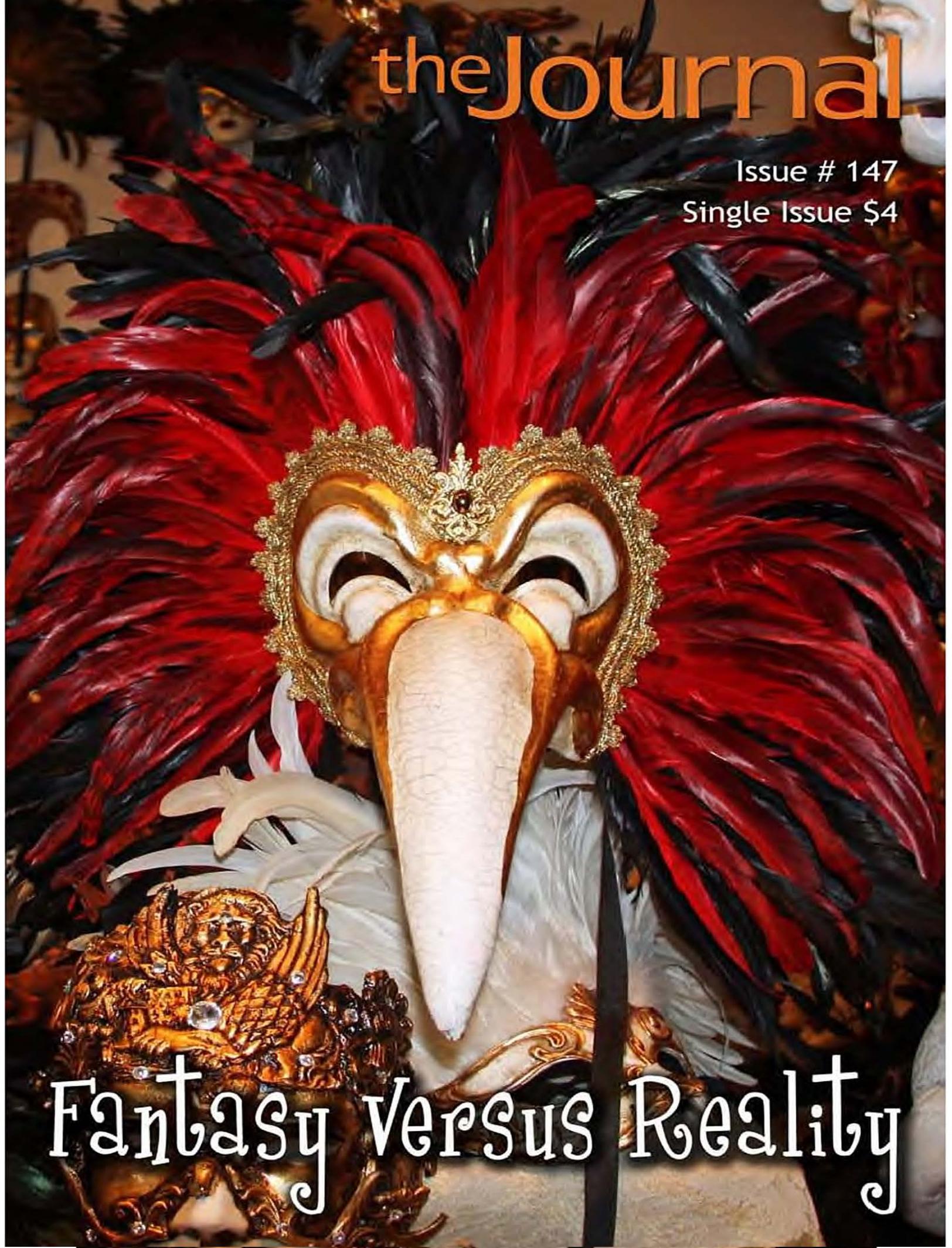


# the Journal

Issue # 147

Single Issue \$4

Fantasy Versus Reality



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

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## Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader:

The theme of this issue is “fantasy vs. reality.” We received a lot of really good articles on this topic. There are some great suggestions on how to stay out of fantasy and bring our thoughts to reality. As someone who has struggled to stay out of fantasyland, I was grateful for the ideas.

As I’m writing this, all of the awards shows are about to air on TV. The fact is, living in fantasyland can be rewarded in our society. I always thought it was good to have an active imagination. But my disease took this idea to the extremes. And before I knew it, I couldn’t tell the difference between my fantasy world and reality. I would have to numb out in the movie in my head in order to deal with life.

S.L.A.A. showed me that it’s possible to live in reality and not break apart into a million pieces. In this issue S.L.A.A. members testify to this. Hopefully their experiences will be as helpful to you as they were to me. We are not alone.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

**Correction:** In issue #146, the article on page 10 entitled “With S.L.A.A., I Give Love (and Dating) a Good Name!” was cut off. It should have ended with the following line: “These tools help me to stay sober and actually enjoy dating whether I make a “love connection” or not. —Anonymous, Orange County, CA”

The editor apologizes for the error.

# First Things First

## 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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## Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Do you find it difficult to live in/see reality?

What helps you stay out of Fantasyland?” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two questions are: 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; and Issue #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?” — The deadline for submissions is 5/15/14. Please send answers to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org).

“DO YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT TO LIVE IN/SEE REALITY? WHAT HELPS YOU STAY OUT OF FANTASYLAND?”

I have the half-second rule: Catch my thoughts; say a prayer; all in a half of a second.

— LOUIS C., KERRVILLE, TX

Hourly “check-ins” to spend two minutes in deep breathing and acknowledging my feelings to myself. This practice pulls me into my body/reality.

— NANCY G., SAN DIEGO

Yes! Suit up. Show up. Be in the chair here (get to meetings; call program friends / fellowship)!

— KATHLEEN, SAN DIEGO

Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude. Fantasy makes me feel bad for what I don't have. Exercising gratitude for what I have makes me feel good.

— STEVE B., SUNRISE, FL

Staying connected to my sponsor on a daily/regular basis. Doing service. Sharing with newcomers.

— GABRIEL, SACRAMENTO

## QUESTION OF THE DAY

Whenever I drift off into fantasy, I try to shift my focus to here and now, often by focusing on the surrounding nature.

— FREDERICK L.,  
UPPSALA, SWEDEN

Yes. Working the program.

— MARK H., VAN NUYS, CA

Nope... Working, service, volunteering and being available to the present moment keep me sober. Breathing helps too.

— RITA H., MONTREAL

Whenever I catch myself in a fantasy scenario, I stop and pray, "God, please teach me how to tolerate reality so that I don't find it necessary to escape into fantasy." Then I move on.

— ANONYMOUS, DALLAS, TX

Not anymore. Discovered that reality is for the people who can't handle acting out. I can't handle acting out. So reality is my only choice.

— ANONYMOUS

No. Reality is my friend! That's been a mantra of mine for about 9 years. It took awhile for me to get to that point.

— ALICE D., LOS ANGELES

My spiritual practice is the foundation of being able to stay in reality and stay out of Fantasyland. Connecting with what I consider my Higher Power, allowing others into what I'm thinking and getting feedback on thoughts and actions before I do them allows me to stay present and connect with reality. I make the decision not to go into Fantasyland because there's nothing there that I want anymore. Slowing down, taking time to breathe, and enjoying the small things in life keeps me present in the life I live.

— JOHN M., SEATTLE

To go to groups and share and hear other's experience.

— MARCO, LONG BEACH, CA

“DO YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT TO LIVE IN/SEE REALITY?  
WHAT HELPS YOU STAY OUT OF FANTASYLAND?”

Fantasyland, I know where that is. My addict takes me there all the time. Sometimes I don't really want to go, but I do what the addict wants. It's on the dark side of reality. I go there before I fall asleep, or before I wake in the morning. Sometimes my addict will take me there for the whole day!

I go on all the rides at Fantasyland. I save the most exciting rides for last. You know, the ones that take you up and up, then that special thing happens! If I have a really great time at Fantasyland, my addict will take me across the street to a place people call “Acting Out”...

— ANONYMOUS #1732

“Mindful every day activity. If I pay attention to what I am doing right now, I don't have time to fantasize.”

— ANONYMOUS, LONG BEACH, CA

1. Do you find it difficult to live/see the reality?

Yes, depending on how I feel, if I'm in a sad phase, depressed, stressed out because of numerous things like workload, private life, family relations etc. It can also be when I feel good, when I am happy etc... when I let my guard down and can't see my slips until I take a relapse.

2. What helps me to stay out of fantasyland?

I try to stay out of it by doing things I'm interested in like playing a musical instrument, long walks in nature, going to the gym, calling another 12-Step member or sponsor, working and praying...

Sincere regards, S.L.A.A. Gävle, Sweden.

— 4 PEOPLE FROM S.L.A.A. GÄVLE

IN SWEDEN MET AND GAVE THEIR

ANSWERS TO THE

QUESTION OF THE DAY.

ONE OF THEM SENT THIS SUMMARY.

At times I get the impression that my entire perspective on reality is flawed. I can easily get mired in fantasy of absolutely no relation to reality. It is only later do I realize what has truly happened. In the immediate time, doing the next best (sober) thing is essential. I then hand over the medium and long term to the loving God of my understanding, all the while focusing on doing the next best thing.

— PATRICK P., MONTREAL, CANADA.

# Working With My Reality

I am a newcomer in S.L.A.A. = D.A.S.A. (Dépendants Affectifs et Sexuels Anonymes) after 6 years in Anorexic/Bulimic Anonymous.

Although I have been married for more than 24 years, I have always had this need and/or capacity for falling in love with unavailable men, if possible monks, an abbot and far away from home, in a different country. And I find it hard to give my love or energy to somebody who can't respond and who in fact is "never there for me when I need him" (I do think it rings a bell from my childhood !!!) But, at the same time it's important for me, for today at least to be able to "escape" when the situation with hubby gets a bit rocky .....

Starting with S.L.A.A., I have decided to get more involved in my marriage, but before that, with myself. I do understand that I am a sexual anorexic in my marriage, afraid of intimacy, afraid of men. More generally: I do everything I can to avoid contact and being



together. At the same time, I do crave togetherness ....

I find that working with my reality is a good tool for "here and now." But, I am far from recovered from this need for romance ...

I do wonder whether I need some more psychotherapy to understand what's at stake. I had an absent father, who died when I was just entering my teenage years... I don't know yet .... I just have hope that the meetings with this new fellowship will help ....

Bye, for now.

And as we say in French: Bonnes 24 = happy 24 !

— AURÉLIE

# Surrender: Taking an Active Role in Recovery



I have been in the S.L.A.A. program for a little over a year. One of the issues I have been struggling with is surrender. I have made great progress with this issue, but I have a long way to go in continuing to recognize, listen and apply messages sent to me by my Higher Power (God).

Now that I have a small grasp on what surrender actually is and is not, I look for ways to apply this to my everyday life and take an active role in my recovery. The

messages are sent for a reason and not just to distract, confuse or entertain me.

For the last couple of months, I have made a conscious effort to be receptive to these messages. I do this to the point of actually writing them down when they come. By doing this, my attention is completely off of what I was thinking, contemplating or doing and focuses all of my energy on the message. This allows me to evaluate if this

message was in fact from my Higher Power (God), my inner addict, or a transient message from my common sense operator, who probably is my Higher Power anyway.

As I have become more conscious of the messages, when I have recognized and evaluated, I try to apply the message to, “doing the next right thing.” I think to myself, “How does this help me do the next right thing?” Or, I think, “Having this information, what IS the next right thing?” This tactic has taken me away from having someone else try to “fix” me and places the onus on me.

I, as probably most of the other people in the program, have been the recipient of many hours of therapy. The first couple of years that I attended therapy, I told my story, gave information and waited for the therapist to evaluate my issues and come up with a plan to fix me.

It wasn't until recently that I realized that nobody but me could fix me. A therapist can take information and tell me what issues he/she thinks I have, but nobody knows my story, what I have been through, how I have dealt with trauma the way I do.

I have to use the tools of the program; I have to recognize and

listen to my messages; I have to decide what the next right thing is to do; I have to nurture and grow myself, and I have to surrender to my Higher Power (God). All of this IS surrender to me.

It took me many decades, much therapy, an intensive treatment program, and S.L.A.A. to realize that surrender is NOT quitting. It is the process of discontinuing to fight the messages and deciding what is the next right thing to do and then doing it.

I am starting to surrender in the war of resistance and trying to place all of my energy into accepting my Higher Power's messages. I am listening to the “little voice in my head,” and resisting the resistance of doing the right thing.

I have found that there are ways, not related in any way to the program, that I can assist in my conquest to do right — and this is service. I have provided limited service in the S.L.A.A. program, as my life seems to be in somewhat chaos right now. What I can do, on a daily basis, is try to be of service to my fellow human beings outside of the program. This has been as little as letting someone in front of me in traffic or in a line at a

store, picking up things that other people have dropped, or anything that would make someone else feel a little better.

I was driving down a street in the city the other day. I was inside of my head, and thinking of what I needed to do. As I passed by a residence, I saw an elderly lady struggling while bringing her garbage cans back up to her house after pick-up. I had passed her, and was a block away when I realized that I should have stopped and helped. I turned the car around and returned to her.

I grabbed a hold of the carts and brought them to her back yard. She was extremely appreciative and somewhat shocked that a stranger would go out of their way to help. She probably forgot about it shortly after, but the feeling I got lasted and is still with me.

I have struggled with feeling good about myself my whole life. The affirmations of the program have been hollow reminders of how low my self-esteem is. When I feel good about some of the things I do, it makes it less likely that I will do the things that continue to make me feel bad about myself.

They are silent affirmations sent from my Higher Power (God). "Doing" removes the conceptual aspect of the tools

and advice from the program and puts them into practice.

I found that I could actually do selfless things for selfish reasons. This sounds a little tainted, but let me explain. I discovered that by doing things for other people, by making them feel a bit better during their day, I feel even better than they probably do.

So, I set out of my door every day with the intention of doing something good for at least one other person. I try to do something that could brighten someone else's day, even for just a moment and this makes my day better and keeps my mind off of my addiction and the negative feelings about myself. This too is surrender for me.

Surrender has taken on a whole other meaning to me, in recent times. Surrender to me is taking the thought of "somebody should do something" and making it, "I should do something."

I found that whenever I heard, "Somebody should do something" in my head, it was a message from my Higher Power that I should do something. But, in the past, I would not surrender to the message. Now, I try to do just that.

Surrender is not giving up; it is taking an active role in the world around me. It is doing, rather than talking about how it is never

done. It is changing the statement, “Wouldn’t it be nice if...” and making it, “Isn’t it nice that or when...” Surrender is just changing my life and way of thinking. I like to think it is somewhat like making a deposit in the Karma Bank. When the message arrives, I try to listen. When I do listen, I try to do.

I have not perfected this tactic, nor do I expect to. I just try to stick to the “progress not perfection” ideology and I have found it has made my feeling about life better, though my life is as bad as it has ever been. It has changed my attitude and I believe it has changed my whole world in some small, positive way.

— TONY C., SALINAS, CA

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## Changing Definition of Fantasy

**W**hen I came to the program, I had a different definition of what fantasy was. I thought it revolved solely around sex or some sort of fetish. What I soon learned, through the awareness that the Steps force us into, was that I was the queen of developing a “fantasyland.” Much of my program over the years has been about redefining the things I “thought” before coming into the program...But isn’t that where the addict starts first, in my thoughts? For me, absolutely!

My version of fantasyland started at a very young age. While most children grow up thinking about what sort of profession they will work in when they grow up, my dream was that I wanted a

family and a home.

It was everything that I didn’t have. And it began the long process that I now know as my love addiction. This fantasy grew as the years passed. I would dream of how many kids I wanted, who I would marry and their names, what our lives would be like, what I wanted our home to look like, and the love that would fill it.

I was bound and determined to never put my children through the things I’d been through. I lived in this fantasy bubble for my entire life. Finding a partner was about fulfilling that fantasy and being rescued from the abandonment, rejection, and abuse I’d suffered.

Unfortunately, my reality

didn't match my fantasy at all. I spent a very long time in denial. When that no longer worked, I got into so much pain that I was ready to end my life. I once again found myself in fantasy. This time, I wasn't planning my family or the house I would live in, but rather planning my death.

The fantasies got so dark that they included how I would do it, what my family of origin may or may not feel about it, and the most insane part was the inclusion of my son.

God did for me what I couldn't do for myself in these moments. A friend called me and I walked out to the garage (the only private place in the house) to tell her about my insanity. I fell to my knees as I described to her where my head was that night. As I heard the words come out of my mouth, I was horribly scared — scared for me, and scared for my son.

I started therapy. And, again, God did for me what I couldn't have done for myself because the therapist happened to be an addiction specialist. She recognized the signs of my love addiction right away and asked me to go to a meeting to check it out. This began my journey to freedom from my love addiction. It took me a bit of time to get to the face-to-face rooms because I was too scared and filled with

stereotyped images to go at first. But I did find an online room and then, shortly thereafter, a women's S.L.A.A. phone meeting began.

I was asked to be of service. This meant that I had to suit up and show up for others which helped me get out of my fantasy, if even for a short period of time. I found a sponsor and started working the Steps back toward sanity.

Today the biggest assets that keep me out of fantasy are my Higher Power and the tools of recovery, such as: gratitude lists, reaching out to recovery partners, working my Steps with a sponsor, being of service, going to meetings, utilizing exercises that help me to get present, prayer, daily meditation readers, and program literature.

I am not the same person I was when I first walked through those doors, and I have S.L.A.A. and my Higher Power to thank for that. I used to define reality as a painful place that I couldn't exist in. Today, I define it as an opportunity for additional growth. My life isn't perfect today, but I am so grateful for the freedom that living in reality has brought and I wouldn't trade it for anything!! Thank you S.L.A.A. for saving my life!

— LISA, TX

## Didn't Know I Was Living in Fantasy



**T**he question, “Do you find it difficult to live in/see reality? What helps you stay out of fantasyland?” Is very interesting. When I came into S.L.A.A. 3 years ago, I had no idea I was living in fantasy.

I thought fantasy was reality and even though I had been knocked down many times by acting on my fantasy and being shocked when others weren't with my program, I did not realize what I was doing.

It was only after the process of withdrawal from my qualifier and hearing about fantasy as an addiction in the rooms, that I came to identify myself that way.

My ability to live in and see reality has been directly related

to my slow process of becoming able to recognize my fantasy thinking.

What I used to think of as harmless creative imaginings or daydreaming, I now consider my fantasy addiction in action.

A couple of clues that help me identify my faulty thoughts are when my thoughts depend on another person doing something or engaging with me in a way that is inconsistent with what is going on, what is being said at the moment or when it is inconsistent in terms of our relationship at large.

With fantasy, I can take situations as mundane as a comment in a grocery store, a conversation in line to buy a

movie ticket or praise from my boss and turn them into the beginning of a torrid love affair. The way I stay out of fantasyland is by noticing what my thoughts are doing.

Am I imagining a possibility that is 100 actions in the future, beyond the conversation? Have I spaced out? Am I conniving in some way?

Is there giant romance or mindblowing sex involved in the thoughts? When I answer, “Yes,” to any of these questions, I know I am in fantasy.

To come back, I shake my head and literally say to myself “You are in fantasy. That is not happening, now come back and finish what you were doing.”

There has been something sad about letting go of the fantasy habit. It’s as though I am mourning for all that possibility, even if it was just in my head. I have to hold faith that something beautiful and not contrived by my imagination will come in time. The upside of this awareness is that I am much calmer and more grounded as I walk through the world.

When I am not seeing every encounter as a grandiose missed opportunity, I experience a lot less anxiety and actually have a hope of being present and connecting meaningfully with myself and others who cross my path.

— VIVIAN, LOS ANGELES

## Giving Up the Sparkling Land in My Head

I was raised on fantasy. Growing up, I would listen to my mother glorify the affairs of others, as if it were the long awaited emotional rescue to an otherwise barren existence. Indeed, her own affair, which I found out about in my late teens, was idealized as the man of her dreams who came along “one promise too late” as the song goes. I began to put the pieces of my tweenhood together in my



mind, realizing her anger and distance towards me were a

result of her obsession, and her bitterness that her family would in her mind be the cause of her discontent. Ironically, her acceptance of extramarital involvement was not extended to me. Upon learning of my actions, she said I was a bad wife, a bad mother, a whore.

I have inherited my mom's penchant for fantasy. Each time I would become involved with a new qualifier, the wheels would start turning. This was the man who would save me, awaken me intellectually, emotionally, and physically.

Never mind that he was lying to me. Never mind that he was taking money from me.

Never mind that he chose to date a married woman for reasons that were obvious to everyone but me.

I had my own agenda. And when this agenda didn't play out as I had imagined it should, the resulting anger and pain were

crippling. Funny that I was frightened when faced with the pain of withdrawal. I didn't realize I was already in hell.

Today, I have to be mindful, on a daily basis, of my tendency to enter this fantasy world. I have to admit that sometimes my real life is quite mundane compared with this sparkling land in my head, but it is my life nonetheless.

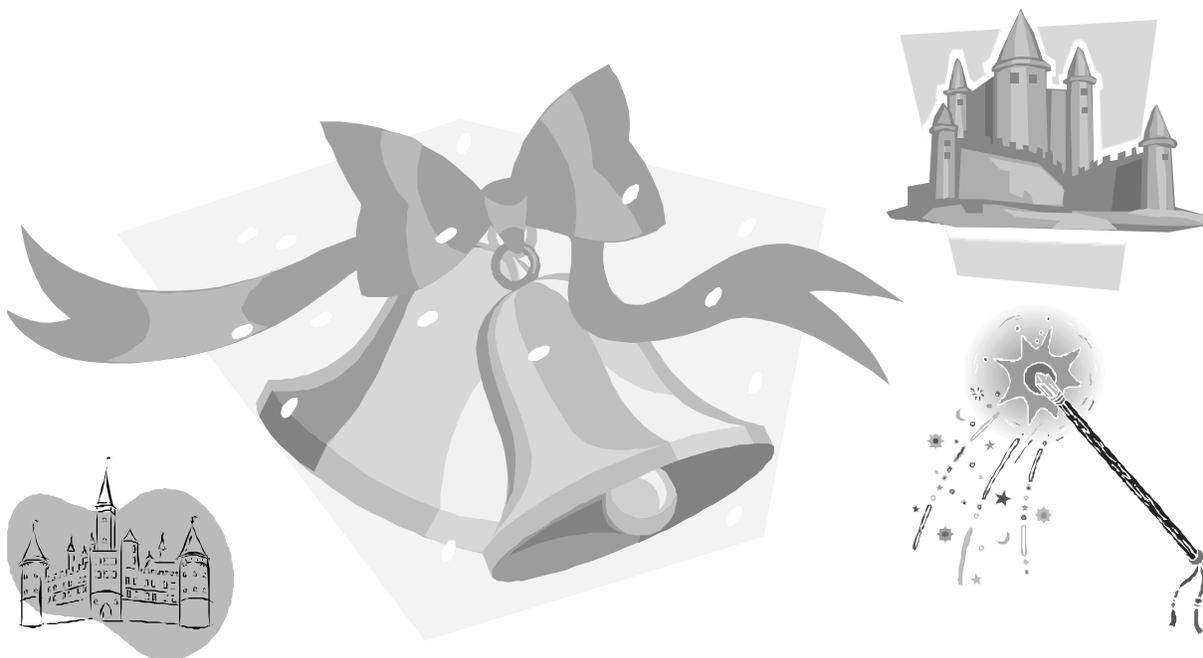
And it is good. I read. I call friends for reality checks. I make up lists...just the facts ma'am, as they say. It's a daily struggle, but I have faith that it is worth it. Today, I remind myself of Tai Sheridan's Zen Prayer for Clarity.

"I open my mind  
to seeing clearly  
the essence of things  
that matter to me  
without being confused  
by the muddy waters  
of passionate attachment."

— ANONYMOUS



# The Futility of My Wedding Bell Fantasy



*Editor's note: This article contains descriptions of abuse that may be triggering to some.*

“**I** now pronounce you husband and wife... John, you may kiss the bride...Ladies and gentleman, I would like to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. John Smith.” Wow, this is an excerpt from one of my very favorite fantasies ever! (With the exception of the time I dated a guy whose last name was Pigman. That didn't fit into my

fantasy so well!)

With each day of sobriety I get a clearer and clearer picture of why I embraced the wedding bell fantasy. I am a sex and love addict. What this means for me is that there is a precious little girl in me who was not adequately loved and adored by the people who were supposed to love and adore her, mainly my parents, but my two older brothers as well.

If I'd been starved of food, the authorities would have been

called. But I was literally starved of love. There was nothing loving, safe or supportive about the household I was born into. I was sexually molested at the age of 5 or 6 by both of my brothers who were 10 and 11 years older than me. I was physically abused from around age 5 or 6 until I was 15 or 16.

The physical abuse included being slapped across the face at will, being beaten while my head was being held under a pillow so no one could hear me cry, and being beaten with a belt until I had welts on my body.

This was all done by my rageaholic mother. She also verbally bullied and abused me from birth until I was 20 years old. She called me every name in the book, demeaned me and degraded me and allowed my brothers to order me around and call me their “slave.”

At one point she told me she had a gun in the trunk of the car, and that if I ever saw my boyfriend again she would kill me. But long before she told me that, I feared for my life in my very own home. I never felt loved or lovable. I felt like the dirt on the floor, like something bad had to be wrong with me.

For me, the allure of the wedding bell fantasy is the illusion of perfect love — love

that is not abusive, critical, judgmental or unkind. It is the pinnacle of fantasies for the wounded, abused, and unloved little girl in me. It means that someone loves and adores me so much that they want to spend the rest of their life with me.

In my diseased, love-addicted mind, this seems like sheer perfection. Sadly, it is not. But, I don't see the futility of it. In my disease, I can't see that perfect love — just like perfect people — does not exist.

When I walked through the doors of S.L.A.A. and began diligently working a thorough program of recovery, I realized that I absolutely cannot engage in this fantasy under any circumstances.

I cannot afford to allow my mind to go into the “He's the one” zone. Others may be able to do this, but it is extremely damaging for me. Once I've entered the “He's the one” zone and started playing the endless loop of the wedding bell fantasy, I have absolutely no contact with reality again.

It's all about what I make up in my head. I can no longer see the man, that I've only just begun dating, for who he really is. He is just the made up man, that my wounded little girl needs to believe in, in order to know

that she really is loved and cared for.

Now that I've got 1 year and 10 months of sobriety, I know that I am lovable. I know that I am the one who has to fill up my own reservoir of love. No one else can do that for me.

I have to turn to my Higher Power, my sponsor, my fellow sobriety sisters, my meetings, and my empowering self-care to completely fill myself with love so that I am not a walking, wounded, love-starved woman.

I have to take charge as a responsible adult and make sure that my need for love is met in all of the healthiest ways possible every single day.

I cannot abandon myself and my needs the way that my family of origin did.

I cannot ignore my needs for abundant rest, adequate sleep, healthy nutrition, fun activities, supportive human contact, and a whole host of other empowering self-care things that are on my list of top lines.

When I hear the wedding bell fantasy begin to play in my head I STOP and lovingly remind

myself that I must take the relationship one day at a time and live in the moment, no matter how awesome the man I'm dating may seem at the time. I tell myself that I cannot allow myself to entertain these kinds of thoughts for a minimum of one year in a healthy, happy relationship, and there are no exceptions. (My disease thinks that every great guy is an exception to this rule in the first couple of months that we date!)

So instead of planning locations and choosing dresses, I plan my daily prayer and meditation and choose my meetings. Instead of reading bridal magazines and calling the caterer, I read the Steps in our Basic Text and call my sponsor.

Instead of selecting a band to dance the night away, I select fun activities I want to enjoy doing with my sobriety sisters. This way, I get to love life, enjoy my sobriety and love myself enough that I don't need to engage in any futile fantasies, especially one as deeply damaging as the wedding bell fantasy.

— ANONYMOUS, CA

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## Living in Reality

I came into S.L.A.A. six years ago, after hitting bottom from a string of frightening failed relationships with incredibly inappropriate people — and after climactically falling in love with a business acquaintance in another city, after a work-related dinner.

I was completely in fantasy with this person. It seemed perfect. He was my age, in the same industry, and he was interesting looking. He lived in Chicago and I lived in New York. This should work. We had a nice conversation over dinner. We should get married! I felt ready to drop everything and move to Chicago! I wanted to move in and start my life with him.

I remember walking down the street, after I met him, imagining that he was everywhere — watching me — seeing how wonderful I was. Somehow, from Chicago, he could beam his presence to follow me around my neighborhood. I was really in a daze.

Hmmm... but he didn't take my hints. He didn't respond to my emails that suggested meetings and socializing. And oy, "He just wasn't that into

me." And he wasn't magically stalking me from Chicago. What was wrong with him? I thought I was going to die. Literally, I couldn't believe it. How could he NOT see the wonderfulness that could be "US"?

Thank God, I made my way into S.L.A.A. I was able to work myself out of that fantasy by going through withdrawal and facing reality. The reality was, he was a complete stranger and even our business dealings were not that deep.

There was not a personal connection happening. He was not interested and not available. He ignored my requests — professional and otherwise — and never followed up with me. These are signs that someone is NOT interested in you and you should stop pursuing them.

If I had not found S.L.A.A. and the tool of identifying qualifiers (people we use as drugs), and the suggestion of no contact with qualifiers, I would have continued to follow up, and attempted to manipulate the situation and not taken "No" as an answer.

Before S.L.A.A., I would have created business opportunities to meet with him, and even just flat out offered casual sex at some point. I would have hoped that having sex with me would seal the deal and he would at last fall

in love with me and become a wonderful partner.

By stopping contact, confirming facts with others, (i.e., he is not returning my calls, e-mails, and has not asked me out), I could see he was clearly not interested in dating me. I was able to walk away, dignity intact. This initial round of straightforward fantasy-busting in S.L.A.A. was very healing and started a decent foundation in recovery.

Guess what? Fantasy, for me, is even more insidious than this. I continue to hit bottom in this program in a variety of areas in my life — another failed relationship, career, and many other “failings.” I see each situation has elements of fantasy or gross unrealistic expectations of others, or myself — which for me shapes itself as fantasizing.

My most recent relationship had many red flags going in. But, unlike a total fantasy qualifier, this guy was getting on his knees and professing his love to me. This should definitely work and he was cute. Nope, it didn't. I fell in love with a fantasy of who

I thought he would become. Thankfully, he just ended up dumping me. And, of course he did. I was not having a relationship with him, I was banking on v-2.0 and it wasn't coming out. EVER! V-2.0 lived in my head in a fantasy where I control all the moving parts.

This breakup has been painful, but the lessons have been really fruitful! The withdrawal from this relationship has deepened my healing process from childhood trauma. I am really clear about what I want in my next relationship and feel a renewed trust that it will happen in due time.

Next time around, I will include, as part of my dating plan, reality checks for each step of the way, as I get to know new people. I will check in with friends and my sponsor about my feelings, and ask myself, over and over, “What do I want?” And, I will ask myself, “Does this person that I am dating, embody the things that I want and need?”

One key qualification for me is that I am looking for a husband, someone who is

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capable of committing to me on that level. I have never said that before, and it feels amazing to admit it. I will actively date when the time comes. But, again, I also trust the right person will arrive in my life when I am fully ready to embrace them. And they will only appear when I am present and available and capable of committing, and when I am fully showing up in reality and able to make a long term committed relationship work.

To fully stay in reality, for me, is a process of confronting inner demons and emotions from childhood, so they are not ruling me.

As I heal these wounds and wake up to the reality of the woman I am today – in the life before me – I have criteria and choices. My inner child need not run the show. I am awakening to my truth of being a single adult woman, making her way in the world.

Only I can fully actualize my unique gifts that I was born to share. If I stay asleep in a fantasy world, my reality quickly becomes a nightmare.

What is the winning combo to awaken? Work the steps with a sponsor; get outside professional help to deal with

trauma and or other emotional challenges that may persist as an addict, anorexic and/or co-dependent.

Lastly, for me, I have a deep committed spiritual path that at the end of the day reminds me I am not my story. There is more to me than these broken childlike identities that want to run the show. We are spirit, there is a flow, and a source (Higher Power) to connect into, that once experienced, guidance will happen for each of us in a unique and profound way.

– LISA R., NY



**To Do List:**



#1. Subscribe to the *Journal*



#2. Go to [www.slaafws.org](http://www.slaafws.org) and subscribe to the *Journal*



#3. Enjoy reading the *Journal*



# The Light at the End of the Dark Fantasies



**A**s our local *Journal* rep, I often reach out to fellows to share their story with our “meeting in print.” Today, I thought, “Why not share my own experience, especially if it may help another?”

When I think of “fantasy,” I instantly picture women droning on about the man of their dreams whom they’ve just met

but have already designed their wedding dress, bought the perfect house with the white picket fence, and picked out names for their children – all within moments of meeting said Mr. Right, and all in their heads. Ugh. As a love avoidant (or relationship anorexic, take your pick), this kind of talk would nauseate me. That is, until I

found the rooms of S.L.A.A. and realized whether people are fantasizing about that stuff – or the stuff I’d daydream about – the resulting pain is the same. And pain is something I can really identify with.

Unlike my love addict counterparts, when I meet someone I like (which is extremely rare), the images I conjure up in my head are not of the “happily-ever-after” sort. They are actually more along the lines of those tearjerker movies, where viewing requires lots of tissues. They are the “what-horrible-thing-is-going-to-happen-(usually of my own creation)-that-will-cause-this-relationship-to-come-to-a-tragic-end?”-sort. In most areas of my life I am a pretty easygoing, lighthearted, optimistic, “glass-is-half-full” woman. The Universe is abundant, and the future can hold wonderful things for us, as long as we are open to receiving them. Not so, when it comes to love and romance. If I were living in biblical times, Noah’s Ark would certainly have left me behind. Of that, I am convinced.

Hmm... Is that where the saying, “You missed the boat” comes from? Yup. I definitely did miss the boat. So, when I do meet someone I like, the motion

picture that plays in my head is of devastation and ruin. And just at the point when things are going great – in reality, that is – I systematically act out each scene from my mind’s eye. Even and especially when I don’t want to! It’s like I’m on autopilot, with no ability to stop myself; it’s as if I were watching myself from outside my own body. The program has taught me that’s me in my disease – the saboteur of all of life’s joy.

I think of the Roddy McDowell character in the old TV series “Night Gallery” who wanted so desperately to escape his dismal life by living in an idyllic museum painting, only to have his wish granted when the painting had been replaced by a very disturbing one. That is where living in my dark fantasy eventually brings me to – self-fulfilling prophecy. If I “know” I’m destined to be the “crazy cat lady” living in a house with 100 cats and no human companion, just like that woman in “A Clockwork Orange” (sans phallic sculpture), then that will be my reality. Thought creates energy, creates reality. Coming into S.L.A.A., I learned that my monumental fear of abandonment manifests itself as me being a love avoidant or

anorexic. Years of therapy have not convinced me of the simple fact I learned here: All I have to do is rewrite my own ending.

Wow! So instead of “Men, whom I have loved, always die or leave me, and therefore, I will always be left behind and alone,” I now say to myself, “I am loved by Higher Power and I will be loved by someone worthy of me who will stay.”

It has taken 2 ½ years in program (a mere 10% of my time in therapy!) to rewrite the script and really own this. And, owning my new ending, restores hope and faith that I had lost decades ago.

How did I get to this new place? I’m not going to sugarcoat things. It wasn’t easy. It takes hard work – one day at a time, and sometimes one moment at a time. I basically had to re-program my brain – which, for me, comes with working a strong program.

Whenever I’d find myself wandering into the darker side of fantasy land (the only side I’ve ever been to), I’d apply the 3-second rule. I can indulge for 3 seconds and then I’d have to change the channel. I wrote “Stop Thinking” on a post-it which still hangs on my bathroom wall. I’d use one of my Buddhist mindfulness exercises of being completely present in the

moment: I say to myself, “Where my feet are, is where my head should be.” I consciously experience the moment with each of my 5 senses: What does this place look like? What does it feel like? What does it smell like? What does it taste like? What does it sound like?

In answering these questions, my mind is instantly transported back to the present. I am once again out of my head and in my body, which is exactly where I need to be.

When struggling, I’d get honest and humble and also ask for help from fellows. I’d write poetry. Say the Serenity Prayer; pray to Higher Power – not for “poor me,” but to have these thoughts lifted so I could be restored to sanity and help others. I’d get to a meeting. I’d give myself a reality check.

My sponsor taught me to make 2 lists: One is the fact list; the other is the “make-up” list (things I make up in my head). I remind myself that I’m just making this stuff up; it isn’t real. In the last issue of *the Journal*, a fellow referred to this as “MSU,” or Making Sh\*t Up.” I’d think of slogans and read literature. Speaking of, when I’m not in reality but in the throes of obsessive thinking, “Triggers as a Resource” suggests I ask myself “What am I trying to avoid in my

own life? What am I afraid of?" Answering those questions often is exactly what I need to free my mind and also, to take the next right action.

I can write down the answers, say a prayer, and put them in my God-box. When I want to kick myself for the mistakes I've made and how I have repeatedly hurt myself, I share my story with others and reconcile that if my experience helps another human being, then there is a purpose to all of it.

I journal my feelings and do service. I talk to newcomers and let them know the pain does pass, and things do get better. I'm a low bottom addict, and if this program has helped me to get better, it can help anyone!

All we have to do is show up and do the work. We say this is a "we" program and, "We recover together or die alone." Writing for *the Journal* gives me an opportunity to help people in program, not just locally, but on the other side of the world! How great is that?

I think of the people and things in my life for which I am truly grateful and the dark images

disappear. I call my sponsor; review my Step work and I help my sponsees. I say affirmations and share them with others. I pray, meditate, chant; go for a walk; commune with my cats – perfect creatures of God. (Yes, I do live with cats!)

I'd pick any one of the 35 tools in my recovery toolbox. One of the most helpful, freeing, and nurturing things I have learned is to look at a picture of myself when I was just 5 or 6 years old and say, "This is who I am hurting right now." It has helped me be far more gentle and nurturing towards myself.

I remember to laugh, and have fun, and appreciate the small things. I work, volunteer, spend time with friends; in other words, show up and live my life. I look at all the wonderful things in my reality and I'd much rather be here than there. Basically, I will do whatever it takes because the rewards are sooooo worth the work.

Thank you, S.L.A.A., for restoring me to sanity and for giving me my life back. I am eternally grateful.

— KATHY, NYC

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# Share space

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## Grateful for Change

I came into S.L.A.A. (properly) around Thanksgiving. I don't think I was aware of what I was doing or what working this program would require. And I am so glad that I didn't know!

I remember sitting in my first meeting, and a young voice inside of me — a voice that I didn't even realize existed before — said, "It doesn't have to be this way anymore." It made me cry.

I felt a prison in my mind, that I hadn't noticed, was forced open. I felt more intimacy with myself, a Higher Power, and others flow into my soul.

As I have continued in the program, I am learning to care about myself rather than what



others think of me or may do for me. This intimacy is growing on a daily basis, as long as I keep putting in the leg work.

I am dual addicted and have been recovering in O.A. for many years. I have been sober in O.A. for almost ten years. But in that time something always failed to click for me. My recovery in S.L.A.A. has greatly supported my recovery from bulimia, anorexia and binge eating.

I didn't realize how deeply these two addictions go hand in hand for me. My eating disorder was a way to cope with life, but also with my sex, romance and love addiction and anorexia.

The past few years, I have felt like a person who is walking around without any skin, constantly surveying the landscape like a hungry animal, hunting for love and sometimes sex. I was always giving off "interested-but-distant-unreachable-tragedy-in-a-tower syndrome" signals.

Even though I don't act out sexually or romantically much, I have tortured my mind and body with self-destructive and hateful thought patterns and romantic obsessions with unavailable people.

My addiction also followed a pattern of choosing sick people — the sicker, the better. I would get hooked and shake with anxiety or collapse into a self-hate-fueled depression which often entailed self harm in the form of acting out with my eating disorder.

Now, I have so much more choice. Even though there are many days when I wobble, I feel I am stronger in my body and have a skin.

I am no longer drawn to the people that I used to be drawn

to. If I am, I can take this as an indication that I am A) looking for an out, and B) I am trying to fix something myself and am in self will and C) have forgotten my trust and commitment to recovery and a Higher Power.

I go back to the Steps. The solution is spiritual: In a Higher Power of my own understanding.

Sometimes, I have to get honest...Oh, I am craving this person, or this experience...So what's going on that I don't want to know or feel?

And then another level of honesty...Who is in charge? And what is life really about? I forget so easily that my life is a gift and is intended to bring love into this world: an unachievable goal when I am focused on self and trying to get what I want.

I am so grateful for S.L.A.A. and the life that is slowly coming back. I am opening my own part-time practice, something I was unable to move towards in the chronic ups and downs of romance addiction. I feel freer and have more self-esteem. I have faith that there is much more to come.

I am grateful to all those who show up to S.L.A.A. meetings, to talk, share and listen and be part of something much bigger than ourselves as individuals.

— ANONYMOUS, BOULDER, COLORADO

# Just Being

Today, as I was walking to work and talking to God, I had the overwhelming desire to have a day of just being — a day where I was able to eat what I want and exercise, or not — a day to talk to God, only if I desired — a day to forget my top, middle and bottom lines and just be, as I see the rest of the world being. I was thinking how much work life is. Just the act of being for an addict is a lot of work. Well, it is if we hope to stay clean. This thinking started my mind going on what would happen if I could just be, and prompted me to write the following:

Ever wish for a day of just being?  
 A day of just eating whatever you like,  
 A day of just doing whatever you want,  
 A day where program just is and requires no work,  
 A day of just being sounds so nice!  
 A day without structure can entice.  
 A day where I don't have to plan my meals,  
 A day where I don't have to follow any lines,  
 A day where I function as I see the rest of the world do,  
 A day full of freedom to just be,  
 For the addict, this day of just being can never be.  
 To do so is to live haphazardly.  
 I must get up and plan my food.  
 I must wake up and adjust my mood.  
 I must connect with my Higher Power.  
 I must turn over my fear.  
 I must practice what I preach.  
 Physical, emotional and mental health don't just happen.  
 I must work for this daily reprieve.  
 So buck up little one, life is not fair.  
 My days of just being can never be there.  
 The sanity of recovery is a gift.  
 To the addict the act of just being is a slip.

— ANONYMOUS

# Reflections on the Eve of My 25th Anniversary

**T**his comes to you (August 27, 2013) on the eve of a very special day in my life: the celebration of my 25th anniversary of sobriety and participation in 12-Step programs.

I am sharing this news with you, *the Journal* readers, because this program has special significance in my life.

Today, thankfully, I am a different man than the individual who first entered the rooms on August 28, 1988. When I started, I was a person who was deeply immersed in the addiction and had created a long trail of regrets; I was seriously in need of support and grace.

Fortunately, my Dad and stepmother, Marie, were there for me. And I soon discovered the gifts of fellowship and understanding that are available from people in the rooms.

The last 25 years have been marked by several steps forward and a few steps back. I worked at a restaurant in Massachusetts

for 9 years; getting off of work at 3 a.m. every morning was not a sane lifestyle.

In 1991, I enrolled at community college, and met several inspirational faculty members, who recognized my potential. Over the next 3 years, I became the student government president, challenged the institution on its commitment to diversity, and started a mentoring program. When my advisor suggested I apply to Yale, Harvard, Tufts and Brown, I called him “an alcoholic.” It turns out he knew me better than I knew myself.

Yale and Harvard were transformative experiences educationally and interpersonally. So much healing took place, as I internalized what others saw in me. I grew as a writer, thinker, and student of life. Upon graduation from Harvard, with my Masters in Education, I was fortunate to be employed by one of the highest paying school dis-

tricts in the country. In my 2nd year of teaching, I started a tutoring business. And after 7 years, had 2 fulltime jobs. Something had to give, and I followed my dear friends, Jim and Jean, to a city in the southwestern United States. They had spent 10 years researching where to live after retirement; I benefitted from all their footwork.

Over the last 9 years, I have never been happier and more fulfilled. I cherish my new home: I have a strong affinity for the open spaces and mountains, the friendliness of the people, and the extraordinary cultural mix. I have found my family of choice.

James is 22 1/2 and will soon be a college senior; he has maintained a 3.8 GPA and is determined to attend graduate school. With that vision, he recently co-founded a mentoring program for male youth that will serve individuals in 2 cities.

Michael will be turning 16 in 3 weeks. His mom recently passed away, but he has been consistent in sharing his thoughts and emotions. One of our favorite activities is practicing driving skills; I affectionately call Michael "my driver."

The 3 of us will vacation together in San Diego in October, and then in Connecticut and Florida over Christmas break.

One remarkable blessing over the past several years has been the phenomenal growth of my business. We no longer advertise; our expansion is entirely due to word-of-mouth.

At the start of this school year, we have been inundated. I am currently working 12 to 14 hour days.

That will change as we hire and train new staff.

More significantly, we have just finalized an agreement with the guru of ACT prep to bring his course and materials to our locale. My business will likely double in size over the coming year.

I have shared the details of my journey so that you can understand the profound gratitude I feel today.

When I began my recovery 25 years ago, I was incapable of envisioning where I am today. One day at a time, things have changed and improved.

Through bountiful grace, years of footwork, dedication to the 12 Steps, and tremendous support, I have become a man I like and even occasionally admire.

May the next 25 years be as abundant and prosperous!

Thank you to S.L.A.A. for being a part of my life and my recovery.

— MARK A.



**THE JOURNAL IS LOOKING FOR  
SHARES FOR A SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE  
TOPIC OF DIVERSITY**

*“We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences of sexual orientation or gender identity.”*

This recent change to the S.L.A.A. preamble reflects the idea that we can all find recovery from sex and love addiction, no matter our differences. Have you ever felt that you didn't fit in? Do you feel that you fit in in S.L.A.A.? Do you feel that the program is reaching as many people as it could be? How can we continue to carry the message to as many people as possible?

Please send your shares on diversity to :  
[www.slaafws.org/contact/Conference+Journal+Committee](http://www.slaafws.org/contact/Conference+Journal+Committee)

Topics may include:

- Gender Relations
- Sexuality
- Cultural Viewpoints
- Unique Bottom Lines
- Acceptance
- Fitting In
- Identifying with Feelings
- Encouraging Diversity
- Unity
- Gender Identity
- Other topics welcome!

# Augustine Alchemy

A Recovery Conference for SLAA and COSLAA

Saturday 9 AM to 5 PM

August 9, 2014

First United Methodist Church

941 Old Rock Hill Rd, Wallingford, CT 06492

Donation at the door \$18.

Brown bag or on the town

## Sample Program

8 AM Hospitality

9 AM First Open presentation.

One S.L.A.A. /one COSLAA speaker

10 AM First breakout

11:15AM Second breakout

12:30 PM LUNCH

2 PM Third Breakout

3 PM Fourth Breakout

4:15 PM Second Open Presentation

One COSLAA / one S.L.A.A. speaker

4:50 PM Closing circle and gratitude

5 PM Close

This conference, now in its 14th year, is one of few with equal participation of S.L.A.A. and COSLAA. It is an opportunity for addicts and those affected by addict behavior to hear each other in a sober, serene environment.

We have been blessed that the Methodist Church in Wallingford Connecticut has invited us back for yet another year. It is a serene safe and sober environment.

There are separate breakout rooms but many sessions are held together. Getting current rooms are separate. Please respect boundaries.



## Meditation Book Project

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE:

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

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

### HITTING BOTTOM

“I had reached the point which is the prelude to change for most addicts: I was at my bottom.”

— S.L.A.A. BASIC TEXT, “I HAD EVERYTHING (EXCEPT A LIFE)”

**SHARE:** Why is it only by experiencing devastating pain that we begin to see clearly that change must come? Wouldn't it be more pleasant if we could simply act on the fleeting thought that perhaps this sexual encounter, or this emotional intrigue, could have disastrous results? Once we truly hit bottom and surrender, fully accepting our powerlessness, are we able to push ego and self-will out of the way and make room for our Higher Power? As we work each step in our recovery process we begin to see we have choices. With help from our Higher Power, others in the program, and our sponsor, the Steps help us begin to steer clear of our bottom-line behavior and the pain of finding yet another, deeper, bottom.

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**AFFIRMATION:** *Today I choose to use the 12 Steps, my Higher Power, my sponsor, and others in the program to help me stay free from the pain of my bottom-line behaviors.*

# THE INSPIRATION LINE

## YOUR 24/7 SPONSOR

### 215-574-2120

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 inspire Sex and Love Addicts?



### ▶ **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.

# *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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