

theJournal

Issue # 195

Single Issue \$4

Long-term Recovery

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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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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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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In submitting such content to S.L.A.A., the member releases S.L.A.A., any other members of S.L.A.A. and S.L.A.A.'s officers, directors, employees and agents (collectively, the "Releasees") from any and all claims which the member may have against any of the Releasees in connection with the member's submission of content to *the Journal*.

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Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day for this issue is on the theme of long-term recovery. Here are some insights that were submitted in service

from fellow S.L.A.A. members. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #196 – May/June – Sponsor’s Words – What’s the best thing your sponsor has ever told you? Deadline for submissions is March 15, 2022. And #197 – July/Aug *ABM Issue* – Anorexia Withdrawal – What is anorexia withdrawal in your experience? What tools helped you deal with the pain of withdrawal from anorexia without retreating back into anorexia? Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2022. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

How do you keep your program fresh and growing?

Working with sponsees, talking to newcomers.

— SAM, LONDON

I have learned to really be in tune with my emotions and physical reactions to situations. Often times, I don't have the answers to these situations, so I have to bring it up to my sponsor, meetings and recovery friends. Surprisingly, the answers and their application are never quite what I expect! This keeps my program fresh and undeniably growing.

— KELLY-JOY J., MONTREAL

Give the newcomers my phone number and never stop going to meetings.

— LORA M.

Question of the day

When I finally surrendered, after two and a half years of not being serious about my program, I had an incredible peace come over me. It showed on my face and my demeanor, and within 30 days I was already being asked to sponsor. I remembered 12-step literature I had read which said that the best insurance we had against a relapse was to work with others. I accepted the sponsorship request joyfully. Fast forward, 15 years of sobriety later, and I am still joyfully sponsoring. Nothing keeps my program as fresh and alive as working with other women who are suffering, and desire to recover. Service is sobering!

— SUSAN G., HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA

Sponsoring! I have to stay on top of my program to be of service to others. Moreover, new challenges and situations come up with sponsees that I've not seen.

— VICTORIA V., CALIFORNIA

Dating, because when I date, I stay much closer to my meetings, sponsor, & outreach! I also read meditation books, attend workshops, attend other 12-step groups that may go hand in hand with my SLAA issues. Helping others helps the most.

— LAURA K.

Working with others is the key to growth. It refreshes my program every time I help someone else.

— KAITLYN A.

Question of the day

Keeping it simple by maintaining my bottom lines, doing service work, reaching out to others so I can stay in the center of the herd, meetings, prayer and meditation, the Steps, calling in and leaving messages on the Inspiration Line, sponsoring, being mindful of the triggers from my Higher Power that remind me who and what I am, and gratitude.

— CHRIS D.

Although I have finished my 12 Steps I still want to keep growing. Every day I learn something new from my sponsees as I see their hard work and we share experiences, strength and hope together which often leads to new understandings and revelations. I love hearing chairs and finding new readings and SLAA literature as the learning about the experience of other fellows is always uplifting and reminds me that I am not alone.

— MIRA, UK

I attend meetings regularly. I read recovery materials (like daily meditations). I have a goal of at least one meeting or phone call a day. I share about the power of 12-Step work with other people. I look for recovery principles in other things I read as well. I sponsor people. My program is folded into my life in so many ways. I love it.

— ANONYMOUS

Question of the day

My continued recovery status and sobriety is based upon my notion that I am never going to be done with this issue in my life. I have to think that I forever have a seat in the rooms. I am never cured. I keep it fresh for myself by mixing up my service. What I mean by that is some years I am very active taking meeting commitments, some years I focus on Intergroup level service, and then some years I focus on fellowship wide service positions. The key is to always be in some sort of service to the fellowship. I need to constantly hear from my fellows and to speak up myself or I get too comfortable with my recovery and for me that is a dangerous place to be. It is subtle, but the old character defects that I have turned over and work in partnership with my Higher Power on can creep back in on me. I have to also maintain that constant conscience contact with a power greater than myself or I get stagnant.

— SUZANNE, SAN ANTONIO

When I first came into the rooms, I was focused on getting what I wanted from the fellowship and then looking for the exit and being 'normal' again. Since getting caught and finally honest with God, others and myself, my sobriety has lengthened and my focus is not only on what I can get, but what I can give. I need it to be both. If I think only of myself my sobriety will stay thin and selfish. If, however, I imagine myself to be a recovery 'hero', rescuing others by being such an amazing helper, sponsor, intergroup rep, etc., then my sobriety and spirituality will warp and distort in other ways. I am in it for the long haul. I keep coming back to get what I continue to need, and I find that by sharing what I find with others I get to keep it myself.

— ANONYMOUS

Question of the day

Ten years into my second time in program, I still learn new tools to aid me in my recovery. In the time of COVID, I make outreach calls (to people all over the country). The plethora of online and phone meetings/workshops brings me in contact with fellow travelers I'd otherwise not meet and hear their experience, strength and hope. I have sponsored/am sponsoring women from different generations which gives additional depth to our relationships. Recently I have begun to attend anorexia meetings to understand it more, how it affects me and ways to change those behaviors.

— ROBIN, SACRAMENTO

I follow the five S's that are referred to in the SLAA Preamble as our primary resources: Sobriety, Service, Sponsorship & meetings, Steps & Spirituality. I do a weekly check-in with myself and ask myself what I am doing for my recovery this week in each of these areas.

Example: this is what I'm doing this week:

Sobriety: I am continuing to abstain from my bottom-line behaviors. Last month I celebrated five years of continuous sobriety. My bottom lines are:

1) no sex outside of a committed, monogamous, reciprocal relationship.

2) No contact with six different specific people.

3) No stalking of any kind- online, in person or third party. I don't go anywhere I'm not invited.

4) No snooping of my boyfriend's private stuff (cell phone, journal, laptop, iPad, top of closet, etc.). I also abstain from my middle line behaviors.

My midlines are:

1) no more than two alcoholic drinks on any one day.

Question of the day

2) No drinking caffeine past 4pm

3) no thinking about past, current or future romantic interests while driving

4) no purchasing of gifts for significant other or person of interest outside of guidelines in my dating/relationship plan

5) no researching ways to change my body (diets, plastic surgery, etc.) while I am alone.

I have top lines that I do that help me maintain my sobriety: daily (prayer, personal grooming, 15 minutes of movement, 45 minutes outside), weekly (meetings, visit a place of worship, go to the beach) and monthly (go on a weekend getaway, try something new, go to a restaurant).

This week I am committed to taking my dog to the dog park at least three times, serving at the meetings that I have commitments at, calling my sponsor, making a new recipe.

Service: I am meeting with all of my sponsees on Zoom this week. I have service commitments in two SLAA meetings and two conference service committee meetings.

Sponsorship: I sponsor 6 different people in SLAA. I have a Sponsor and a Service Sponsor. I also am a Service Sponsor and will meet with that sponsee on the phone this week.

Steps: I am walking my sponsees through the Steps and am currently doing it three different ways: the Anorexia Step Booklets, The Guide through the Steps & The Alternative Way through the Steps.

Spirituality: I experience my spirituality in all of the areas above as well in my spiritual practice. I commit to meditate for 45 minutes this week using my meditation tools: singing bowl, candle, incense, meditation pillow.

Using the five S's and making a commitment to use each one each week helps to keep my program fresh and growing!

— NORA B. CALIFORNIA

Staying Away From the Lies the Disease Tells Me



As soon as I find myself free from the obsession of my qualifier and getting victory over my disease, I start to feel like the program is not really that important in my life. This lie is one of my disease's favorites. It is ready to bring me back down into destructive relationships,

fantasies and obsessions that keep me from feeling enough and loved. One of the best ways I have found to keep my program fresh is to be of service. As long as I can connect with a newcomer or even someone who has been in the rooms for many years, but is struggling, I can connect to

the person I was when I came into the rooms and avoid the pain and suffering that my disease brings when it runs rampant through my life. Seeing the hope on a newcomer's face or hearing relief in another person in the fellowship's voice when they begin to hear that they are not alone is the best way I have found to keep my program alive and fresh.

As long as I can focus on helping others in the fellowship, my HP is working

on all of my problems. Even though I have been in the program for about three years, I still experience shame, loneliness, or frustration as I go through the hiccups of sober dating. But I find that each of these hurdles is lowered to a height I can clear much easier when I am getting back to service in the fellowship. Like the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous reminds me, working with newcomers is "a design for living that works in rough going".

— ANONYMOUS

An Invitation For You

Enlarge your recovery by allowing others to get the same benefit that you get from reading *the Journal*. It is a great way to carry S.L.A.A.'s message of hope and practice the Twelfth Step. The fellowship needs volunteers of all skills and levels of availability. Here's what you can do:

- Become a Journal Representative for your intergroup or home group, encouraging the use of *the Journal* as a source of topics, letting people know that there are Journals for sale, and ensuring that plenty of Journal subscription cards are always on the literature table.
- Visit a local organization that deals with sex and love addicts in your area, bringing copies of *the Journal* along with a few pamphlets. The institution may be a treatment facility, a judicial entity, a large recovery club that welcomes varied literature, or a hospital.

Contact info: <http://www.slaafws.org/contact/journaleditor>

Keeping My Program Fresh

When I read the theme for this journal issue, “How do you keep your program fresh and growing?” I felt compelled to write. Having actively worked the SLAA 12-Step program since August 2013, I’ve experienced a lot of progress, recovery, and hope.

The first step was, of course, to get sober. Three weeks into the program, I was able to get completely sober on two of my three very high-risk bottom-line behaviors. It took another year and a half to get sober on the third, but I did it. Working the 12 steps with a sponsor, I began to walk the path of recovery. I completed the 12 Steps in four years, and since then I continually revisit and work on each one.

A lot of what I do to keep my program fresh and growing stems from my Fourth Step inventory, which I’ve done thoroughly four times now from different angles. Each time I take my inventory, I can see more clearly the lifelong patterns and character defects

that kept me in suffering and addiction. I regularly review the patterns, identify new ones, and develop character assets. I’ve organized this article into some areas that I’ve consistently made efforts. Here goes.

Basic 12-Step Activities and Service

Sobriety is a priority for me. Without sobriety, I’m like someone drifting on a raft deeper into a shark-filled ocean. Two key ways I maintain sobriety is (1) consistently attending meetings, and (2) volunteering for service.

I’ve never stopped attending meetings on a weekly basis. To get sober, I first did 90-in-90, that is, 90 meetings in 90 days, twice in a row. Since my local area does not have daily meetings, I attended SLAA phone meetings, and those calls are still a core part of my recovery. I often step up to co-chair meetings. For almost 2 years, I even started and led a local in-

person anorexia-focused meeting. Currently, I attend one to two meetings a week that focus on 12-Step readings.

Service is the way I stay connected to fellows even when I want to isolate and hide, which are my gateway behaviors to acting out. My first sponsor encouraged me early in recovery to write articles in *the Journal* and participate in my local intergroup. I've represented my intergroup twice as a delegate to the SLAA Annual Business Conference/Meeting – once recently during the pandemic – and at one point was elected the Conference Anorexia Committee chair. I'm currently a volunteer on the SLAA Inspiration Line and help coordinate the monthly calendar. Doing service is my lifeline to other people in recovery. It keeps me accountable to others and motivated to stay sober.

Slogans and Affirmations

I realized early on in recovery that I deeply suffered from low self-worth. To help me, my sponsor encouraged me to say positive affirmations, but I resisted doing so for almost two years! I hated

them. I didn't believe in them. They didn't work for me, and on and on. Honestly, when I said the words: "I am lovable," I felt nauseous and wanted to gag. Slowly, I understood that my resistance wasn't because affirmations are hokey but because my self-loathing was so strong.

To help me, after each weekly phone call, my sponsor would leave me with the words: "Be kind and gentle with yourself." I still have the original piece of paper on which I first wrote down that phrase, and I keep it visible on my spiritual altar.

Often, to get me through the day, I rely heavily on these SLAA slogans:

I am not alone

Progress not perfection

Sobriety is priority

Stay on my side of the street

Let go or be dragged

Do the next right thing

One slogan I heard at a meeting I made into a sign that hangs on the wall when I enter my house: "Welcome to reality!" and then below that "Lower your expectations." Ha ha! It makes me laugh each time I see it. I also create my own slogans. Here's a recent

one: "I just need to win right now. I just need to win in this moment."

Higher Power

I've had a consistent spiritual practice for almost 40 years. I encountered it while I was in college, and my practice along with the people in my spiritual organization literally saved my life. I'm alive today because of it. Having said that, after I completed Step Three in SLAA, I felt like I really learned how to pray.

Up until I got into recovery, my spiritual practice was almost like a survival tool. I prayed desperately to get through the day with a modicum of happiness or at least equanimity. But conscious faith came with recovery. When I began to pray with a new and heightened awareness of my own value, all the barriers between me and my Higher Power were stripped away. I could open my heart and truly partner with my Higher Power. Each day, each month, each year my relationship with my Higher Power has only gotten stronger and deeper. And for that I am very grateful. In fact, I have learned to live with appreciation, and every day I

actively acknowledge things for which I am grateful.

Intimacy and Social Skills

One of the patterns I've struggled with is social anorexia. I was a highly sensitive child and unfortunately experienced trauma and family dysfunction at an early age. Unlike my sisters, because of these problems, I found it difficult to make and keep friends. Several decades later, when I was diagnosed with PTSD and received appropriate treatment, I learned how my trauma symptoms led to severe isolation in adulthood. But as a teenager I had no idea that my emotional reactivity and distrust of people's intentions were two characteristics that pushed people away and made it hard to develop intimacy.

I was a lonely adult. I experienced long bouts of celibacy, interspersed with a few romantic relationships and intense sexual encounters with strangers. I had a strong fantasy life and spent many evening hours in a dissociated state. In my early 40s I married someone very wrong for me, and only realized in hindsight that I acted against the advice of people around me because I was desperate not to

be an “old maid.” My husband and I divorced six and a half years later. And then my hardcore sex addiction kicked in. Eleven months later, when I told my therapist what I was up to, she informed me I had to attend SLAA meetings or she could not work with me anymore because she could not keep me safe. The rest is history.

My first breakthrough with isolation was thanks to the SLAA Anorexia 1-2-3 pamphlet, which taught me how to identify the ways I avoided life. It took a few years, but I have significantly recovered from emotional and social anorexia.

Today, I am focused on cultivating healthy friendships, building a fun social life, and dating. For the last few years, I’ve taught myself – through reading, attending workshops, discussions with my new sponsor, and other sources – what it means to be a good friend. I work on this every day. For example, I’ve developed:

- the ability to stay present and truly listen when someone is talking

- the confidence to disclose information about myself and the wisdom to know how much

to share

- the self-awareness to pause and respond calmly if I don’t like something a friend says instead of overreacting and lashing out.

I’ve also been learning basic social skills such as how to engage in small talk, how to strike up a conversation with someone at a social event, and what to do when there’s an uncomfortable silence in the conversation.

I can proudly say that I now have two good friends in my life whom I talk to regularly and with whom I have mutual trust and caring. I also have three newer friends with whom I do social things. I’m a member of a folk singing group and a theatre group. For me, this is a huge milestone.

Regarding dating – sigh! About four years ago, I wrote a dating plan with my sponsor. I started dating about six months before the pandemic. After a few months, I parted ways with the first man I dated. It ended a bit sooner with the second man I dated.

Even though neither relationship worked out, we parted amicably and I learned a lot. Since the pandemic started almost two years ago, it’s been hard to meet people.

Dating websites did not work for me. For now, I'm practicing patience.

Self-Care

The biggest challenge for me has been to let go of the shame and guilt of my past, to embrace self-acceptance, and to build self-confidence.

Shame has been the single most pervasive negative influence on my well-being. I believe it's responsible for several of my biggest character defects, including self-denigration, resentment, and isolation.

Because I had such low self-esteem, self-care was not high on my list of top-line behaviors.

Consequently, knowing the best ways to take care of myself has been an ongoing effort, but the effort has paid off. I really take good care of myself now because I believe I'm worth it. Below are just a few examples of how I do it.

Emotionally and psychologically, to address my PTSD, I worked with a trauma therapist using a method called somatic experiencing to allow myself to experience my

feelings in my body. It took many years, and now I'm pretty good at it. I have the courage to ask myself throughout the day what I am feeling emotionally.

I have good tools, for example, to release anger and soothe despair. Also, for the first time in almost 40 years, I no longer see a therapist. I have acquired enough tools, friends, and resources to give myself the support I need to stay balanced.

In 2020, I learned a powerful journal method from an expressive arts therapist to access my inner child and deepest yearnings. I reconnected with a long-lost part of me, which is a story for another time. The most exciting outcome was that I rediscovered my passion for the theatre and have begun playwriting again.

Physically, I tend to be a couch potato and have looked askance at "working out." Because of this tendency, when I was acting out in my addiction, I could spend hours on end at the computer in adult chat rooms. As I recovered from PTSD and began to value my life more, I

realized I had to include regular fitness in self-care.

Two years ago, my doctor told me that, based on my lab results, I needed to improve my heart rate, and he suggested daily vigorous exercise. I laughed and said that wasn't going to happen, and asked him what was the minimum amount I could get away with. I then explored and identified an exercise I'd be willing to do regularly. I now swim about 45 minutes three to four times a week, and walk weekly with a friend. That's a lot for me! I also improved my nutrition. Today my heart rate is great, I've finally shed some pounds, and my body and

mind feel a lot better for it.

I have come so far since I went to my first SLAA meeting more than eight years ago. I won't pretend that everything is hunky dory. Certain areas like relationships still have me stymied at times, and it's a struggle to maintain hope that I will experience in this lifetime a healthy, happy intimate romantic relationship. And yet, as my sponsor points out, I have made so much progress. I feel a level of happiness and inner freedom beyond my expectations. It's only a matter of time before other "miracles" happen.

—ANONYMOUS, AZ



The Journal is now
available in
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format.

Get them at:

<http://store.slaafws.org/prod/JAU>

The 11th Step in Motion



The trip out to an SLAA meeting ... was a beginning. It started a process that would change the way I viewed my place in the world, the way I looked at relationships, and the way I felt about myself.” (P. 168 Basic Text)

Thanks to working on the Steps with a sponsor, I’ve come a long way since my first trip to an SLAA meeting five years ago. But it’s still important to keep my program refreshed.

Often, I hear people share in meetings that one of their topline is spending time

outdoors, so I've adopted that also. It helps me keep growing in the process of my recovery. When I walk in the parkland near my apartment, the oxygen-rich air literally freshens my brain. In the silent wisdom of the trees, I pour out my heart to God – the squirrels don't care if I'm babbling away!

What continues to surprise me is how these morning walks lead to a process of greater understanding. In the mornings, I have seen eagles, hawks, raccoons, day-old fawns with their spotted coats and wobbly legs – I so relate! -- rabbits, possums and, once, an owl winging into the dark forest. Often those animals seem to bear messages from my Higher Power. To trust, play, rest and prepare for the next season of growth.

Sometimes insights come on the trail. Other times, fresh perspective on a problem that's been troubling me, sometimes for weeks, emerges later in the

day. It's as though it takes a few hours for these 11th-step insights to filter into my brain.

Sometimes growth in recovery is uncomfortable. When I face a difficult situation, often my kneejerk reaction is to revert to manipulating people or fantasizing about being rescued. But reaching out to others in this fellowship gets me out of my slippery middle-line emotions and back to using my toplines, such as being in nature.

When I see Orion's Belt arcing over me or trace the Little Dipper's lines to the North Star, it feels like conscious contact with a God who can hold both the Milky Way and me in His hands. It freshens my perspective. Through SLAA, to my infinite gratitude, God has guided me to a new way to be in the world.

— SARAH S.

The S.L.A.A. Basic Text eBook
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My Willingness to Grow Through Times of Pain

Wouldn't it be nice if ongoing recovery was filled with only sunshine and rainbows? Not only is this unrealistic, but it would also interfere with necessary growth. Pain motivates and even creates the possibility of a leap forward in the recovery process.

I believe this to be true as I sit with a heart filled with grief. Just a few days ago, I packed my things and began living on my own, away from my wife. This marriage, my second, began in recovery and was one of the many gifts I've received during my 16 years in SLAA.

My first marriage was rocky from start to finish. We were two incompatible people who struggled to get along. Yet, I believed I couldn't live without her. Being with her, I thought, made me whole, happy, and capable of living a good life. Instead, I was broken, angry, and living a lie.

SLAA recovery put me on a path to practice our principles

in all areas of my life, including when I began dating a year after my first marriage ended. Rather than compromise my needs and values again, I took time to get very clear on what I needed and wanted in a relationship. I put these standards front and center as I began dating, refusing to settle for someone just because she liked me. The result was finding the woman I'm currently married to for the past nine years.

What went wrong in the marriage? A therapist summed it up perfectly when he told me that my wife and I had "developed negative adaptations to one another's stuff."

I love my wife and I know she loves me. And there's work to do. Each of us has stuff, our personal issues, to work through. If we're to remain together, we'll need to heal our hurts and find a way to stop hurting one another.

The hardest word to write in that last sentence was "if."

IF we are to remain married. It pains me to write that, but that is the reality. Our marriage may or may not work. I don't want to say that, but it's important that I do.

As a sex and love addict, I knew when I began dating that I had to commit to being okay no matter how my relationships turned out.

Anything less than that would end up with the compromise that was my first marriage.

How am I getting through this painful time and the uncertainty about the future? By doing the next right thing.

That includes going to more meetings, staying close to my friends and support system inside and outside the program.

I'm crying when needed, taking lots of deep breathes, and using the tools I've gained along the way.

I believe it's in using these tools that creates the opportunity for significant growth. Just this morning seemed to be one such moment.

Feeling overwhelmed with sadness, I used the tools of prayer and meditation. As I sat, I felt led to seek out a meditation on grief. Finding one on an app I use to

meditate each day, I picked a comfortable place to sit and began the meditation.

The speaker invited me to picture the grief. An image of a little boy came to mind. As the meditation progressed, I was asked to open my heart to this image of my grief, offering it whatever it needs.

Turns out, it needed a hug and words of comfort. The words that came to mind surprised me.

With tears streaming down my face, I told that little boy he was going to be okay. That I accept him.

That I will always be here for him. This I believe is the possibility for growth—that I committed to always be here for me.

All of me, including the painful, wounded parts of myself.

This is an important commitment for an addict who spent much of his life wanting to escape and make the uncomfortable feelings go away.

When I acted out to numb unpleasant emotions, I was abandoning myself, believing that I couldn't handle the pain. This was a betrayal. I was turning away from the most important person in my life—me.

Am I scared? Yes. Big time. Am I hurting? Very much so. And I know that the hurt means I'm feeling my feelings instead of trying to make them go away.

I'm incredibly grateful and fortunate to have SLAA to see

me through this time in my life. My Higher Power gave me our program and I in turn get to give myself a better life every day I choose to follow this path. I deserve that and so does that little boy.

— SCOTT W., TAMPA BAY, FL

I Stay Because...

After 22 years in the program and 17 years sobriety from my bottom-line behaviors I am glad that I not only stay for my sobriety but continue to benefit from associating with old-timers. On my own I cannot trust myself. Watching and listening to old-timers using the spiritual principles of 12-Step recovery inspires me to stay.

Recently I attend at least two to three service committees weekly with old-time members who express gratitude for sobriety and

recovery in very kind and generous ways. One of these old-timers has been in the program 36 years and is my sponsor.

Another was my Board mentor when I was on the Board in 2008. Yet another was a Board member when I was a Delegate in 2003 and 2005 and I continue to follow in her footsteps not only as a past Board member but now as past editor of the F.W.S. Newsletter, past ABM Record Keeper and service on the 50th Anniversary Basic Text Subcommittee (a long term

project). Each one of these members were there before I came in January 2000 and continue to guide me in unexpected ways whether it is stepping up to chair or facilitate a subcommittee, take minutes or offer their views in a group conscience. I listen and know I can freely give my opinion as well as change my view in round robin discussions. There is something magical about this spiritual process (Tradition 2) that takes away any need to be right or be the voice that matters.

Trusting the process and showing up for service and recovery keeps me sober and is a way of life now. At 74 I started dating last year and found myself caught up in some old patterns of euphoric recall and fantasizing. Even

though I own my anorexia and try not to avoid/dismiss relationships out of fear, I also saw my sex and love addict resurface with a past long-time partner that I had not seen in 24 years.

At first, I politely replied to a birthday email but then my sponsor suggested I open myself to something more. Before I knew it, I was off and running especially in fantasy. I had not seen fantasy as part of my sex and love addiction. With new draft literature and meetings specifically about fantasy I can identify this as another example of my sex and love addiction.

That is why I stay... because no matter how old or how long I am here without this program of recovery and the long-time members I am not sober, sane or safe on my own or alone.

—MONTREAL, JANUARY 2022

A Relationship With a Power Greater Than Myself

Hello, my name is Shawn. I'm a sex and love addict in Los Angeles, California. I first came into SLAA in 2006. I suppose my qualification begins way before I even knew that SLAA existed. I come from a severely dysfunctional family and a traumatic childhood. I watched my parents cheat on each other and there was domestic violence.

And I just didn't feel safe as a kid. And long before there was a pattern of sex and love addiction, I didn't even know something healthy looked like. And I was also molested by my babysitter from the age of five to 11.

So, when I was a kid, I just felt dirty, and I would look at myself in class pictures with other kids, and just immediately recognize myself as other than or not a part of, but mostly like I had a secret or that I was just dirty.

And the apex of it is that I enjoyed it after a while. So,

there was this secretive, self-loathing feeling like I'm wrong and I'm doing something that's wrong that also feels good. And so, there's just been guilt and shame attached in my maturation process when I didn't realize what was going on. If sex was involved, there was guilt and shame. And if there was some sort of attraction, it was dirty.

And so very early on, I just develop a pattern of no structure, just chaos and all of these feelings and not knowing what to do. I never felt safe and wanting to pacify all of that. So, I'm the youngest of three boys, and never got the birds and the bees talk.

There was never any sort of instruction about what to do or what not to do outside of the streets of North New Jersey, which is where I'm from. I just got instruction around this stuff, third, fourth, and sixth party from people who were just as misguided as I was. I did, however, find out later

that my oldest brother actually did get a birds and the bees talk from my dad and I guess my dad left it up to my brother to tell us.

And I think the coolest thing my oldest brother ever told me was to always stop when someone says no. I'll never forget that. It's probably one of the first things that I learned.

And so, I always had a respect for someone else's space or I was just afraid to do anything that wasn't okay with somebody else.

But my brother also in the same breath told me to make as many dates as possible, and just go on one. So just from a very early age I had this really confused understanding of what was right and wrong, good or bad when it came to sex and love.

And in 1989, when I was about 20 years old, my mom killed my father. And there was a murder trial that lasted a year and a half. They had been cheating on each other. My mom cheated on my dad. My dad cheated on my mom. There was always someone's name being thrown around. Infidelity. My mom could not deal with my father seeing

another woman openly and her best solution was to run him over with a car. And so, for me, my qualification is definitely rooted in my childhood, it's rooted in brokenness in my family and multi-generational family dysfunction.

And also, in a way, it's a blessing to be in the program, understanding that the disease of sex and love addiction is deadly. People wind up in the ground, behind bars or in mental institutions.

So, I have a very healthy respect for it. So, I went out into the world and learned that if I shared my trauma about my family, the trial, and murder, people would respond. I would just use whatever I could to connect with people. So, trauma bonding is in my history of how I get attention and seek love.

My mom also left for two years when I was 12 so I have an abnormal reaction to abandonment that doesn't occur in normal people. I have also been in other 12-Step programs specifically AA since 2004. I liken this disease of sex and love addiction to the allergy of alcoholism. I understand my sex and love

addiction and recovery to really be a reflection of an allergy that I have. I have an allergic reaction that doesn't occur in normal people, the same way an alcoholic has an allergic reaction to drinking alcohol that doesn't occur in normal people.

So, I have an allergic reaction to being broken up with. I have an allergic reaction to someone expressing interest in me. I have an allergic reaction to having sex, or to *not* having sex, being single or alone that doesn't occur for normal people.

And there's a lack of proportion in my responses to most things. And I like to recognize this in my recovery, so that I don't come into SLAA and ever forget that even though after periods of recovery in SLAA, where my life gets serene and some structure gets built, that it's ever going to be okay for me to go out on my own and try some controlled dating, some controlled relationships, or some controlled sex. The gift of this program is that there's structure in here and I qualify for it. Whether I'm on my bottom lines or in my top lines, or however long stretches of recovery that I have. I truly see

myself as a sex and love addict and therefore, in need of attending meetings, of getting service commitments, and most of all of taking other people through the Steps.

I recognize a tendency to get sober in SLAA and think that everything's okay now and leave the program. I've done that. And now I stick around, if anything, to take other people through the Steps, and just be an example and of service to other members who are new. Long term recovery in SLAA can be an attractive thing to people who are new. I think it's very helpful to people who first get sober to see people who have been doing it for a long time.

I first got into SLAA in 2006. I was in a relationship, and it was toxic as heck. And I didn't know how to get out of it. The person I was with at the time, whenever I would say, "Okay, I'm leaving," she would say, "I'm going to kill myself." And I would stay. A friend of mine was like, "You need to go to SLAA." So, I went. And it was in a meeting where someone said to me, "You know, Shawn, threatening suicide is a threat of violence." I never heard anything like that.

That's not a slogan in SLAA and was very specific to me. I can't speak to suicide or anyone who's had that experience but for me at that time hearing that from another caring member was enlightening to me and invigorating to me and it kind of energized me to the program because I saw that there was an immediate solution in going into SLAA.

For me, there was an immediate power in my situation being normalized. I'm not alone. I was listening to other men and women talk about things I'd never heard people talk about, and then I went to fellowship and connected with other people enough that I was able to get this suggestion from another member.

And with that I was able to actually leave the relationship the next time she said that. And I owe that to SLAA. I thought, *okay, If I can get that kind of solution of how to navigate a relationship in one meeting*, it was a very attractive quality for me to keep coming back. Which I did.

I got a sponsor. I got on my bottom lines. I became like an SLAA little soldier. My sponsor was very rigid at the time, and I don't really respond to that

today. Me and the sponsor with whom I work today, we're not rigid at all. We're more intuitive and we have signposts and goals in place.

In my recovery, I try not to promote any sort of shame for myself if I'm not on top of a bottom line, or if there's any kind of ebb and flow from my program at the time.

When I first got into program my sponsor was like, "Okay, let's create your bottom lines and so try not flirting for 30 days. Try having no contact with women for 30 days," and masturbation or all these things.

I just really stuck to it and took it seriously. And my life began to change. I became aware of these patterns and the peripheral behaviors of romantic intrigue and just the whole language of SLAA. My whole life began to change, just by having SLAA-colored glasses.

And I got better. And with the bottom-line behavior -- I went through withdrawals as well. People began to notice. And I became more of an attractive person.

People wanted to hear what I had to say or asked me to come and speak. I got to speak often. I appreciate this opportunity to speak for *the*

Journal magazine. I just really see SLAA as a beacon of light for our culture, where usually don't get to learn how to date. Our culture is just not about getting a license or registration to learn how to enter relationships and develop intimacy with people. So, it's really an awesome fellowship. I'm really grateful to be a part of it.

At this stage in my recovery, I see that any 12-Step program, whatever it is, the problem isn't sex, romance, intimacy, or relationships. When I first got into SLAA, I thought, I have a problem with sex; I have a problem with relationships. I've come to understand that sex and romance is not my problem.

The big book of AA says that a lack of power -- that is our dilemma. The 12-Step program is designed to give me a relationship with a power greater than myself. And for me, I had a sponsor who said, "Before you start praying, find out what it is that you are already praying to. Where do you go for fulfillment?"

So, that for me is asking myself, "What am I already worshipping?" Anytime I was in a relationship with anyone

that was toxic it was because I didn't have a relationship with God.

And so today, my recovery is very much about recognizing what I am already praying to, what I find precious. And I'll share this last thing is that I use the story of the Lord of the Rings as a template for how I recognize my Higher Power.

In that story, everyone from the little people to the giants, the good people to the evil people all wanted this one object that they called precious. Precious was that one thing that they thought if I get it, I'm going to be okay. If I lose it, I'm not going to be okay.

And to me, that represents God. What is it in my life that I think if I get it, I'm going to be okay: relationship, a job, money, property, prestige? Or if I lose it, that I'm not going to be okay.

And in that story, everyone who got the precious, once they got it, it turned them inside out.

And so today I understand that I need to recognize the idols in my life and smash them. I need to look at what I find precious. And sometimes it can be a relationship, right,

and sometimes it can even be a 12-Step program, where I go to a meeting to get something. The programs are also about being of service. If I have a relationship with a Higher Power, then I no longer use the program to sort of get high. I'm no longer using the program to get a dating plan so I can go out and "get."

If I have a relationship with a Higher Power, instead of going on a date, I'm sent on a date. Instead of getting a relationship I'm sent to a relationship.

If I continue to go through my life, find the things that I have considered precious idols in my life, and smash them, and continuously develop a relationship with a Higher Power, then I have an opportunity to be of service. And I will stop going to people, places, and things for the warmth that I can really only

get from meditating and praying to the fire of my Higher Power. I have service commitments at meetings. And to the best of my ability, I try to constantly not go to my sponsor to solve my problems and not go to meetings to solve my problems and not go to people and relationships to solve my problems, but to develop a relationship with my Higher Power, so that I can then be a sponsee, be of service, be a fellow or be a parent or a son.

I'm just very grateful that there's structure. For anyone who's reading this today who's new, I hope that you can get the same thing that I've gotten in this program which is relationships that are unique and priceless and structure in an otherwise chaotic life.

Thank you.

— SHAWN, LOS ANGELES

Long-term Recovery: A Conversation

The following is a transcribed and edited conversation between a sponsor and sponsee about long term recovery.

M: I think the thing that really helped me to keep my program fresh and growing was doing service.

L: I was thinking about the fact that we've stayed in SLAA so long. I've been here 24 years and you've been here 21 years.

M: Yeah.

L: And it's like, even though our minds or our addiction might have told us to get out of SLAA or that we should stop going to meetings or stop being of so much service, we still did a lot of service.

M: Yeah. Yeah. We definitely did.

L: I mean it's been really difficult in the pandemic to keep my program fresh and growing.

M: No kidding.

L: But I stayed and I went to the Malibu SLAA retreat this year which was beautiful and it re-energized and centered me at Thanksgiving when lots of people lose their minds (laughter). You know, I took on new sponsees during the

pandemic. The sober dating questions for discussion has just like taken off in the pandemic like people aren't really dating, the way they used to, you know.

M: Which is ironic, I guess people since they don't have as many options to date they have more time to think about stuff and work on themselves you know.

L: Yeah. It's become more about a relationship with a Higher Power and self. That's what those meetings are for me because I'm not dating, just offering support to those that are.

M: Yeah. So, I think at various times in my recovery, there have been different activities or tools that I've used to continue to grow in the program. There was a time when I was doing a lot of intergroup and conference service work that kept me very engaged in both SLAA, and my own recovery.

L: Well, when I think of that, I remember that you became a delegate for the ABM before I even heard of the ABM.

M: Yeah. I did that. I was also starting meetings. I

started some morning meetings in Venice (CA).

L: And you started the phone group.

M: Yeah, I did. One of the ways that I was able to feel like my recovery was fresh or new was by taking on different service positions, not just the same ones because I had sponsored for many years before that. Another thing that I can say that has been very helpful is to continue my relationship with my sponsor. And that has kept me engaged and growing.

L: Yeah. Taking on different service positions -- I wanted to talk more about that because I remember I was the literature person for my intergroup. I sold literature for Los Angeles intergroup for eight years and I held on to that position. And I can see where outside, people were like, "Time to give it up." I just remember going to one intergroup and the reps saying we need new people in this position, we need rotation of service. And I wasn't paying attention to that rotation of service, you know, I was holding on to it, like let go or be dragged kind of holding on. They in a way pushed me out of that position. They said I was doing a great job but needed to respect rotation of

service. And that gave others the chance to engage in the program through service work. And I took on other positions that interested me and it freed up time to do more service work on the meeting level. I wasn't allowed to get bored, I had to learn something new and that was refreshing.

M: I had a very short stint as a literature person, and I wasn't any good at it. So, yeah, I mean, sometimes you find that certain service positions just are not ones that you are good at, or feel you have the skills to do. And then sometimes you take on a service position that you think you might not be able to do and find out that by following suggestions of the former service person that you really can do that. And just like with delegate I really didn't even know what it was. When people asked me to do service I said, "Yes" because I knew that was what I needed to do for me. And that led me to a lot of other service opportunities, very different ones at the meeting level, local level, and conference level. There were some that I believe I did well at and some, I believe, I did not do so great at. Most everything I did was new to me. It was all new. I didn't know what I was

really saying, “Yes” to sometimes. But I was willing to try and learn. And it made me grow tremendously as a person.

It raised my self-esteem because it showed me that my Higher Power can use me. Even when I may not have felt I was doing my best work, it still gave me a sense of belonging because service commitments got me to meetings. Going to meetings got me interacting with other SLAA members. Interacting with other SLAA members got me to stay in SLAA, stay in contact with my Higher Power and to continue to learn from others. So, sometimes the service position itself is not necessarily the best one to help us grow, especially one that we've been doing for many years, and know inside and out. In my opinion what really makes us grow is the contact that it creates between us and other members and the fact that we are being responsible and doing that service commitment.

L: I think that's why rotation of service is brilliant because that does keep it fresh and that makes sure that we stick to the tradition where there are no leaders that govern.

M: Right. And I think that is the point of it, it's not the position, it's the engagement with the other people that the service positions create. When I had service positions in meetings, hey you know, I was more likely to attend meetings, isn't that interesting? You know, what an interesting coincidence.

So, the other thing that helped me to grow, has been to continue to do written work. A lot of literature has been newly published since I've become a member. And I've benefited by using the old and new literature as a tool of recovery, especially writing assignments and most recently answering questions in a pamphlet and reading them to my sponsor. The way I read answers to questions 20 years ago. What worked then is what works now. But it's only that now I have personal experience to say these things have worked in my life.

Once we're done with written work on Steps One through Twelve, keeping in mind that Step Ten can still be continuous, there are other questions we can answer about ourselves and areas of our life that the literature can provide. And I believe that continuing to do written work, not just a

written Tenth Step but continuing to write about our addiction through the use of the newer literature -- I think that that's incredibly valuable. It's another way to stay fresh instead of just starting the Steps all over again. The literature can help us look at our disease from a different point of view.

There are other books like the one I'm going through with you right now, ("Sober Dating Questions for Discussion") that asks us to look at ourselves outside of the context of formal Step work, but it has acted very much like Step work to me.

L: When we do that in the Tuesday night meetings we sit and write for 10 minutes and then we read our writing to everyone, it's like, it kind of directs the share. I've heard a person in that meeting say that it helps us to center ourselves and to stay solution focused.

I wanted to go back to what you had said about continuing your relationship with your sponsor. I wanted to talk about that because we have been together since the very beginning when I was acting out and I was told by my sponsor I had to drop you because I was acting out. And you said, "No way. You're staying with me." And thank

God you said that because I never would have sat with you every week and read the Big Book of AA. And in the Big Book of AA, I found my story. Yeah, I saw that I was truly a sex and love addict and that was my Step One. And we've been through, weddings, surgeries, the death of a spouse. And we reconnected because of a pandemic and Zoom.

M: And I think we also reconnected because Chris passed away and it became more obvious to me how much I needed SLAA, how vulnerable I was to my addiction. I'm always vulnerable to my addiction, but I became more aware. And I knew that if I wanted to engage in another relationship that I wanted to do it differently. I had gained wisdom from hindsight and seeing mistakes. I'm going to call it the mistakes that I made when I first started dating my spouse, and you know dating plans and people talking about their dating plans now is very different for me than years ago. I don't know that it was as much of a focus 20 years ago in meetings on sober dating. I remember a lot of my meetings early on were about not acting out. And a lot of us were new at the same time. And so, we were

in SLAA on the same page and that made me feel part of, but it also meant that I didn't have very many people I could look to who could point the way in sober dating. So, looking back, I mean, no, I didn't act out on my bottom lines when I started dating my spouse. But I can see some mistakes that I made. And I'm also a different person than I was years ago and even after my spouse died. I've become a different person. And so, I think I'd like to approach dating from a new point of view, to respect the fact that I'm a new person, you know, and also to address anorexia, because part of my anorexic behavior is living in the past not living in the present. And when one is grieving, it's easy. Maybe it's necessary in the grieving process to look to the past, but as a recovering addict anorexic, I need to be in the present, and having a current sober dating plan that addresses my needs today is one of the best ways I can be present.

L: And I think our relationship with that has helped me keep it fresh and growing you know because I've learned so much from you by hearing your experience with grief, and with, you know, the steps and, I mean, all along.

You kind of showed me how to do SLAA. I think by our interaction. Yeah, that helped both of us grow.

M: Oh yeah, absolutely. You're the one that got me into SLAA.

L: And you're the one who got me to do the questions. And that led to the Step Questions Workbook.

M: And you're the one that didn't drop me when I acted out and persevered with me.

L: You didn't drop me when I acted out.

M: All right. How many more back and forths do we want to do? And you're the one that wrote the sober dating book that now is helping me get a dating plan like doing you know we can, we have 20 years doing this, we can do this for 20 more.

L: (Laughter) I would like to.

M: Yeah. Well, I'm not trying to deflect the sincere, either compliments or memories you have of me and how I showed up for you. I think because it just you've said in the past that doing this Step work with me and being of service did help you to get sober. And I can definitely say that it's kept me engaged in my recovery. I started being of service within the first two

months of regularly attending SLAA because my local meeting needed I think a treasurer, or something. Coming in from AA I understood, intellectually anyway, that commitments were important to getting and staying sober. Our service together is just another example of how it's a "we" program and another example of how we learn from one another.

And I think what also kept things fresh was I started having women friends in recovery, which was an amazing growth for me. Being willing to be part of a group of women that were growing together was a risk that I took that ended up being an incredibly beautiful experience. And I wondered how I got through SLAA without this before. But I ended up kind of distancing myself from newer people. I understand, I wanted to cultivate these relationships and friendships, but I think by segregating myself out and really focusing on a group instead of SLAA as a whole I started to lose out.

L: I was thinking of your relationship with these women as something that helped your

program grow because you were all like generations of sponsors that would meet in Texas.

M: Yeah.

L: I feel like fellowship has done that for me. I mean, remember way back when, what was it, 18 years ago when we used to go to holiday parties, pot lucks, and dance parties in SLAA? Yeah, I mean that kept me connected for a number of years. And my spouse is also in SLAA, we would always go to dinner after meetings, we would fellowship with other sober SLAA members.

M: The meeting after the meeting.

L: Yeah, we have this little group that are still together. We all went to the retreat in Malibu together. And we still, even though we're very far stretched out sometimes we have to drive an hour or two to see each other, we all meet and have dinner together. As soon as things started easing in the pandemic we all met at an SLAA member's house. It's the best.

OK. I think this is a good place to stop the recording. Thanks for your service!

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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