

Essay

September 2007



*There is a Solution * Escape from the Web
2007 International Convention*

A quarterly publication of Sexaholics Anonymous

The Twelve Steps of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. We admitted that we were powerless over lust—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to sexaholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Essay is the quarterly publication of Sexaholics Anonymous

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Sexaholics Anonymous

is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober. There are no dues or fees for SA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. SA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sexually sober and help others to achieve sexual sobriety.

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Sexaholics Anonymous is a recovery program based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous and received permission from AA to use its Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions in 1979.

Internet Addiction

There is a Solution	2
Escape from the Web	6

Member Stories

We Agnostics	10
Single and Happy? You Bet!	14

2007 International Convention

Gifts of Love	16
Working on “the Lust”	17
One Big Meeting	18

Member Shares

Making the Real Connection	20
A Painful Lesson	21
Father Figure	23
Cancer of the Soul	24
The Sexaholic is an Example of Self-Will Run Riot	25
Surrendering Lust	27

Working the Steps

Step One: I am Powerless Over Lust	28
Step Nine: Made Direct Amends Wherever Possible	31

Inside Out by Roy K.

Sobriety and the Sea of Relativism	32
------------------------------------	----

Report from the General Delegates

	34
--	----

Calendar of Events

	36
--	----

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There is a Solution

It's after 2 am. I need to get up and ready for work at 5 am, just three short hours away. I must try to get some sleep. But what if there's an opportunity for a connection with another lonely heart out there? What if I'm missing something? The East Coast should be waking up by now.

I went to bed after midnight but got up again a few minutes later because I could not sleep. I might miss something. This insatiable hunger for connection with others in anonymous sex has fueled a fire I cannot quell. Perhaps she emailed a reply. I'd better check my email. I get up, log on, and check my email. "Nothing. Damn." I think, "Well while I'm here perhaps I can go into another chat room. This time I'll leave my name ambiguous. I can chat with lesbians that way. I'll be a 32-year-old woman. Or I can enter a gay men's room. There I'll be a 48-year-old man looking for someone



to be his subordinate."

I try to grab two hours of sleep before I go to work in the morning. Aghh! This makes for a long day. "I will NOT be doing this again tonight I assure you," I think to myself. "NO WAY."

I get home and the first thing I do is head right to the computer. "Come on," I think to myself "hurry up and boot." Eagerly I check my email. There's one from a woman I had cyber sex with. I told her I was a young man just divorced and quite lonely. I can weasel my way into women's hearts and draw

their strength from them. But wait, no, I'm wrong. This whole thing is wrong. I feel ashamed of what I'm doing. What did she say? She thanks me for what we shared last night. She could not sleep either thinking of me all day. Yea, yea, yea. Did she send another X-rated picture? That is all I want to know. I see a picture of her and her kids. I tell myself that I don't need this. I am not going to chat with her anymore. Well, no more email. I promised myself I would not go to chat rooms today. I want to get to sleep early.

While I'm here, I may as well check into another chat room. Maybe she's there again. Her husband is out of town. He is not supposed to be back until the end of the week. Damn, too bad she's on the other side of the country.

It's 11 pm again; way past my bedtime. I'm so exhausted I can hardly type. I can't let go of the keyboard. I should eat something. I've been sitting here for more than six hours straight. I had things I needed to do. Perhaps they can wait until tomorrow. They will have to wait. Tomorrow I am not even turning on the computer. I have too many things I need to do.

Damn, it's going to be another long day at work. I'm forgetting things and starting to be a little careless. There are dark circles under my eyes. At least I shaved this time and took a shower. This is what the disease looks like. Unshaven, unkempt, looking a like a refugee from Auschwitz.

Well, I'm glad this day is over. I have to do laundry, shopping, and some general errands. When I'm pumped up on cyber sex and Internet addiction, every woman looks like she could be the one I just had cyber sex with. I stare at them all with a deep-seated lust in my heart. I am invisible or so low that when they look at me they look over my head. I see that woman in jeans. She is

overweight but not unattractive. I see that older woman crossing the street walking her dogs. Nice, I say to myself. I am hopelessly lost in fantasy. I can't wait to go home again and turn the computer on and act out this fantasy life.

"No, that is not right," I say to myself, "not tonight." I finished half the things I meant to do and rush home to get online. Let me see what women of this ethnic persuasion look like. How about this other ethnic group?

I started my sexaholic journey before I can remember. I grew up in a war zone with two alcoholic parents and a raging sexaholic father. I was probably destined for a life of sexaholism. I started with men's magazines I found around the house. As technologies grew, my addiction drank them in. I started with 8mm movies, then progressed to Super 8. Beta was next, then VHS. When the computer was available I was more than ready for that too. I immediately started into chat rooms, images, and setting up meetings with people.

I always knew I was different from most people. How could I not have been, given my family of origin? I met a woman on the Internet and had an affair with her. She became pregnant and was adamant about keeping the baby. I didn't want to have a child with this woman. I prayed the sexaholic's prayer: "God

if you get me out of this I'll be good." God allowed the woman to miscarry. I continued my sexaholic ways.

I was changing my life and trying to start over when I got a call from a woman I was chatting with. My girlfriend at the time (now my wife) listened to the phone message and wanted to know who it was. I told her it must be a wrong number. I was lying and I am not very good at that. The betrayal and denial continued. It was a constant source of argument. I, having no boundaries, thought that cyber sex was nothing more than mutual masturbation. Who did it hurt? She, having rigid boundaries, considered cyber sex with another person an intrusion into the house. She said it was as if another woman were in the bed with me instead of her. This addiction was slowly driving a wedge between us—until one day, when we watched a program on Oprah about sex addicts.

Amazingly, I found that I could relate to the men's stories. We decided to seek help. A counselor told me about SA and I was willing to try it. My endless trying to stop—but not being able to do so—was an indication of how powerless I had become. All my attempts at stopping had gotten me further and further into a downward spiral. There was no way out except for divine intervention. The spiral stopped when I found SA.

I can remember that first meeting

as if it were yesterday, even though it was more than seven years ago, in September 1999. I walked into the meeting place and three people were ready to give me an orientation. When they finished sharing a little of their own stories I walked into my first meeting. I felt as if I had stepped into a warm Jacuzzi. I felt at home. I knew I was not alone anymore struggling with demons inside my own head. Here were men and women who understood what I was struggling with and who immediately took me in and befriended me. No longer was I ashamed or afraid to share my thoughts and experiences. Here were others who suffered from the same kind of struggles, but they had changed their behaviors and were willing to help me change mine.

After my first meeting, I came back to my apartment. My girlfriend was lying on the couch watching TV. I walked in, turned off the TV, and walked to her and kneeled beside her. I took her hand and placed it over my heart. I looked her dead in her eyes and pleaded from the bottom of my soul, "Please don't leave me. There is a program and I am willing to change. Please give me a chance to do this." The next week my girlfriend went to her first S-Anon meeting. We got married, and the two of us have been active in our own programs and another program we share together ever since.

Today I count my sobriety date as August 17, 2000—just over seven years ago. That date is also my wedding anniversary. I was sober before I was married but when we married I changed my sobriety date to my wedding anniversary date. This date is a greater cause for celebration with my wife and I because without sexual sobriety, we would not be married today.

God had a plan for me all along. God's intention for me was to get well so I could help others get well. It was never any more complicated than that. God saved me from the full consequences of my addictions so that I might live to help others. Once while overseas, I was driving drunk and wrecked a car. I very well could have been killed as I fell asleep behind the wheel traveling about 60 miles an hour. I knew then that God had something for me to do but did not have a clue what it was.

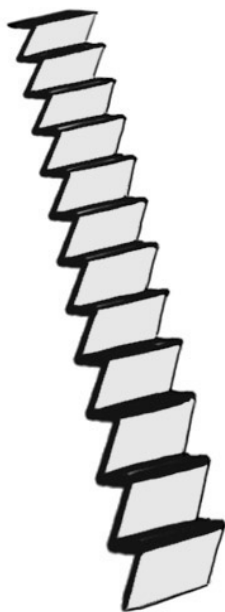
Today my life is very different than it was. My whole life revolves around recovery. The Internet is no longer my slave master. The chains of my addiction have

been broken. I am tempted but not obsessed. I have tools I can use to help me through the rough times. I am part of a recovery community that is much greater than myself.

Today, SA service, the fellowship, sponsoring, and being sponsored have all given me the tools I need to stay sober in today's world. The resentments that plagued me as a child are gone. Forgiveness and tolerance are expressions of God's will in my life. I am comfortable in my own skin. Who would have known that my prayer in desperation and my promise to do better would result in the gifts I have today? I was powerless to stop my behavior and change myself, but God has changed me through this program.

Access to porn at the time I was growing up was rare. I knew I was different. I seemed destined to a life of sexaholism. No one I knew of was exposed to porn as I was. However, in today's world we are all three mouse clicks away from acting out.

I believe that we who are sexually sober are pioneers in what will prove to be a worldwide epidemic of unimaginable proportion. Those of us who have accepted the program as a way of life are in a position



to help those who struggle. I believe that this is why God gave me this disease, and then saved me from it.

This disease is more powerful than I am. It was the only thing strong enough to bring me to my knees, and only while I am on my knees am I in a position to pray to

get better. I believe that God gave me this disease to bring me closer to Him, so that I can be available to show others the way. For this program, the fellowship, and God's love, I will always be grateful.

—Anonymous

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Escape from the Web

I don't remember when I discovered Internet pornography, but I know now that I was in trouble from the moment I first saw a hard-core image on my screen. Initially I didn't think much about it. I'd been looking at photographs of naked women since my early teen years—girly magazines that we passed around at boarding school.

In those days the magazines were pretty tame by today's standards. The only real pornography I saw came in the form of a few well-thumbed novels that we also passed around. The excitement came in the images we called into our minds to match the descriptions on the page. The magazines just gave us a little more fodder for our imaginations. Of course I masturbated to them both—magazines and books—and I always figured my buddies did too. We didn't talk about it, because we "just knew" there was



something shameful about it.

Somehow I never outgrew that boyhood habit, even after I matured physically and became sexually active. I spent my twenties acting out the fantasies I'd picked up from the printed page with women my own age, who usually seemed willing enough to go along. If they weren't willing that was okay too; I'd just move on to someone else. But I also continued to use books and magazines for extra excitement, and to tide me over in those periods when I'd lost interest in one girlfriend (or been dumped), and hadn't yet found another.

I was drinking a lot and using illegal drugs. Alcohol helped me relax, and the bars were my happy hunting grounds for available women. If I went home alone, I could just drink and drug myself into dreamland.

Eventually I got tired of that lifestyle and married a woman who was willing to put up with my drinking. She said I was “a little wild.” I told my friends the only reason we were getting married was to have children. But somehow we never did. My wife didn’t match the perfection I saw or imagined in the printed women I continued to use when I masturbated. I kept finding excuses for not having children or, eventually, sex. I preferred my fantasy women to the real one in my bed, and the marriage ended.

By then my compulsive use of alcohol and drugs had taken its inevitable toll in my life. “Under the lash,” I’d stopped drinking and taking drugs and joined Alcoholics Anonymous. By the grace of God I also quit smoking cigarettes, which I was eventually able to do with the help of the principles I’d learned in AA. I met the woman who became my second wife, and we settled in to a happy marriage in every sense of the word. I even stopped masturbating—for the most part—because my new wife and I enjoyed an active and fulfilling sex life.

Then we got the computer, and I

discovered a compulsion in me much deeper than my other addictions. We’d been married a few years when we joined the 20th century and started to explore the Internet on a dialup connection, amazed at what was available there. That’s when I found Internet porn. I started spending more and more time alone with the computer, searching out ever more explicit images and, when dialup gave way to broadband, video clips.

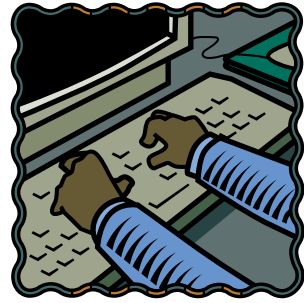
At first I didn’t pay for it. There was more available online for free than I could ever survey, even staying up late clicking through the sites. But in time I found porn sites that offered the specific, sordid fantasies I’d read about as a boy. I subscribed from time to time. It wasn’t much money, and I didn’t see the harm. I could give my imagination a rest and let the computer show me what I wanted to see.

My wife did see the harm in it though. It was probably inevitable that she would figure out what I was doing. But her problem wasn’t the money; she was devastated by my disrespect for her, and for her gender. I’d never thought of the women (and men) in the videos and pictures I enjoyed as real people. They were just actors or models who were paid for what they did and who sometimes seemed to enjoy it. It usually wasn’t something I particularly wanted to do myself, but I got a thrill out of watching others do it. But my wife saw it

for what it was—cruel and dehumanizing exploitation. The upset was so severe that we separated. We went into marriage counseling and, at the suggestion of a friend, I found SA.

Recovery from my pornography addiction hasn't been easy—much harder for me than giving up booze, drugs, or cigarettes. I get a deep urge for a little escape into pornography when things don't go my way, when I get frustrated at work or home, or when I'm "hungry, angry, lonely, or tired." I seem to want pornography a lot more than I ever wanted liquor, cigarettes, or drugs. Eventually I reach a point where my will power is no good. Fighting just seems to make things worse, and the possibility that "the next one will fix me" keeps the obsession alive in the face of sleepless nights and painful lust hangovers.

I've had more than one slip, and I've grown to appreciate the admonition in *Sexaholics Anonymous* (91) that sometimes people who've been successful in other Twelve Step programs have to start all over again in SA. I've come to realize that the pornographic "drink" starts well before I turn on the computer or begin the fatal series of mouse clicks that will call up an image that sends me into a binge. I adhere to the SA bottom line, but I've found it helpful to change my sobriety date every time I look at pornography, whether that leads to physical acting out or not. I



know from painful experience that it will eventually.

I'm also learning—too slowly for my impatient taste—that a lust drink always brings a hangover. For me it usually takes the form of depression, remorse, and painfully obsessive resentments directed at the people around me. Sometimes I act out on those resentments too, a habit that will eventually get me in trouble at work, home, or just out on the street. But "my own enlightened self-interest" isn't always as strong as my addiction, and I often think that acting on resentment scratches the same itch in my soul that acting on lust does.

I use my computer as a research tool at work, and lately I've started switching it off, no matter how busy I am, if I find myself idly clicking toward lust images. I know where they are. Like a lust look on the street, I know in my heart if what I'm doing is driven by a desire for the lustful thrill that I think will make me feel better about whatever is bothering me. If it is, I shut down and start over. That

helps too.

But ultimately it is the program of SA that keeps me sober, by helping me find my way to a personal God who works in my life. SA helps me know when lust is driving my attitudes, thoughts, and actions, and when it is, I can turn to my Higher Power with a simple prayer or a quick

telephone call to another suffering addict who understands my problem. I learned in AA that “it’s the first drink that gets you drunk.” That is certainly true for me with pornography. The first click can get me drunk, but my God is always there ready to help me stop before it’s too late.

—Anonymous

How Do You Make Amends to Anonymous Partners?



“Pick up trash,” one guy glared.
“Donate to a shelter,” the oldtimer shared.
“Give blood,” another led as he bled.
“Donate to SA,” someone said.

I sighed, feeling quite a bit baffled as if I had bought a ticket to a confusing raffle.

Should I just do these or something more?
Please let me know soon—if not before.

—Ed R., Columbus, GA

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We Agnostics

Why is Chapter Four of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (44) entitled “We Agnostics” instead of “Those Agnostics” even though some of us entered the program already believing in God? Today, I believe that I act like an agnostic or atheist whenever I turn away from God. God and I are walking along enjoying ourselves when all of a sudden I say, “Hey God, why don’t You wait here awhile. I have to go do something. I’ll see You later.” At that point it’s as if I’m an agnostic or atheist because I’m living as if there were no God. Acting out in my addiction is a time of denying God, and that is why that chapter is titled “We Agnostics.”

I was born into a Catholic family, and I tried to be a good little Catholic boy, but my mother was addicted to prescription drugs and my father was a workaholic. My three sisters and I raised ourselves. We all have our problems; but my parents did the best they could with what they knew.

I became hooked on women at a very young age. One of my earliest memories is of a babysitter playing with my private parts when I was three or four years old. I remember it as if it were yesterday. I also remember enjoying our family drives downtown every Sunday because we



would pass by the burlesque house where I would stare at posters of ladies who performed inside. I found solace in pornography and masturbation. After awhile it became compulsive and overpowering.

I decided that I could NEVER confess this secret to the priest. So I went on the first of many mental agonies. When I was 15, I decided there was no God. Looking back, I think I was getting rid of the Judge so I wouldn’t have to face the judgment. I became a full-fledged atheist, and Knocker of All Organized Religion. About a year later I was forced to downgrade to Merely Agnostic, because I couldn’t sleep at night thinking, “What if I’m wrong and everyone else is right?” “What about trees and planets and sunsets?” So my attitude became, “Okay, maybe there is a God, and maybe there isn’t. I don’t care.”

At age 18, I had a spiritual experience and became an evangelical Christian. I remember the exact

date, time, and place. I thought this was great, having a relationship with the God I had tried to ignore. I wish I could say that this new relationship with God ended my obsession with lust and masturbation, but it didn't. I must have asked Him 3,000 times, "Take it away! Please, take this from me." But He did not.

This caused a new disconnection between me and God. I was asking for something that God must certainly want me to have: freedom from a really bad habit. But He seemed to do nothing. I took it the wrong way. I would not learn the truth until almost 30 years later.

For the next 29 years I had my ups and downs. My first marriage ended in divorce after 2½ years. I attempted to find a new relationship but had never developed the skills needed to nurture true intimacy. That didn't keep me from trying though. My best friend taught me how to go out drinking and picking up women. Now I had two more bad habits.

I developed a "Big Shot" mentality and an ego to match. I formed a partying club and hosted three or four big parties a year. Live music, booze, and paid admission. People actually paid to attend my parties! I was flying high, but behind that Big Shot was a little boy, hurting because his mom was always sick in bed and his dad was always at work.

At one of my parties I met the

woman who would become my second wife. Against all my upbringing and morals, I let her move in with me—thus making a conscious choice to alienate myself from my church and church friends. We soon got married and were divorced 11 months later; long enough to have a baby boy. This time, my wounded ego and I moved into a big party house full of single men and women.

I tried to pick up a lady at the grocery store, and she invited me to her church, which I had attended years before. I went and quickly got involved with the Singles Group by playing in the worship band and working the sound equipment. In my private life, however, I was still searching for that one special woman who would make my life meaningful. I was still masturbating to pornography. I was trying to fill that hole in my soul with anything but God.

In 1988, when I married my third wife, I was still hooked on lust. Eventually the Internet came along and I got hooked on chatting with women online. Innocently at first (yeah, right), I kept getting worse.

I would invest huge amounts of time cultivating online relationships. I thought of myself as an honest, nice guy to these women, but in reality, I was using them for my own selfish pleasure. My wife traveled for work, so I had plenty of time to goof off online. I worked by myself in my own

business, and I eventually spent all eight hours “at work” acting out with my cyber girlfriends in chat rooms across several time zones.

I was totally consumed by lust. I couldn’t stop, even though I tried. I had built up a duplex inside my head. One side was the husband, father, church treasurer, worship band musician, etc. In the other side I was hopelessly addicted to cybersex. There was a wall down the middle, and I was pretty good at keeping it from leaking, most of the time. But my disease took its toll on me.

I still had not learned the skills for building intimacy, and because my wife was often away on her job, we never really worked on intimacy. When she was home, my wife couldn’t stand me, and I was a big chicken around her. So off I went into my fantasy land. My life began each night when the lights went out and we didn’t have to communicate anymore until the next day. My lust-driven



mind would digest all the toxins I had picked up on the Internet that day.

Finally, I became so scared of my wife that I decided to get help from a therapist. On my first visit he told me I had the biggest ego he had ever seen, a huge false front. I thought about it, and thanks to God I decided the therapist was right. He was surprised when I showed up for my second visit.

The therapist at first diagnosed me with ADD; he thought that diagnosis would solve our marriage problems. But my lust disease kept getting worse, and my wife was getting more irritated. I had progressed from Internet girlfriends to real girlfriends. I had an affair with one of my customers, and my insanity kicked into overdrive. “I don’t *feel* guilty,” I told myself. I wanted more, and I wanted freedom from marriage so I could indulge myself without the guilt of adultery hanging over my head.

So, in the office of my therapist, I asked my wife for a divorce one Monday morning. This did not go over well; for one thing because she felt that she should be divorcing me. On her insistence, we did a lot of talking and praying that day, and I woke up on Tuesday feeling God’s presence. He had been right behind me all along. I was the one who had turned away. I told my wife, “I repent. There will be no divorce. I’m going to

get help.” My wife asked, “Repent of what?” I had to think fast, “Umm, I repent of asking for a divorce.”

I called my therapist and asked if the vacancy was still there for his Wednesday night therapy group for sex addicts. It was, and I went, and God saved my life. That Tuesday was six years, 12 weeks, and two days ago. I worked the Twelve Steps, started going to SA meetings, got a sponsor, and started sponsoring others. The miracle happened, and God has kept me sexually sober ever since that day, Tuesday, June 12, 2001.

Soon after I started the sex-addiction therapy group, my wife joined a therapy group for spouses. Those groups were the turning points in both of our lives, and God has been working miracles in our marriage ever since. Next year we will celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. Through this program, for the first time we have learned the intimacy and communi-



cation skills we need for building a healthy marriage.

I asked God in 1971 to take away my compulsion to masturbate. He didn't do so until June 12, 2001. What was I missing? For one thing, I was making an incomplete request. My request was, “God, please take this away, now.” Here are a few examples of what I really meant: “God, take this away, now, so that . . .

. . . I won't have to do any hard work.”

. . . I won't have to sit in a room full of people and humiliate myself.”

. . . I can forget all about You once my misery is gone.”

. . . I can get on with my day.”

Instead, what I needed to do was come to the end of myself and reach out to the God of my understanding with complete humility. NOT so that I could get on with “my” life, but so I could surrender my life to Him—the One who has all power—asking only for the knowledge of *His* will and the power to carry it out.

—George F., San Diego

Reminder: When submitting your story . . .

please remember to tell us what you were like before, how you found SA, what works for you, and how your life is different today. Include your contact information, and indicate whether you would like your article to remain anonymous in print.

Submit your story to Essay@sa.org

Single and Happy? You Bet!



When I first came to SA in June 2002, I was miserable and I was single. I didn't want to be miserable, and I sure didn't want to be single! My divorce had been finalized just two months before I came to SA, and I was jealous and upset that my newly ex-husband had gotten engaged before the divorce was final. He was to be married that September. It didn't occur to me at the time that my physical, emotional, and Internet cheating had contributed to the conditions that led to my husband leaving me for someone else. All I knew was that I was miserable without him; therefore the solution was to find a new relationship to fill the void left by his leaving.

After my first two SA meetings, I went to treatment for three months and developed one unhealthy crush after another on men in treatment. I came home and developed crushes on various men in the program. My sponsor kept telling me I needed at least a year of sobriety before I could begin to consider dating. I didn't listen. I would chat on the Internet even though my sponsor warned me that I would lose my sobriety if I continued to do so. She was right; I lost my sobriety again and again.

If chatting wasn't going to work,

then I was going to find other ways of getting a relationship. I called a singles phone line and ended up acting out with a man from Oregon. I gave my phone number to a man at my doctor's office, thinking this was how "normal" people begin relationships. He acted out with me once, then I never saw him again. I even used a male prostitute for companionship, as if a person who was paid to have sex would want to have a relationship with his client! I went to treatment a second time in the fall of 2003. There I developed crushes on a couple of guys, and one of the men in treatment had a crush on me. After two years of flirting and beating around the bush, this man left his wife and started dating me. I was in heaven. I finally had the relationship I was looking for. Never mind that we were acting out and his divorce was not yet final. I simply went to a different "S" program and called myself sober—though I don't think many in that program who knew my story would have called me sober.

We acted out for the last time

on July 2, 2006. Three days later, he called me to break off the relationship, saying he could not be with someone who would not take care of herself. I realized he was right. My weight was out of control. I was constantly depressed, landing in the hospital for depression three times during the seven months we were together. I would skip showers and sleep in late if I didn't have school or work. I was unhappy with my new job, so I quit. I was a mess.

Give the man credit, his words spurred me on. I went to an intensive outpatient treatment program for a month as recommended by my therapist and began to feel better. I got gastric lap band surgery and so far I have lost 85 pounds. I started getting up earlier. I began meditating every day. I re-adopted the SA sobriety definition, and added Internet chat and reading erotica to my bottom line. After six months, I rejoined SA for

good, got a new sponsor, and started working the Steps.

Along the way, I realized something. I didn't need a relationship to be happy. Indeed, I was much happier without a relationship than I ever was with one. What I really needed was to connect with the God of my understanding—and this program—to fill the gaping hole inside of me.

On July 3, 2007, I celebrated one year of sobriety, the first time since I entered the program that I have reached this milestone. According to some in the program, I can consider dating now. The amazing thing is, I have no interest in dating. I have my God, my program, my children, and my friends. What more do I need? I am grateful for this time that, rather than pursuing the man of my dreams, I am now pursuing the life of God's dreams.

—*Tanja E., Norman, OK*

We Would Love to Hear Your Story

Topics of special interest today include Internet Addiction, and Singles and Young People in SA; however all types of articles are welcome. Consider submitting:

- Your recovery story describing your life before recovery, what happened, and your life today
- Your experience working the Steps or Traditions, and how this has helped your recovery
- Your thoughts on a particular topic (serenity, sponsorship, etc.)

Please submit stories and articles to Essay@sa.org

Gifts of Love

I just got back from the SA International Convention in Maryland and it was wonderful! But it didn't start out that way.

My weekend started with a meltdown Friday night, when I felt lonely and afraid. I was starting a newer, cleaner form of abstinence with food (my primary addiction). I knew no one, including the SA man who was willing to give me a ride across three states to the conference. I attended two meetings Friday, including one on isolation, then went up to my room, binged on room service, and decided to abandon my food program while at the convention. My sponsor disagreed with my decision.

Saturday morning in a women's meeting, I started off my share leading with my weakness, explaining what I had done the night before. I was surrounded by gifts of love and understanding after the meeting and throughout the day. I met some wonderful women and men there.

I received many other gifts, like hearing Roy K. speak twice, writing my Fourth Step inventory in a workshop, meeting a woman I've known through a phone meeting and hearing her tell her amazing story, and laughing really hard and loud at the



entertainment Saturday night!! My first SA conference was in Greensboro in January 2007, but I had a very different experience in Maryland. This time I feel I truly embraced the program and the fellowship.

On the plane ride home, a man was seated next to me, talking on the phone when I first boarded. Then he dozed through most of the flight. For some reason, I felt a familiar feeling about him, reminding me of one of my old flames whom I hadn't thought about in ages. It felt odd to me that, without any contact with the guy next to me, I felt this familiarity.

To my amazement, about two-thirds of the way through the trip, I saw a book on his lap, *Lust Virus*, written by Roy K., which I had just learned about in Roy's talk that morning! What a God-wink that I

was sitting right next to a fellow SA member. So when he awoke, I tapped him on the arm and showed him my conference name badge, and from that point on, we talked about the conference and program for the rest of the flight!

What incredible gifts I got to bring home! I am blown away by my disease and lust, and in a much different way, by this fellowship, the

program, and my Higher Power, Who guides me when I surrender to His grace and to the program. I also see it is my responsibility, as part of service, that I participate more fully in this program, to ensure that it remains strong and is always here for the newcomer and those of us in need!

—In gratitude and service, *Jill*



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Working on “The Lust”

The 2007 International Convention in Maryland was the first large SA gathering I had attended. I didn’t know what to expect or whether I would feel comfortable being around more than 500 people who are as sick as I am. But I was greatly encouraged by the honesty and sincerity of the people I heard sharing their stories in the breakout sessions. As I met and talked with people in the halls, the hospitality room, and at the meals I found myself relaxed and at peace. The people I met were focused on their recovery; they weren’t trying to judge me or to get something out of me. We were there to attend to the things which matter most in our lives right now: sobriety and a stronger relationship with our Higher Power.

One of the biggest surprises to me was how my insides were matching my outsides. I took the action to go to the conference because I needed to keep growing and be real in working my program. Just six weeks earlier I had almost lost my 20-month sobriety when the content filter on my computer stopped working. During the week that my computer wasn’t filtered I had tempted myself with images that could have led me to lose my sobriety. Although I did not lose my physical sobriety, I felt as though I had. I knew I had done damage to my sobriety, and as I shared my behavior with my sponsor and at meetings, I knew I could not continue to indulge such behavior. I had to address this behavior or I would lose my sobriety. If I lost my sobriety, I might stop

working my program. The stakes were high.

What a wonderful revelation I had at the Convention when I found breakout sessions and discussions that addressed the very thing I was struggling with. I was extremely grateful to my Higher Power that I was in a place where I could grow in my understanding and be led spiritually to take actions that make my sobriety more secure. “Something good is happening to me,” I told myself. I was ready to take the next step in my sobriety. I decided that I would make adjustments to my sobriety definition

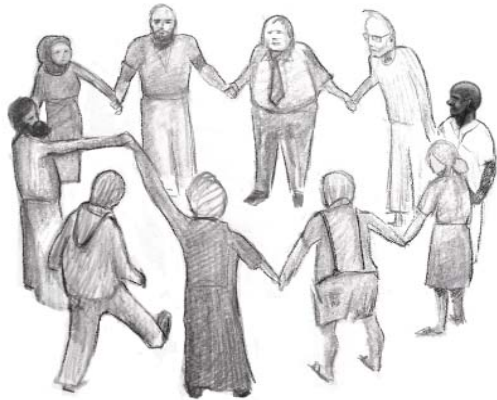
to support what I had learned about lust from the recent experiences in my life and from the Convention.

Upon returning home from the convention I discussed my decision with my sponsor and then I took the step that my Higher Power seemed to be leading me to take: If I purposely seek out images on the computer to indulge my lust, then I will consider it a form of acting out and reset my sobriety date because of that behavior. The convention had a positive effect on my life and encouraged me to grow in sobriety.

—Anonymous

One Big Meeting

As I anticipated attending the 2007 Convention, I felt both excitement and fear. Excitement because the idea of meeting lots of new friends in recovery (including people I do service work with) sounded like great fun! But fear at the prospect of traveling to Maryland to meet these people, especially the men. My former career involved traveling all over the country to work with other people—mostly men—on various company projects. My work



travels were the scene of a large part of my acting out. So the prospect of arriving at a city away from home and running into people I work with was

scary. I had no idea what to expect.

For the first few years of my recovery, I practiced sobriety by avoiding men. I had quit my job shortly before our family went into recovery, and I believed that the scenario of me being around a bunch of guys had been my problem. My new motto was: "I don't need to be around any men other than my husband." The problem was that, while this attitude helped me achieve sobriety, it did not produce great recovery. After several years of avoiding men, I found myself increasingly triggered by any guy I happened to run into. I couldn't understand why this could be. If I was sober, why wasn't I getting better? The answer is that I had no real recovery. For one thing, this attitude kept me from attending the great mixed meetings in our city.

Today I know that the large mixed meeting I attend has been one of the most healing things in my recovery. Men and women meeting and working together provide an opportunity to learn how to have healthy

relationships with the opposite sex. I feel loved and accepted by the guys in my group, and I feel safe with them, basically because they desire sobriety. The environment among sober people is different from that among non-sober people. People who aren't sober lust after others in order to make themselves feel better. I know this because I am an addict. But sober people are able to love others, seek others' best interests, and help others maintain sobriety. I know this because of the way I feel when around the sober people in my group.

It turns out that I found this exact same atmosphere at the convention: sober people reaching out in love to help others in recovery. No scary vibes. It was just like one big meeting; I felt entirely safe. I had so much fun with my new and old friends that I didn't want to leave! The convention experience was just one more example of the miracle of this program of recovery.

— *Barbara F.*

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Making the Real Connection

Recently, I took my four-year old daughter fishing. We arrived at the secret fishing hole and set off to find an unoccupied spot. As we followed the wooded path near the calm water, I noticed a man lying in the underbrush. I thought perhaps he was sleeping, enjoying the natural scenery, meditating, etc. We reached our destination and cast the lines in the water, offering our bait of worms to the fish. Sitting on a rocky outcrop, we waited and watched our floaters in anticipation of a bite. Periodically, my daughter would ask “what is this?” or “what is that?” or “what is that person doing?”

I noticed movement out of the corner of my eye and saw that the man lying in the ground cover was actually a man and a woman. The couple was lying down, embracing. I re-focused my attention to the reason for being there: fishing with my daughter. A few minutes later, my lust kicked up and I cast a glance in the direction of the couple. Now the woman was on top and they were basically having sex with their clothes on. Immediately I felt uncomfortable. I felt fear that my daughter might see



and ask questions. I felt anger because my boundaries (and hers!) were being violated. And I felt fear, shame, and guilt because a part of me wanted to watch the couple in their act or join them. I turned my back on the couple and positioned myself to block my daughter’s view of them. I looked again to see the woman still on top, and I was scared. I didn’t know what to do . . . leave, stay, yell, throw rocks at them, or kick them.

I picked up my cell phone and proceeded to call guys in the fellowship. After the fifth or sixth call, I reached a live person. I shared what was happening and that I did not know what to do. I also shared that the yappy voice in my head said “You have three-plus years of sobriety and you don’t know what to do!?! You stupid loser!” My friend gently reminded me that I was taking the necessary action: making a phone call. At this point I discovered I could breathe again. He reminded me that I came to fish with my daughter and that’s what I needed to do. Another deep breath. He helped me to see that other options were available—move to another spot or leave entirely. After saying goodbye, reluctantly I said

a short prayer, asking God to bless and protect the couple. My daughter kissed me on the cheek and said “I love you, Daddy.” Then she hugged me and thanked me for taking her fishing. Sometime later, I really don’t know when, the couple left the area.

We continued to fish until it was almost dark and the quarter moon had risen. My daughter caught four healthy bluegills and I took photos of her with the fish. I don’t know which of us was more excited! The phone

call with my friend, being outside in God’s creation, fishing with my daughter, and receiving her simple love—for this addict those are all part of making the real connection. My sponsor reminds me that the yappy voice lies; I am not a stupid loser. Thanks to God, once again, for doing for me what I could not do for myself. Thanks to each of you for reminding me that I never have to face anything alone again.

—Joe G.

A Painful Lesson



Recently, I had a painful experience that knocked me down mentally (I did manage to keep my physical sobriety thanks to the support of God and SA) and showed me once again how cunning, baffling, and powerful this disease is. To quote *Alcoholics Anonymous*, “I have a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of my spiritual condition” (85). I’m not cured! I was doing pretty well in my recovery: doing a daily sobriety renewal, calling other women in the

program, and talking to my sponsor. I have a date set to give my Fifth Step and have been writing on it when I have private moments. But I have a husband and two kids who are often close at hand, and I was using them as an excuse for not making much progress. Since this experience, I’ve been taking time alone to work on my Step Four writing.

One of my “bottles” was a married man who turned out to be a genuinely caring person. We had a secret friendship for months after the physical connection ended. I couldn’t figure out until I got to SA why every time I started talking to him, he became an obsession and I wanted him every minute as my best friend and life mate. It would always end up with me being in emotional turmoil over what I “can’t have” and admit-

ting to him that I couldn't handle a friendship with him. He'd be kind and understanding and say something like "maybe later when you're feeling stronger we can be friends."

When I got into SA, I learned that all contact with past romances is off limits; this made good sense. I had refrained from contacting this person since becoming sober. But one day when I was feeling lonely at work, I thought "now that I'm sober in SA, I can surely inquire about his well being and then carry on with my life." The first clue I ignored was that I was feeling lonely and really just wanted the familiar lust hit that comes with contacting him. I knew I should call my sponsor or another SA member before acting on this thought, but my lust won and I hit the 'send' key on my "how are you?" email. The insanity returned the moment I sent the email. The new and wonderful sense of living in reality that I have been blessed with since joining SA evaporated quickly.

My first obsession was won-

dering when he'd respond. When it took a couple of days, I emailed again. This time he left a message on my work phone saying that he was fine. His voice did not sound fine and when he did respond by email, he shared that his father-in-law had died that day. Of course, I had to respond to express my sympathy. I wish that had been the end of it but it wasn't. My disease of unreality set in; its power astounds me. I sunk into a deep despair, feeling very shameful and angry at myself for having contacted him. I couldn't believe that my obsession with him replaced the gift of "living in reality" so quickly. I couldn't function at work and was sobbing uncontrollably at my desk over the fact that he didn't love me and didn't leave his wife for me. I again needed him in order to make me okay and I knew at the same time that was never going to happen.

What gradually brought me out of the despair was telling my sponsor what I had done, sharing it with my group, and receiving the love, un-

Letter to the Fellowship

Some time ago I wrote to SA and requested your "Sponsor by Mail" service. I received a letter from a member of SA who is now my sponsor. We have been working together for almost two months now, and things are going well. I just wanted to thank everyone involved for all your help.

—Anonymous Member in Prison

derstanding, and support from them that I believe is God in action. I am now taking extra precautions to make sure I don't send inappropriate emails when I'm feeling vulnerable. I am also reminding myself that his life is none of my business. This pain has been a great teacher but not something I want to experience again if I can help it. People say that our tolerance for lust goes down the longer we

are sober. I am beginning to see what that means. Actions motivated by lust that seemed normal before recovery now cause pain very quickly. I am beginning to know my limitations as a sexaholic. I hope the next time that others suggest that I not take a certain action, I will trust the people who have gone before me, and not take it.

—Anonymous

Father Figure

I just wrote the following statement in my journal, and it caused me to burst into tears: “A male friend called me on Monday and asked me how my job search was going.”

As I wrote this line, my eyes welled up with tears. I wish I had a father who would ask me how my goals are going; how what I endeavor to do is going. I feel like making a project of just looking for a father figure, because my own dad is too broken for me to lean on as a daughter to a father. But I'm afraid to trust another man who's my father's age because I'm afraid his investment in the relationship with me would be to take advantage of me like the other men in my history. Then I would lose my sobriety, and everything else I've received from my Lord as gifts.

My heart and my ears ache to hear from my parents words of encouragement that are too few and far between. Crying.....I need to move out. I keep hoping for something. Some kind and gentle word. Crying.....

A proverb says “Hope deferred makes the heart sick.” God, show me your love. Tell me you really love me.

I feel better now that I wrote this and cried a bucket of tears. My tear balloon was too full and needed to burst. Thank you SA for listening; it gives me comfort to share my pain.

—Anonymous



Cancer of the Soul



Cancer. I hear the word and cringe. I've known people who have suffered the wrath of this relentless disease. Some have survived using prayers, surgeries, radiation, and chemo. Some survived one bout to suffer a miserable relapse (or even two or three relapses) years later. Loved ones suffered with them, spending long nights in desperate prayer for the parent, spouse, sibling, or child to be spared. Some never made it. The cancer took their lives and ensured pain-filled memories for those left behind.

Sexaholism. When I hear the word, it sounds like an interesting subject to study or a mild personality disorder. The painful, brutal truth is that it's not one of these. Sexaholism is another form of cancer: a cancer of the soul. It's that simple. Just as cancer might destroy a person's ability to breathe, sexaholism can cripple a person's ability to make the Real

Connection with God and others. Like other cancers, sexaholism has no known permanent cure that would guarantee a life free of relapse. The only solution for sexaholism is persistent and sometimes aggressive treatment. Just as a cancer survivor must make serious lifestyle changes, take daily medication and vitamins, and undergo regularly scheduled check-ups, recovering sexaholics must also make changes: take daily doses of prayer, meditation, reading, and Step work, and attend regular meetings to receive checkups by others. Just as a cancer patient relies on his doctor for advice on how to stay cancer-free, a sexaholic gets suggestions from his or her sponsor and other program members on how to stay lust-free.

Those of us who have chosen to submit to treatment by God and others know that this program of treatment is not an option. The program is our chance for a life free from a vicious relapse. Each of us knows that the next relapse is the one that could kill us, land us in jail, or destroy our marriage or career.

My wife is sometimes jealous of the time I spend in meetings, working the Steps, and reading. This is just another reminder that I'm a sexaholic; and a reminder of the hurt I've

caused her because of my addiction. She sometimes complains, “You’re going to another meeting!” She does not want to be married to a person with my addiction. “I’m going for chemo,” I explain. As I get in my car, I overcome any feelings of guilt for leaving her alone with the kids by reminding myself that I’m not going to “hang out” with my friends and talk about our golf game. I’m not reading a fantasy novel to escape from reality. I’m not writing letters to pen pals around the world. I’m treating

my cancer! I’m going to any length necessary to ensure that my cancer does not relapse. I’m expending energy to build my relationship with God so I can be healthy—spiritually healthy enough to be of value to my family and friends. Let there be no mistake about it: my life depends on this daily treatment. My life depends on the support of my Higher Power. I depend on Him. This is my treatment. The closer I am to Him, the better the chances for my survival.

— *Anonymous*

The Sexaholic is an Extreme Example of Self-Will Run Riot, Though He Usually Doesn’t Think So

Alcoholics Anonymous, 62

Where does self-absorption begin? It just is. This is how I remember it: If a woman asked me for help, I would think, “If I help her, I may get a great smile from her, which I would interpret as her expressing approval of me.” I need approval. I don’t feel safe around others. Approval tells me I am safe. I have always wanted more than my share of emotional security; no amount of it is ever going to be enough. I can use the smile later on for my fantasy life. I will feel lovable.

Help you out? Sure, I need to feel better about myself. If I can help

you, then I must have worth. The nagging feeling on the inside says that I have no worth. Clean the house? Sure, it will give me more control of my environment, and make me look good. Achieve at my job? Absolutely. I will get prestige and recogni-



tion. That will make me feel better. Listen to your problems? Sure. I can listen to your problems, solve them, and have pity and sympathy for you. That puts me above you. Then I don't have to look at my own problems.

Little did I realize I was unable to empathize. I couldn't feel any feelings. Why would I want to look inside and feel my feelings? My feelings were pretty bad: insecurity, inadequacy, lust, grief, loss, betrayal, depression, anxiety, vulnerability, etc. At the time I didn't know the names of those feelings. It was hard-wired into me that feelings, needs, wants, and self were to be ignored. I was supposed to do all the right things. That would make me a good guy, and others would perceive me as being good and having value. But on the inside, I felt I was not good enough; I was an addict. So please keep telling me that I am good and have value. I never get enough of it.

Why make friends? I am not interested in making small talk. I don't know how. That takes work, effort, and sacrifice. What do I get out of it? There are too many other things I have to do. I could speak with you, but if I do, often I will go off into my head somewhere because I'm not interested. My ability to relate to others kept getting worse. I thought I was a loveable guy who was always trying to make others happy, and people just naturally got angry at me. Why are

they throwing rocks and beer bottles at me? Little did I realize that I was rude, discourteous, judgmental, and insulting. I no longer knew what was appropriate to say or not to say.

So there is the self-will run riot. I was constantly looking for the next thing or person to make me feel better. I thought I was one of the friendliest guys ever, but I was only trying to help myself. How did I get to this place? A little at a time, each day I got worse with the aid of lust. How did I get out of it? With God's help a little at a time by working the Twelve Step program each day. The first step is awareness. I decided one day to do only what God wanted me to do, and surrender to Him my endeavors, before I began. It occurred to me that before, when I would tell Him I wanted to help my wife, for example, I was really only looking for approval and control.

Okay, I get it. Self-will run riot is the root problem. I won't be that way any more. Unfortunately, I did not have the power to give up self-will. I needed to ask for God's help. I began praying for the honesty, openness, and willingness that *Alcoholics Anonymous* refers to. I made a decision to turn my will and life over to God, as I understood Him.

You're waking me up because the toilet is overflowing? Hey, that's great. Ordinarily I start my day with prayer, but helping someone else

when I don't want to starts me off on the right foot. It helps me get out of myself. That is the only way that I get better.

I have worth now. I have worked the Steps and I realize I am good enough. The addiction is an illness, not my identity. My purpose in life now is to do God's will by staying sober, working the Steps, using the

.....

Surrendering Lust

I'm a newcomer to SA. I attended my first meeting on June 20, 2007, in Yonkers, Pennsylvania. The fellowship has been an enlightening experience so far, and I look forward to more growth and understanding.

I've had a difficult time surrendering lust. When I catch a glimpse of a lust object, I try to avert my eyes and turn my head, but I am still new to this, and it does not always work. The SA literature suggests I say a prayer for the object of my lust, hoping, I believe, that I would not lust after someone for whom I am praying, but that has not worked very well for me, at least not yet.

The other day I was listening to a CD about surrendering judgment, and one of the members shared that we already have a tool to help in surren-

dering judgment, focusing on the positive, and helping others recover.

—Steve Z., Milwaukee



dering judgment, and that is our sense of humor.

I applied this to one of my lust objects, inadvertently at first. Staring at her, I thought, “That person wants me!” That is one of my delusions as a sexaholic—that the women I see are as interested in me as I am in them. But this time, I went one step further. I said aloud to myself, “That person wants to have sex with me!”

Hearing myself say that brought home the incredible absurdity of it all. I could not help but laugh out loud. The laughter replaced the lust.

I do not know how others will view this notion, but this is what is working for me today, as I am still on Step Zero.

—Don B.



As a child I had no exposure to healthy intimacy or communication. My parents had seven marriages between them, and seven children, two of whom I never met. My father left when I was three; my mother remarried when I was in my 20s. We younger children saw our father on weekends, but we were taught that he was evil. Questions about him, or about my family, were taboo.

In fact, most important questions in my family were taboo. Survival meant learning to hide my questions and fears. I also learned that maleness itself was somehow hateful and pathetic. As a child I would hide in the bathroom, standing before the mirror in my mother's clothes, at times using scotch tape on my body to try to transform myself into a woman.

From the onset of puberty, I was constantly preoccupied by sexual desire. But I also saw sex as immoral and dirty. While my friends seemed to openly enjoy kissing and touching and going steady, I would ask: "How can you commit to one girl, knowing that tomorrow you may meet someone you like more?" I set impossible

Step One

I Am Powerless Over Lust

rules for myself; only the purest motivations were allowed. My values allowed me to feel morally superior to other boys; my hidden desires made me feel dishonest and ashamed. In my mind, there were good girls with whom to be friends or go steady, and bad girls to kiss and touch. I was hardly the first 13-year-old boy to fall into this trap. The problem is that I never outgrew it.

I first prayed to God when I was 16, living in Israel at a boarding school. I had fallen in love for the first time. I felt wonderful! Then I learned she had been with someone else. I was crushed. I soon found myself with another, older girl, one I hardly knew. She led me quickly into my first intercourse. When it was over, I was stricken with remorse and terror. I babbled to the girl insanelly, and fled. I spent hours walking alone in the dark, calling out to God, begging him not to kill me, to give me another chance, and swearing to never do such a filthy thing again.

Over the next 20 years, I repeatedly tried to find intimacy, each time convinced this one would be different; each time failing. Only alcohol made me feel whole, temporarily masking the shame and fear. Courtship was

always wonderful. But immediately following sex, all emotion would die except for an overwhelming need to escape. I was transformed into another person, hating myself and the woman beside me. Yet I enjoyed being with women with whom a real relationship was impossible.

At 19, I moved from Israel to Los Angeles and started college. Driving alone one night, I passed a prostitute on a street corner. I felt as if I had touched a live wire; I was hooked from the start. Prostitutes became the secret passion of my life, allowing me to have the ultimate bad girls without hurting anyone. The polarization of my life became extreme; friends commented that I seemed immune to the flirting games played between men and women. I became a successful activist, public speaker, and teacher—but most nights were spent cruising Sunset Blvd., masturbating and picking up prostitutes.

Returning to Israel at age 23, I was soon visiting prostitutes, living two lives and spending more time and money than ever. Eventually, financially drained and worried at my increasing exposure to disease, I discovered Internet pornography—safe, anonymous, and free. My therapist believed it was preferable to prostitution: health-

ier, inexpensive, and more civilized. In fact, the Internet helped me limit visits to prostitutes—but gradually it took me to places far less civilized than I had ever imagined.

As pornography and prostitution gained a greater hold on my life, my attempts at finding a real relationship lessened, until I gave up the effort entirely. I told myself I cherished my independence, and that I wouldn't harm anyone this way. My contacts with friends lessened. My apartment gradually became a private refuge from the world. Binges of eating and masturbating to pornography lasted for days at a time, leaving me feeling ill. The pictures began to stay in my head all day; they were my first thoughts in the morning and last thoughts at night. I felt nauseous. I decided to stop. Then I decided to stop again, then again. At first I would last a month or two, then a couple of weeks, then days, until finally I found myself swearing to stop and then back at the computer 15 minutes later.

Last year, my life crashed. I started therapy with a new psychologist, and dealt for the first time with

the warring sides of my personality. I became severely depressed, alternating between a passionate desire to injure myself, and an equally passionate desire to take my life. I knew I had no choice but



to stop the insanity. I again promised myself to stop, and kept this promise for a three months. But then I fell again, and finally admitted that I was never going to be able to stop, unless I found a new way to go about it.

Then three months ago I saw a TV program on sexual addiction. A man spoke about his life; I felt as if I were hearing myself speak. The man said the Twelve Steps had changed his life, and that he had found support and fellowship from others like himself. I located the fellowship in Jerusalem and called the hotline. I was “Twelve-stepped” by two people who left me in a sincere dilemma as to which of them was more insane. It is an indication of my desperation that I returned the following week, and as I sat in the room at the start of the meeting, I felt completely alienated and regretted my decision. But an amazing thing happened. As people began to tell their stories, they were transformed, and I saw humanity and compassion where minutes before I had seen nothing but strangeness. And so I find myself now trying to define powerlessness, unmanageability, surrender, and even lust itself.

I Am Powerless Over Lust. I cannot look at pornography without minutes turning into hours and hours into days. Masturbation has become an obsession. The need to act out is like a physical force. Self control, will power, and shame have proven power-

less against it.

My Life Has Become Unmanageable. The unmanageability of my life is what led me to seek help in SA.

Symptoms that led me here include:

- I have damaged my health using alcohol to help me act out.
- I have missed work so I could act out, sometimes bingeing for days.
- I have wasted inestimable money and time on my obsession.
- I have exposed myself to disease.
- I have become increasingly inattentive, forgetful and irritable.

Yet as my addiction progressed, these were but minor irritations.

Surrender. I don't think I understand surrender. The word terrifies me, as if I am hanging on a branch and there is nothing beneath my feet but a bottomless abyss, and I am now being asked to let go. Even if I have been hanging on to nothing more than a false sense of my own control, I am still afraid that I have nothing else to hold onto. I know that I must eventually let go of something, but I feel powerless to do so today.

What is Lust? For me, lust is the best of friends and the worst of enemies. Lust is the most effective painkiller I know; while immersed in it I know no sadness, loneliness, or pain. Yet the relief it brings are outdone by the self-loathing that follows. Lust has caused me to endanger my life, my career, my health, and my family. It has blinded me to all that is important and beautiful in life.

Why Am I Here? Why am I sitting here reading my First Step? First, if I look at the progression of my addiction, I must ask myself where I will be in 10 years if I continue. The answer frightens me. I am here to reverse the progression. Second, I realize I have spent my life hating who I think I am today and living for who I imagine I will be tomorrow. I am here to become one person, to learn what it means to be human. Finally, I have glimpsed into my anger and have seen not just destruction, but also survival—a tiny seed that refuses to give in, that screams: “I am not hateful, I do not deserve to die.” I am here to cultivate that seed.

Postscript. I gave away this Step

Step Nine Made Direct Amends Wherever Possible

When I’m in my disease I cannot love anyone or anything. Making Ninth Step amends has helped me reach out to God, and God in return has enabled me to feel love for those I have harmed.

In my disease I had inappropriate and lustful contact with my sister-in-law. I once briefly apologized to her over the phone for my actions. At the time, I was just dumping my guilt. The difference between a mere

last month. I have been sober now for over two months. The almost constant agony of the first six weeks has given way to periods of calm interspersed with waves of difficulty. I do not know what the future holds, and I am struggling with my understanding of a Higher Power. I am only now realizing how deep my fear goes, and my anger and resistance to putting my trust in anyone or anything. I think I haven’t yet realized the magnitude of what I have begun, nor the importance of sharing this path with others like myself. At the same time, I find myself very excited about beginning a dialog with a force greater than myself, realizing that though I have often spoken to such a force, I have rarely tried to listen to it. I am hopeful that I will be surprised.

—Anonymous



apology and a heartfelt amends is like night and day;

I was being dishonest.

When I first thought of making a real amends, I talked to another sexaholic who had more sobriety than I. I told him I resented my sister-in-law for resenting me; I felt she was in some way complicit. The problem was that I had not spent enough time

in recovery to understand humility. I was caught up in my ego.

To make a true amends, my sponsor told me to begin by praying for my sister-in-law in every conceivable way, and only when I could feel love for her, and had worked through Steps Six and Seven, would I be ready. I measured my progress daily, praying that she would be free of lust as well as guilt or shame in connection with my lusting. I prayed that God would grant her a suitable life partner and joy in spiritual abundance; that He would bless her financially, physically, emotionally, and mentally; and that she would experience happiness in this lifetime.

When the time came to make the amends, I kept it honest and short. After an awkward silence, she said “Let’s not bring this up again, okay?” I was faced with fear of her opinion and left it there. Even with the amends, I realize my sister-in-law may never forget the incident, so I continue to make living amends.

With humility and faith in my Higher Power, the relationship is now based on honesty, and every opportunity we meet is a chance for me to work the Steps. Recovery brings healing. Recovery enabled me to listen to a sound and reasonable suggestion, and then take the actions of love.

— *Anonymous*

Inside Out, by Roy K.

Sobriety and the Sea of Relativism

When this piece was written, SA was only one year old, but even then there were temptations to conform to the rapidly shifting cultural mores. Perhaps the piece is even more relevant today, where there is increasing pressure to put personality before the principles embodied in our Traditions.

—Roy

Today the world is adrift on a sea of rapidly shifting mores. Change is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. The last eighty years have surpassed the rate of change of the last eight thousand, and the last thirty have



probably surpassed it all. Every aspect of our lives and sexual thinking are affected. Thousands of voices clamor for attention, preaching new “freedoms” of every kind. Was it not but a few years ago that “shacking up”—what the courts called “cohabitation”—was thought to be abnormal? Today it is called a “meaningful relationship” or having a “significant other.” And witness the new movement to legalize incest.

Look closely at any of the sexual trends in the last few decades; there is something more than mere reversal of attitudes or even revolution here. There is a dissolution of the entire fabric holding couples and families together.

Such forces as the Pill, the Bomb, the technological revolution, world war, the population explosion, and especially the media are all facilitating changes in the attitudes and beliefs of men and women toward sexual thinking and expression at a rate never before experienced in the history of the human race. And we are trapped within this flux.

One historian called it the “Sexual Wilderness,” but it is deeper than merely being lost in a wild land. The problem seems to be spiritual. There is rebellion here—against authority, against God. There is movement toward destruction here; sexual victimization has broadened to damage every aspect of life. There is connection with a larger spiritual darkness here.

We sexaholics, victims of our own attitudes and actions, are nevertheless children of our times. Not only did we let these forces into our own lives, we helped give them free reign in the world at large. As a result, we found ourselves not only adrift, but drowning in this sea of relativism, with nothing to anchor our frail lives against the storm of change without

and the storm within. Enslaved to the darkness, we were powerless to save ourselves.

Most of the voices we hear today on the beguiling windsong playing about us offer the easier, softer way. They appeal to the lower instead of the higher, to our weakness instead of our best, to the transitory instead of the lasting. As angels of light offering new and glorious “freedom,” they pander to our lust. To have and indulge. Their cry is “DO IT!” rather than “I can do without it.” “Have it now!” rather than “Thy will be done.” Theirs is based on a deception—the primacy of the physical and emotional instead of the spiritual. And God is not there.

The best among these voices would settle for the “good.” But as Bill W. of AA used to say, the good is often the enemy of the best. And if SA has anything unique to offer, it is the best—sexual sobriety. Sobriety as we have come to see it. To the world at large, we have nothing to say except to bear witness to the truth of our own experience. But to the storm-tossed suffering sexaholics (and only to sexaholics), who want survival and freedom from the bondage of their “freedom,” this program offers an island in the storm, an anchor for the soul, a Connection with the unchanging, the real, and the true.

—Submitted 10 March '82, rev.
7/84, re-submitted 7/07



Report from the General Delegate Assembly - July '07

During meetings in July 2007 the Delegates tasked the Trustees in the following matters:

Previously assigned tasks

- *RAC*: How to form a new Region
- *Legal*: Impact of shredding original material sent to SAICO
- *Status of phone / email meetings*: Appoint subcommittee

New tasks assigned

- *Rename Site Selection Committee* to International Convention Committee. Broadened scope includes: develop guidelines for SA host groups; develop principles for cooperating with S-Anon to ensure safe convention for all attendees; ensure flexible dates; and help negotiate hotel contracts to ensure all needs are met.
- *Revise disclaimer* and work on other updates to SA.org.

- Investigate ways to make SA logo available to SA groups worldwide.
- *Revitalize Nominations Committee*. Find and present candidates for position of Trustee.
- *Establish Agenda Committee* of Trustees and Delegates to recommend guidelines for bringing motions to GDA.

Actions taken

The following literature was not approved; was returned to committee:

- *Is SA for Me? SA and Same Sex Attraction*
- *Does a Male Need to Have Sex?*
- Article from 1991 *Essay*

The Delegates thanked Jerry L. for his devoted service as Chair as he rotates to other duties.

Meeting Disclaimer. The Delegates recommended that each region or intergroup add a disclaimer to meeting guidelines related to shares that could result in legal action. The wording will depend on local laws, which differ significantly between states. The delegates recognized two main concerns: (1) the need to provide an atmosphere of safety in meetings, which is essential for open sharing; and (2) the need to protect meeting attendees who are mandated reporters, and who are placed in a difficult position when members share legal violations they must report. The concern does not include a desire to protect members involved in abuse of children or elders. Any share of that nature should be reported, followed by a discussion at the next meeting regarding how to restore a feeling of safety.

As one example, following is a disclaimer used in a meeting in California:

"Because some occupations in the State of California are required by law to report certain crimes, SA cannot guarantee legal confidentiality for any unprosecuted crimes disclosed in these meetings. We encourage you to tell your story in a GENERAL WAY as described in AA Chapter 5 'How It Works.'"

Trustees and Delegates can be reached at saico@sa.org.

SAICO Announcements

Additional Trustees Needed to Serve the Fellowship

SA's Nominations Committee is seeking nominations for the position of Trustee. We are currently operating with only five Trustees (the minimum allowable under SA Bylaws). This could become a problem one of the current Trustees should need to discontinue service. It also means more work for current Trustees. Please let us know of qualified members in your Region who are willing to do service. *Qualifications:* Minimum five years of sobriety; knowledge of the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts; prior SA service experience; and availability and willingness to serve. See pages 26-27 of the *SA Service Manual* for details.

Please submit nominations to saico@sa.org.

Readers Needed for Step Into Action and Other Literature Committee Projects

SA's Literature Committee is seeking Readers to provide feedback on various fellowship works in progress.

We are currently finalizing Steps Eight through Twelve of the *Step Into Action* series, reviewing the first two volumes of *Step into Action*, and collecting material for SA's Twelve Traditions. If you would like to serve as a Reader, **please contact saico@sa.org**. If you have comments or suggestions on Committee projects and would like to share your comments with us, please send input in Word documents via email to saico@sa.org, or mail hard copies to SA-ICO, PO Box 3565, Brentwood, TN 37024-3565, USA 37024-3565, USA.

If you would like to share your experience related to one of the Traditions,

Please submit stories to Essay@sa.org.

New Groups USA

Brevard County, FL

Boise, ID

Des Moines, IA

Memphis, TN

New Orleans, LA

Netherlands

The Hague

Canada

Nanaimo, BC

Wanted: Graphic Artist Proficient in Adobe InDesign

Layout artist needed to provide advice and/or assistance in laying out pages of future issues of *Essay*. Must have current access to InDesign software and be able to transfer files electronically.

Note: this is a *volunteer* service position.

If interested, please contact Essay@sa.org



Deadline for submissions for December Essay is November 1.

Calendar of Events



September 29, 2007, SA/S-Anon 5th Annual Conference, Nashville, TN. Theme: *Out of the Darkness into the Light*. Info available at www.sanashville.org or call Joe at 615-456-4017.

October 5-7, 2007, SA Fall Retreat, Plano, IL, sponsored by Chicago Area SA Intergroup. Theme: *A New Freedom*. More info available at www.chicagosa.org or call 630-415-0341.

October 12-13, 2007, Toronto SA Marathon, with S-Anon & S-Ateen participation. Sponsored by SA Toronto. Theme: *Practicing a Positive Sobriety*. For info email satoronto@reptiles.org or call 416-410-7622.

October 13, 2007, Writing Workshop on the Steps, La Habra, CA, sponsored by Southern California Area Intergroup. For info see www.sasocal.org

October 13, 2007, SA/S-Anon Sacramento Area Fall Conference. *This Marriage Shouldn't Work*. for info contact Margy at margy4021@yahoo.com or call 530-392-1532.

October 19-21, 2007, Northwest SA / S-Anon Fall Retreat, Ross Point, Post Falls, ID, sponsored by Inland Northwest Intergroup. For info see www.sanorthwest.org or call 866-291-0914.

October 20, 2007, SA & S-Anon Conference, Nazareth, PA, sponsored by Lehigh Valley/ Reading area Intergroup of SA. Theme: *A Program of Action*. More info at www.orgsites.com/pa/sa or call 610-682-9622.

November 9-11, 2007, *How to Work the Steps Retreat*, sponsored by Upstate SA of South Carolina. More info available at www.orgsites.com/sc/upstatesa.

November 9-11, 2007, Northern California SA Men's Retreat, Ben Lomond, CA, sponsored by Northern CA SA Intergroup. More info will be posted at www.sabayarea.org.

March 7-9, 2008, SA / S-Anon Australia National Conference, sponsored by SA Canberra. Theme: *Overcoming the Obsession*. For info call Jerome at 61 02 6296 3841 or see Saoz2008@yahoo.com.au

International Conventions 2008

January 11 -13, 2008, Newark, NJ *Chorus of Recovery*. Info at www.chorusofrecovery.org or at 732-886-2142, option 3.

July 11-13, 2008, Akron, OH. *Come to the home of Dr. Bob*. More info soon.

[*Note: International calling protocols differ from country to country. We include information given by local contacts, however, it may be helpful to consult an international operator for guidance on making calls.*]

Events scheduled after November will be listed in December 2007 *Essay*. Submit info to be listed by November 15, 2007. Please submit dates, theme, place, and points of contact.

Event flyers are helpful for responding to member questions.

Submit events to be listed in *Essay* to saico@sa.org

*Events are listed here solely as a service, not as an endorsement by *Essay* or SAICO.*

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The Twelve Traditions of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on SA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for SA membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or SA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers.
6. An SA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the SA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. SA should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers
9. SA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. SA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.

Essay presents the experience, strength, and hope of SA members. Opinions expressed in Essay are not to be attributed to SA as a whole, nor does publication of any article imply endorsement by SA or by Essay. Manuscripts are invited, although no payment can be made. All articles submitted are assumed intended for publication and are subject to editing. All materials submitted become the property of SA and are therefore considered assigned to SA for copyright purposes. In submitting articles, please remember that SA's sobriety definition is not debated, since it distinguishes SA from other sex addiction fellowships. Essay is not a forum for non-SA sobriety and non-SA principles.

