter in the wind

To accept nourishment
As the sun’s rays hit
And the water seeps into my roots

Oh, to be a tree
still
And
Present

Building a healthier relationship with myself has allowed me to explore my creativity because I have less judgment against myself and less fear regarding others’ opinions of me. I have always judged myself as not enough in all areas of my life, especially relating to my creativity and success.

Putting myself “out there” in all aspects of my life is still scary, but I can do it when I am in a safe environment (such as S.L.A.A.). As my recovery continues, the world is becoming a safer environment for me. I can trust that I am going to be OK. I can be like a tree, still and present, without worrying too much about life. My worries come up automatically, but I notice them and turn them over to my Higher Power and I feel safe knowing that I am enough.

— Anna Y.

Who Are You Really Angry At?

Editor's Note: The tone of this article may be triggering to some.

Next time you have the urge to break your sobriety because someone pissed you off, let me be the first to tell you that you're full of shit.

Using anger against another as the reason why you couldn't help yourself from jumping in bed with a stranger, reconnecting with your qualifier, watching porn into the wee morning hours, or getting that massage with benefits is about the weakest excuse for slippin' there is.

How do I know?

I'm the queen of self-abusive anger. What's that? It's using the anger we feel against another person to abuse ourselves. I've used my anger as an excuse to bed hop, to overeat, to over-love, to over-drink, to over-spend and to over-smoke for more than 30 years.

But what was I to do? I was the victim of abusers, assholes, narcissists, boundary crossers, and downright cruel individuals. I mean it really is everyone else's fault, isn't it? Well, isn't it?

The answer lies within our anger. What does our anger really want to tell us? That we are victims? That it's all their fault? Or maybe, maybe our anger is trying to tell us to pull our heads out of our asses, grow the f*ck up and take a look at ourselves.

Anger can be one of the strongest motivating emotions for self-improvement and changing one's behavior. It's an emotion that can finally get us to say, "ENOUGH!" And it can be the motivating force to push us out of a frustrating job or a



painful relationship or to finally stop us from repeating a destructive behavior.

The key is to focus the anger away from the external circumstances or the people that incited it and focus it more on what we strongly desire to change within ourselves.

It's not our thoughtless friend, or our inconsiderate boss, or the

discourteous cashier at the local grocery store that makes someone feel a burning desire to connect with their qualifier, peruse the bathhouses or surf the net for porn. Sure, it feels like we're pissed off solely at them. But, if we dig deeper we'll find that who we are really angry with is ourselves.

We're angry that it's taken

this long to realize that *we have the power to change our circumstances.*

We're angry at ourselves for doing the same idiotic behavior and expecting a different result. We're angry at ourselves for our own weakness, our own gullibility and our own selfishness in wanting someone else to change themselves in order to make us feel OK.

Come on, let's get real. Our sobriety depends on us getting real — not shoving our anger under the rug or using it to control others but in admitting to ourselves that the anger we feel is not so much against them, but against ourselves.

It's OK for us to get pissed off, jacked up, flippin' angry at someone or some situation IF we don't get stuck in it and if that anger leads us to look at ourselves, our behaviors and the ways we can change for the better.

Of course, who wants to get angry at oneself? We get much more control and power when we feel pissed off at someone else, yes?

The problem is that when we do that, we dig our own graves... big ol' pits of resentments. And it's that resentment that leads us to hurt ourselves, whether it be by returning to the bed of our equally sex-addicted qualifier, or into our favorite strip club or to the computer for internet porn.

Do you get it?? If the anger we feel is truly about THEM then why do we end up abusing ourselves? Because it's not about them. It's about us.

I wish I could say that this knowledge (albeit, of my own opinion) was a result of me figuring out this shit years ago. But it's not. It's fresh knowledge. It's a gift of my four months in S.L.A.A. and the shares of my fellows. I've got a long haul ahead of me — this job of letting

go of resentments and changing 30 years of self-abusive behaviors. It brings tears to my eyes realizing what I've done to myself and others. But I guess that's another gift of the program — humility and the tools to clean up our shit, to make amends and to let it go. I'm tired of the anger that lies behind my smile. I'm cleaning house with the help of my Higher Power. One day at a time.

I'm also coming to believe that the anger that is sparked by the actions of another can be one of the greatest gifts we can receive IF we use it to focus on where we can change, where we can improve and how we can stop destructive behaviors.

The positive power of anger lies not in getting someone else to change, but in using it to propel YOU to change.

— Kim K, Long Beach, CA

How I Fought My Disease and Won Recovery

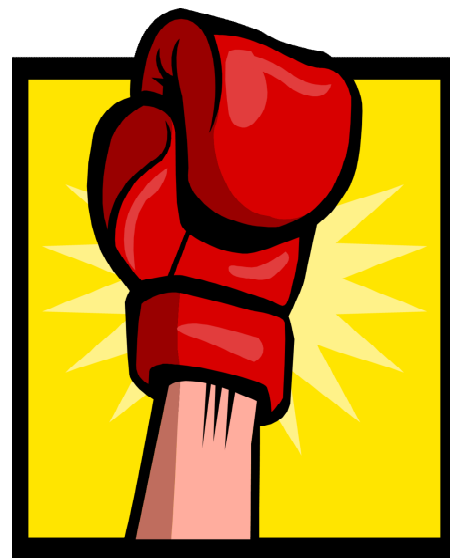
As I introduce myself as a sex, romance and relationship addict, I want to first touch on how each of these addictions have manifested in my life.

I believe my sex addiction started at a very young age with compulsive masturbation. I would sneak around and had a lot of shame around it.

My romance addiction was about the illusion of something I created in my mind, whether it

be a fix on a movie, a celebrity, or the idea of flowers, candles, and beautiful love songs to get high off of; it never kept me in reality.

It was all just an escape. It also never allowed me to be present and to see the person I was with for who they really are. The fix and fantasy in my head was enough alone to get me high. My relationship addiction, which I believe to be my core spiritual malady, never gave me the op-



portunity to be alone.

I was too busy compulsively pursuing and being a serial dater often with emotionally unavailable men and women, and using sex as a tool to get the relationships I wanted. My disease revolved around my worth of being tied to someone. And when that person left, it would feel as if my oxygen supply had been cut off.

March 11, 2012 was my first S.L.A.A. meeting. And like a true addict, I arrived late because I was having sex with the man I was cheating on my husband with. Three weeks prior, I had just gotten out of rehab for love addiction. I remember walking into my first meeting, the room was crowded and I took the only seat I could find, near the door on the floor. And as I curled up in the corner and listened to each share, I began to cry. There was a piece of me in each of these women and suddenly my story was being spoken out loud. I knew I was home.

I remember approaching the chairperson after the meeting and saying, "I don't know what to do, but I know I need help." That was my first bottom.

It took a few months to find a sponsor and begin working the Steps, finally being able to admit my own powerlessness. During this time, I found myself and my steadfast self-will breaking abstinence and being unable to give up dating, one night stands, obsessing over the collapse of my marriage and obsessing about an affair gone awry.

It took being a victim of Hurricane Sandy and being displaced from my home, seeing \$50,000 worth of damage, and having no job, for me to finally hit the stop button. I decided to set a 90 day bottom-line of no dating. I would focus on finding work, beginning a new career,

and rebuilding my life.

There was literally nowhere to start but over.

On day 45, I met J, the man who helped to rebuild my home. One month later, we had sex. Two weeks after that, we fell in love. Two months after that, he decided to leave the relationship.

I hit my second bottom. It was during this time that I lost my previous sponsor but still showed up to meetings like a dry drunk, listening, barely sharing, and never working the Steps or praying.

Self-will had begun to fail me and my spiritual malady had reached an all time low. It was at this point that a fellow reached out to me. I remembered hearing her qualify many months before in a meeting.

We had exchanged numbers and never got the chance to meet. I heard that this fellow woman had a lot of recovery and I decided to respond to her call. That fellow woman is now my sponsor and through her spiritual strength, love and kindness I have made it to my 9th Step amends and found sobriety.

I would be lying if I said my journey with her was an easy one, in fact, on the contrary. I found myself at times simply unwilling to surrender. How can I once and for all get out of the driver's seat and believe in this Higher Power?

Could this beautiful abundant God actually restore my sanity? The what-ifs kept me stuck in my head, but my faith outweighed it. I knew that surrender was the only road to peace. It was the only solution for how I could win back my life.

Although the challenges of life haven't changed, the choices certainly have. I can now choose freedom over sickness, serenity over chaos, amends over resent-

ments, and faith over fear. My disease no longer runs the show.

For me, the true freedom came when I was finally able to take a hard, and rigorous honest look at myself, finally being able to complete and share my inventory after nine painstaking months.

Most of the time this process took place without hope, but never without faith. I knew that having faith was the only way out.

July 11, 2013, was my 16-month sobriety date. As I look back with gratitude, I can now see how my most painful circumstances became my greatest gift.

By consistently attending meetings, turning over my will, taking service positions in the fellowship, working the steps, and most importantly not beginning or ending my day without bringing God in, I am able to walk a spiritual and sober path.

I can finally be in my own skin, and sit with feelings instead of run from them, always trusting that God will see me through any challenges that life throws my way.

That once obsessed and scared little girl who sat in her therapist's office compulsively blaming former lovers and being told that I was bleeding, and needed to get help, was now a wide-eyed self-assured, dignified woman with hope.

I am grateful for the words I heard that first day in an S.L.A.A. meeting that continue to carry me through, "Don't give up before the miracle." I am a living testament of that miracle.

To the women, and men in this fellowship, thank you for loving me until I learned to love myself. I dedicate this to you. May we all have the gift of a sober miracle.

— **Anonymous**

Meditation Book Project

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE:

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

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

Sobriety

“In these matters, time and daily consistency of action are the tools with which we fashion our release, under God’s guidance, from the tyranny of the psychic realm. This may be the last domain of the addiction to relinquish its power, but it *does happen.*”

-- PAGE 111, S.L.A.A. BASIC TEXT, “THE TWELVE STEP PROGRAM”

The more bumpy, slow-going, and rough the road we trudge in maintaining our sobriety, the more durable and fulfilling the breakthrough to smooth highway cruise control on the other side. Persevering in open connection with Higher Power makes the journey a beautiful, climate-controlled one.

AFFIRMATION: I am sober today by the grace of God and will continue to do my Twelve Step work and reach out to others.

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 Journal themes and deadlines for 2013-2014

Issue #	Theme	Question Of The Day (QOD)	Submission deadline (articles and QOD)
#147	Fantasy versus Reality	"Do you find it difficult to live in/see reality? What helps you stay out of Fantasyland?"	Jan. 15, 2014
#148	Breaking Up... with a Sponsor	"Have you ever found it necessary to break up with a sponsor? How did you come to this decision and what happened?"	March 14, 2014
#149	**ABM issue Diversity	"Have you ever felt that personal differences (such as sexuality, gender, age, race, or disability) made you an outsider in society but felt safe in the rooms of S.L.A.A.? Can you share your experience, strength and hope?"	May 15, 2014

Submit your writing at www.slaafws.org

THE INSPIRATION LINE YOUR 24/7 SUPPORT

Did you know that you can call the Inspiration Line at any time to help you get through a particularly difficult day?

Did you know that 24 hours a day, every day, there is a message of experience, strength and hope to help Sex and Love Addicts?

Did you know you can call the Inspiration Line NOW ?

215-574-2120



▶ **How we help.....**

- 87,741 calls have come into the line since 2006, that translates to 12,534 calls per year, 35 calls per day or 1.65 calls per hour, every hour !
- Calls come from all over the world! 50% from the east coast, 15% from the west coast, 20% from the mid-west, 10% from Florida, 4% from New England and even Hawaii !
- Our busiest day is Thanksgiving and there is never a busy signal, so you will get through to receive inspiring thoughts !
- The Inspiration Line has been in existence for 27 years!

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

