

Essay

March 2008



Why I Stay Sober

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.

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March 2008



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.

—Adapted with permission from the AA Grapevine Inc.

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a Meeting in Print*

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Why I Stay Sober

When I first came to SA, I was one of those people who wanted to control and enjoy my lust, but not stop lusting altogether. I wanted to work my own program. I thought I was smarter than the other members and smarter than my therapist. For the first year I would be sober for a week, two weeks, or a month at most. Then I'd relapse, and I'd share in a meeting, "Oh I had a slip," as if it were no big deal. I never felt bad about the slips, and they never seemed to affect my ability to function the next day (in my opinion anyway). So I kept up this vicious cycle.

I often asked myself what it would take for me to stay sober. I thought that perhaps if I had negative consequences for my actions I would stay sober. So I told my wife about everything: the girls, the massage parlors, and the girlfriend. She was quite upset and told me that if this ever happened again, we would be finished. I thought that would keep me sober, but it didn't. I slipped again and went back to my girlfriend, but more carefully this time, never using the credit

card and erasing all e-mails—and slipping, actually falling.

My girlfriend moved to another state, so I figured it was safe to speak



to her every day now. The idea of her not being in New York was comforting. I thought it would help me maintain my sobriety. But talking to her was a form of acting out. I kept the relationship hidden from my wife, my sponsor, and my therapist. That way, if my wife ever threw me out, I would have a place to go. The lies continued. I was technically sober, but the technicality was destroying my family. I could not possibly be a good father, husband, or even friend to anyone when my thoughts were consumed with a women

who was not my wife.

I heard that she was dating someone, and the addict in me reacted immediately. I flew her in and put her up in a hotel room, and we acted out. Afterward she said it was our last hurrah; we would never be sexual again—so I could reset my clock, maintain my sobriety, and still

be her friend. Now the addict was taking advice from his girlfriend! I continued to lie to my wife, sponsor, and therapist. In meetings I shared that I must reset my clock, but never mentioned that I was having an affair in a long-term relationship.

I was getting deeper into the friendship with this woman. I would tell myself that as long as I was sober, no one was being hurt and everyone should be happy. The problem was that I was not happy; I was actually miserable.

Months later we were still talking. She would tell me about her boyfriend. I became her confidant. We discussed their every date and every argument. Then one day she told me that her boyfriend had broken up with her and she needed to come to New York to see me. My ego exploded. I was 43 years old; she was 28 and her boyfriend 27—and she wanted me! How could I say no? This was Sunday and she booked a flight for Monday. Mondays are tough because I have therapy Monday mornings, so I would have to lie to my therapist. But it would be worth it in the end.

But something happened to me during therapy that morning that I cannot explain: I realized that sobriety is the answer for me and that I really must stop. I was going crazy and could no longer handle it. I needed to get off the roller coaster, but I had no idea what to do. Her plane would land in two hours. I prayed to God for help and sent her a text message,

saying that my family is the most important thing in the world to me, and that I could not see her. When she landed, she called, asking if I was joking. I assured her it was not a joke, and I left her stranded at the airport. My life changed for the better that day—October 30, 2006—the day that today I count as my sobriety date.

Today I recognize the huge need to stop lusting rather than enjoy and control lust. My life had been filled with brothels, massage parlors, cross dressing, same-sex acting out, and voyeurism. I've been through it all. But my focus today is on the long-term affair that many of us have experienced, and on how the decision to stop the affair made my life so much better and actually worth living.

I was married by age 20, but marriage never stopped me from acting out. I went to massage parlors and hookers on business trips. I always found ways to act out. I realize now that in all those women I was seeking a person who would love me unconditionally, whether I was rich or poor, smart or stupid, funny or sad. They smiled and told me I was the best. That was all I needed to hear. The problem was that I could not feel connected to these women because of what they did for a living.

All that changed when I met my girlfriend. I met her at a massage parlor, but I believed that she was not like the others because she seemed to care about me. I went back to that location three times a week just to

spend an hour with her. We became close and I invited her to go on a trip to Vegas with me. She agreed—and after seeing her professionally for a year, I finally learned her real name. Imagine that the woman I thought of as my one true love had never told me her real name!

We traveled to Vegas but she would not have intercourse with me because I was married. That only made her more attractive to me. Something in me snapped. All I could think about was this woman. No work got done, no family obligations were met, I became mean and disgusting to my wife, and I continued to carry on with this woman. I wanted her out of the massage business, so I began to pay her bills. I got her an apartment in New York City and even paid her cosmetic dentist bills. Six months later, we started having intercourse and began to profess our love for each other. I lied to my wife and told her that work was so tough I needed to stay in the city overnight. I took my girlfriend on trips to Vegas, Connecticut, Atlantic City, California, New Orleans, and even to Europe.

The double life I was leading was killing me. I felt like crap putting on my teffillin (praying) in the morning. I had no relationship with my kids. I had no idea when their birthdays were, what grades they were in, who their teachers were, or whether they were good students. I didn't know them. But if you wanted to know my

girlfriend's favorite food, how she took her coffee, or what she wore each day, I knew that all too well.

My wife and I fought about everything. We fought in front of the kids. We were never civil to each other. I tried to make my wife more like my girlfriend. I asked her to do things in bed that she refused to do, and to hang out in bars with me. My wife is a religious girl and was not comfortable in a bar, but all I wanted to do was to get her to be more like my girlfriend. Today I thank God that she would not.

I was deeply depressed when I was home. I felt sick and disgusted with myself and had many suicidal thoughts. Yet when I was with my girlfriend I was always happy and charming—and most of the time drunk, from both lust and alcohol. But when I asked her if I should leave my wife, she answered that she could not be a home wrecker. That only brought me closer to her. Imagine the insanity: she did not want to be a home wrecker, yet she had no problem acting out with me or having me support her. The addict in me could not hear or see the truth.

One day out of the blue, my wife asked if I was having an affair. I said "No way!" and "How dare you ask such a thing?" I had a way of making her feel guilty. But she said that if I was not having an affair but was so depressed, perhaps I should see a psychiatrist. Perhaps I needed some meds to pick me up. I told her that maybe

I did need to see someone, but that I would go to a therapist, not an MD.

I decided to go to a Jewish, religious therapist thinking that only he would understand my lifestyle. I figured that I would lay out my story so well that he would tell me to leave my wife and be with my girlfriend. But after two hours of talking, he told me I was a sex addict and needed to go to rehab. I thought he was kidding. How could anyone be addicted to sex? Isn't sex a good thing? But he said that's what I was and that I should go to an SA meeting. He explained that SA is a fellowship of men and women who are sex addicts and want to get better. So then I asked for the meeting location, because now I wanted to go. I wanted to meet female sex addicts. How great would that be—a place to meet women who cannot control themselves sexually! But I walked into my first meeting and only met a bunch of guys. Boy, was I disappointed.

It took a long time for me to get sober. I slowly revealed to my wife that I was in SA, that I had a problem with chronic masturbation, that I "may" have a problem with massage parlors, that I "may" have visited a prostitute, and finally that I was having a long-term affair. She asked, "You don't know whether you went to massage parlors or prostitutes?"



The addict in me could not be fully honest with my wife. I thought saying "may" would soften the blow.

With each revelation I thought it would be easier to stay sober, but that was not the case. The angrier she got, the more I wanted to act out. I realize now that my wife was my biggest trigger. I could pass an attractive woman on the street and not look twice, but if my wife was upset with me all I wanted to do was act out.

"Get sober or die." I had heard this at meetings but never believed it. Actual death? How could that be? For me today, it's "Get sober or die spiritually." Today I can say that because I have experienced the joys of sobriety.

A husband and wife will naturally have good times and bad times. But a man and his mistress have only good times. It's a drug. It feels great to be high, but the high isn't real. That's why it's so addictive. I've experienced both types of relationships and today I like reality much better. The difficult part of sobriety is that you start to feel real feelings—the way life is supposed to feel.

Once, when I was in a hotel room acting out with my girlfriend, my wife called, telling me my friend's son was diagnosed with cancer. I couldn't care less. "Oh well, say some psalms (tehilim) and move on." The boy was 17—the

same age as my son at the time—and I didn't care if he lived or died. All I wanted to do was get back to acting out. I cannot be a caring human being unless I am sober.

My wife and I still fight at times, but we have not raised our voices to each other since I got sober. We deal with the issues of kids, finances, in-laws, vacation, and schooling together. I finally got to know my kids. That has been a big plus in sobriety.

When I was drunk with lust, spending time with kids was a hassle. I would take my son to little league games and walk away from the game to talk to my girlfriend. I would put her on hold when he was at bat, thinking I was being a good father. Now I go with him to watch his hockey games. I love every minute of it, and he loves that I'm there. We get along well now. I have the time and patience to sit and go over his homework with him. In the past, I would just do the homework for him. He loved it because he didn't have to do



it himself. I loved it because I didn't need to spend time with him. Now, I love sitting with him and going over the homework. I don't give him the

answers today. It's more fun to work together and watch him think it out.

Life today is so much better. The best thing I did for myself was to leave my girlfriend stranded at the airport. She has not contacted me since, and I pray she won't. But today I would be able to deal with it; I'd make a call or talk it out with my home group.

Today, I know that there is no such thing as a "harmless affair." They are all harmful, not just to a spouse or children but to the addict. My acting out caused much pain in my household. My oldest son became a sex addict as well. He's in recovery now, but I could not help him until I got sober. Had I done what I wanted to do when I first met with the therapist—leave my wife, my family, and my religion, and just be with the girlfriend—I believe my son might be dead today. He might have killed himself from the shame he was living with. But God had other plans. First he got me better, and then he got my son better.

There is hope in these rooms. It takes a long time for some of us, but keep coming back. Sobriety is the most precious gift I have ever given myself. I want to make sure no one ever takes it from me. That's why I keep coming back.

—Anonymous

Birthday Share

Four Years



"I'm Art, a Sexaholic. I've been sexually sober since January 3, 2004." That's how I've introduced myself in every meeting I've attended. Today, exactly four years later, I have several strong impressions.

First, four years is both a long time and a very brief period. At a birthday meeting at a recent international convention, I was struck by the vast number of us with only a few months or years of sobriety. As the meeting progressed and the crowd coming to the podium dwindled, I wondered if more than a handful would have double-digit sobriety. Thankfully at least 27 persons fell into that category. What an encouragement and what a challenge—as well as a reminder that I'm barely getting started. Just a preschooler in the process of recovery!

Second, I'm aware that four years equals 1,461 days, one day at a time. While I'm grateful to have a four-year medallion, it's not the one I'll carry with me every day. It lies on my bedside table as a reminder to be glanced at when I rise and retire. But the only medallion I'll have in my pocket is the "surrender" chip I've carried since my first meeting. It reminds me that "no matter how far down the road I may come, I'm still the same distance from the ditch."

Third, I know that this milestone

can become a millstone if I forget the important distinction between mere length of sobriety and the quality of it. It has taken me quite awhile to begin to understand that sobriety is not recovery. I used to think they were synonymous, but I've become aware that they are quite different. I've observed this in those who have many more years than I do. I've also observed it in those who have allowed their slips to become stepping stones to a much greater depth in both their sobriety and recovery. They are a constant inspiration to me, as well as an affirmation of the power of this amazing program.

That leads to a final awareness that, as the Good Book says: "Pride goeth before a fall." It's true. I can feel pride welling up inside me at times like this, and I've seen it wreak havoc in the lives of others. While I respect and admire those who lose sobriety and bounce back with renewed vigor and commitment, I'm frankly too scared to let myself go back out there. I may not make it back alive, and I can't take that chance. Four years behind me, thank God, and with His help and the support of the Fellowship, I look forward to many more years ahead!

—Art S.



True Intimacy

The experience of the treatment staff was that people who didn't make a full disclosure didn't recover. They said that recovery has to be based on honesty and that we addicts could not afford a lie in our most intimate relationship. We could choose to participate or not, but they would not collude in lying to a spouse by helping with a partial disclosure. Besides, as the staff pointed out, our spouses have the right to decide if they want to be with us. Our fear that they might be hurt and angry enough to leave us does not give us the right to manipulate them into staying. It's not a loving or respectful thing to do.

The four or five minutes of my disclosure was without a doubt the most painful thing I've ever done. Even with counselors there, it was much, much worse than I expected. I was stunned at how deeply my husband was hurt. A counselor led him to another room and sat with him while his world shattered. He says now that the rest of the day was a blur, most of which he can't remember. In the evening he did some reading in a well-known book on sex addiction. He couldn't sleep.

Sometime in the middle of the night, while he was walking in the

My husband and I were talking about intimacy recently. We agreed that intimacy must be based in truth, and that I need to be totally honest (without gory details) about the big stuff.

But as a warning to anyone desiring total honesty: *Sexaholics Anonymous* (3, "A Caution") talks about disclosure. *Read it first!* We addicts should not make the decision to disclose on our own, and it should not be done when we aren't sober.

In my case, after sinking to astonishing new lows, I was lucky enough to land in a treatment facility for sex addicts. During "family week," I was required to make a full disclosure to my husband about my behavior. He went to a few classes on addiction and learned how the addict is the most visible part of a dysfunctional family system. He also attended an orientation class about what to expect during disclosure. But there's no amount of preparation that can lessen the pain of betrayal our spouses feel when we tell them the truth.

parking lot of the hotel, things clicked and he got it: It's not about him. The stuff I did is not about how good he is in bed, his looks, the amount of money he makes, how well he listens, his weight . . . none of that. It's about me being sexually compulsive and misusing my sexuality to deal with life. Nothing I did was his "fault," and I was trying to learn how to live a different way. That gave him some hope that things could change.

But regardless of what I did, at least now he knew the truth, and could decide where he wanted to go from here. He decided he'd like to try to stay together to see if we could make our marriage work. We've definitely been amazed, even though we are not half way through. I wish we could have gotten here with less pain, but I'm glad we're here.

The recommendation from the treatment staff for when we went home was that any loss of sobriety had to be disclosed to our spouse. Lapses had to be disclosed too—things like googling a former acting out partner, or cruising past an adult bookstore. I've had two lapses (not losses of sobriety) in the last year and a half and—for all this blather here in my story—I was too ashamed and too scared to tell my husband. If I hadn't had good help, I would defi-

nately NOT have disclosed my lapses to him, rationalizing that I was sparing him from unnecessary pain. But that would have been the beginning of living a lie again, and that's not a road I can afford to take. But again, if I hadn't had good help from a sober sponsor, a strong group, and a certified sex-addiction therapist, I would have done the wrong thing. And even with all that great help, if I wasn't in a "fit spiritual condition" I wouldn't have listened.

Both times, my husband was hurt. But he understands the disease of addiction, and he has compassion for how difficult recovery can be. I have a lifetime habit of misusing my sexuality and only a year and a half or so of sobriety. Knowing that it isn't about him, that he can't save me, and that he can and will make choices to protect himself really helps. He knows that if I start acting out again, he will leave me. That's scary for me, but it's been a huge comfort to him. He knows that whatever happens, he can live a happy, meaningful life without being married to me. He stays with me because he loves me. It's his

choice. He doesn't have to be afraid that I will take him on a ride through hell anymore, because he can stop the train and get off before it goes over the cliff.



Disclosure, as painful as it was, helped rebuild the trust that's necessary in my marriage. My husband has experienced that I will be honest about my behavior because I have disclosed my lapses. Because I worked the Steps and stayed honest, I did not go on to lose my sobriety.

Facing My Emotions

I just came back from an open AA meeting. I'm not an alcoholic, but I do sometimes go to open AA meetings when there isn't an available SA meeting. These meetings are usually difficult for me in a way that SA meetings are not, because I don't share. Instead, I have to sit quietly through the entire hour of the meeting. And when I'm quiet like that, my emotions start to come to the surface.

Today, on the way back from the meeting, I realized I was angry. I was able to trace it to fear, and when I got home I started crying. It was old pain—the frustration that I've tried so hard to manage my life, all to no avail. I've experienced this pain before, but it seems that my road to emotional sobriety is like the proverbial onion, where I have to experience successively deeper layers of something before being free of its influence.

It has never been difficult for me to be “cash register” honest.

There's no doubt that sobriety is the most important thing in my life. Losing sobriety would be kind of like losing oxygen: nothing much good is going to happen after that.

—Barb R., *gratefully recovering sexaholic*, s.d. 6/17/06



This was a concept introduced to me by my second sponsor, and it refers to being scrupulously honest to the point where, if a cashier gives me too much change, I give back the extra amount. Neither did I ever lie about my sexual acting out.

But during my Step Four resentment inventory, I learned that I had been a very dishonest person when it came to my relationship with my (now) ex-wife. I was telling her the truth as I believed it, but I was being dishonest to myself about what I was thinking and feeling. During the two years of my marriage, I tried to brainwash myself into being the person I thought my wife wanted me to be. If an emotion was unacceptable, I stuffed it. If I thought or believed something that was contrary to what my wife thought, I would somehow convince myself to believe otherwise. The net effect of all this was that I got

angry, and it became more and more difficult to control that anger. At times it broke out, with the final outburst being the event that separated us and led to our divorce. I was arrested for domestic violence assault.

So for me, rigorous honesty means being truthful about what I'm thinking and feeling. I was very good at suppressing and controlling my emotions, except those times during my marriage. My Step Four resentment inventory was sheer hell. By dipping into my psyche and listing the resentments, I opened the floodgate of all those suppressed emotions.

At times I was subjected to multiple, strong, and conflicting emotions all at once. I used to call them “typhoons,” and since they were typically centered on a person, I would give them names, such as typhoon Mary or typhoon Kathy. It was all I could do to endure them. Partly because of this, I took a year to do my resentment inventory. But at the end, it was very complete. And I had made it past a major mountain in my recovery journey. Actually, of all the things I've experienced in recovery, that was the most difficult. I don't say it any more, but I used to share in meetings that I wouldn't have attempted that inventory if I had known how hard it was going to be. Instead I'd have just killed myself or something.



One of the benefits of my acting out was that it kept me from having to feel. As a sexaholic, I tend to sexualize my emotions. But suppressed feelings clutter up my connection to God. I don't know why that's the case, but the God of my understanding insists that I be emotionally healthy in order to receive my daily reprieve. And this requires me to be honest about what I'm thinking and feeling.

I hate having to feel feelings. I'm going through a difficult time right now in regards to employment. It's the culmination of about ten years of recovery work, and it's bringing up unpleasant stuff. I'm tired of having to try so hard just to do what billions of normal people do every day: work an eight-hour day. In fact, I have proven to myself that I am incapable of doing that. So now I am experiencing the pain of trying so hard for so long, the self-condemnation of being defective, and the fear related to finances. I just tell myself that God is much better at running my life than I am, and I repeat the prayer, “Thy will, not mine, be done.” I cling

to the hope that some day I will be at that place of “happy, joyous, and free” that's promised in *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Certainly I am much better at handling life events than I was five years ago when I got sober.

I've heard AA speakers dismiss their first five years of sobriety, list-

ing subsequent years as being more significant in terms of life changes. Maybe I'm one of those people. My



Since my disclosure to my wife, I've lied to her only once. It was meant as a prank—but it was a bad idea. It really set us back because it brought up all the feelings of distrust that she had in the beginning, and it was hard for her to believe that there weren't other lies. It was a stupid and callous thing for me to do.

Rigorous honesty is part of the foundation on which I have built my recovery. I check in with my wife every day concerning my program, my recovery, and my feelings. I do not tell her about triggers I have encountered, or any euphoric thoughts or dreams. Those are aspects of my recovery that I share with my accountability partner. However, if she asks me a question, I give her an

sponsor likes to remind me that it keeps getting better. So I just keep plugging along. I guess that's why they call it "trudging."

—Chad C.

Rigorous Honesty

honest answer, even if I know that the answer is not what she's hoping for. It just can't be any other way if I'm going to progress in my recovery. Being totally honest, even when it makes me look bad and might hurt her again, helps in several ways.

- It allows my wife to know me and not my facade.
- It deepens our relationship because I'm not holding back part of myself.
- It helps me be honest with myself.
- It reminds me that there is a lot for which I need to ask forgiveness.
- It frees me from having to remember what I said last time, if it's always the truth.
- It proves that I am getting better.

There are also several conclusions I have come to regarding rigorous honesty:

- Honesty is required in all areas of my life, not just SA.
- If I am not honest with another, I can't expect honesty in return.
- A relationship based on lies is a false relationship.

The addict in me does lie, to me. One of the arguments my addict uses

when I am tempted to act out is that I can lie about losing my sobriety, and no one will ever know. But my true self knows that is not true. Besides, my wife can tell when I have given up my sobriety just by looking at my face. And if I should lie to the group, that would require me to lie every week, over and over, and I couldn't pull that off even if I wanted to. I know from being with guys who have admitted lying about their sobriety to the group that it will feel worse than just admitting that I slipped in the first place. As extra insurance, when I have lost my sobriety in the past, I have always called someone in SA

right away, thereby short-circuiting the temptation to lie.

I know I have been lied to in SA, and that it will happen again. I'm not offended today, I'm not surprised, and I don't analyze what others say as to its truthfulness. I have nothing to lose by accepting their lies as truth. I am disappointed, and it hurts them, but I can't judge them because lying was my first line of defense and my initial response my whole life. Now I choose to be trustworthy, and I trust that others are the same.

—Anonymous

One Day At A Time

Selected Daily Renewals Prayers

Morning Surrender Prayer

Lord, I surrender my lust and ask you to keep me sober from my lust today because I cannot; but by your strength, I can.



Submission Prayer

Higher Power, I give this day to you. Establish the work of my hands, the steps of my feet, the words of my mouth, the direction of my gaze, the thoughts of my mind, and the attitude of my heart.

Daily Gratitude Prayer

Giving thanks at the end of each day helps to direct our consciousness towards things that have made our lives more manageable and powerful.

Evening / Night-Time Surrender Prayer

Lord, I surrender my lust and ask you to keep me sober from my lust tonight because I cannot; but by your strength, I can.

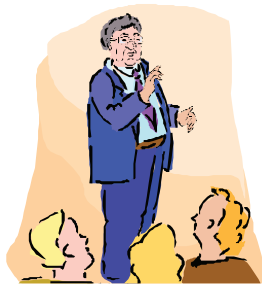
—Submitted by the Dublin, Ireland Group

Releasing the Shame

January 2008, Newark NJ

I experienced something new at the International SA/S-Anon Convention in Newark, NJ, this past January. One of the morning sessions had to do with fetishes and obsessions.

There had been some contention as to whether to include such a topic at an SA convention but the room was packed. The speaker—a woman with significant recovery—shared her story. As she spoke, the faces of members of the audi-



ence lit up with recognition. When the woman finished, others strode to the front to share their own stories. (For numerous reasons, this meeting was not recorded.) One attendee said that he thought it was a great idea that the convention planners had considered such a neglected topic.

For those of us who shared the power of surrender in that meeting, it felt as if a yoke, shouldered for so long, had finally been broken. As each summoned the courage and talked about the shame (after having to hide the truth from family and loved ones for so long), there seemed to be a collective letting go, as we cast aside the stigma that had burned

for so long inside, and projected it out of our heads and into the room.

We don't hear much talk about fetishes in meetings. Perhaps local fellowships could devote time to a special topic of this type, because, as in other areas of recovery, when we share our most shameful secrets, they lose their power over us. The new feelings of optimism and hope, as well as unburdened relief, could be felt in that room.

A few hours after the meeting ended, the speaker told me that the convention planners were so impressed with this meeting they had scheduled another on the same topic for that evening.

I had previously attended four annual SA conventions, and I thought I had seen and heard surrender at the gut level many times. I've seen members become emotional while speaking in the spiritual light of more than 500 people. There is no disputing that when a previously undisclosed barrier to the light is removed, our gates of fear and denial open, and reality, as we had never known it rushes in. There have been times I have felt the protection of my Higher

Power—like an angel's wings—during these disclosures to my sponsor. There is no limit to our desire for secrecy, but as many of us discovered in that meeting, the



secrets that once ruled us do not have to remain secrets. We discover the power and great freedom that comes when we bring our acts to the light.

—Anonymous

Personal Reflections on Lust Recovery

July 2007 Lust Questionnaire, Adelphi, MD

My initials are L. A. I'm powerless over lust without God's help.

My journey to sobriety and progressive victory over lust has been challenging and victorious. In 1989, I came into SA after years of endangering my life and freedom by cruising public acting-out places and hooking up anonymously with men. I dove into the program, went to lots of meetings, got physically sober, and felt tremendous relief.

I thought I was sober.

After three years of physical sobriety, I left the program, believing that walking with God would be enough to keep me clean. I moved abroad and accepted a stressful job that consumed me. After seven years of white-knuckling sobriety, I lost it on a visit back home.

I was so exhausted after seven years of that job that I knew I needed to move back to the States. But

first, I took a five-month vacation in Europe and Africa, during which I returned to some pre-SA cruising behaviors. I considered myself sober because I just watched others but did not physically act out myself. When I finally got back to the US, I felt insane and desperate. I crawled back into SA. I claimed those five months of "vacation" as sober time.

Finally, I had a check meeting and saw that claiming sobriety in light of what I had been doing was producing deep self-hatred and suicidal rage. I reset my date. I felt relieved; I had a renewed sense of my own integrity and God's presence with me.

I realized that I had never understood lust and didn't know what or how to surrender. I had only known that I could not have sex with self or others (except spouse, which I didn't



have) in order to stay sober. But I was not achieving progressive victory over lust.

I had to reconsider what sober behavior and progressive victory over lust looked like for me. I had to add “not taking a willful drink of lust” to my bottom line. And “progressive victory” became the willingness to keep adding to my bottom line as God revealed where lust was still lurking.

It seems that I wasn't the only SA member reflecting on progressive victory over lust. In planning the program for the July 2007 *Live & Let Go* Convention in Maryland, the Convention Program Committee grappled with the question of what the SA fellowship considers sober. We designed a lust questionnaire and offered it to the attendees to complete. In all, 176 of the 300+ attendees responded. *Questionnaire findings are provided on pages 18-19.*

I was personally struck by the responses to Question 12, in which over two-thirds of respondents said that they considered unsober behavior to include willfully looking at porn, willfully lusting after others, willfully fantasizing, willfully lusting after self, and willfully provoking lust in others—even when there was no physical acting out.

Other SA members might have different reactions after reviewing the data, and may be interested in reading and freely discussing the questionnaire results at meetings. It may also be valuable for the fellowship to engage in a broader dialog about what kind of sobriety will lead us to the deeper recovery we in SA are really looking for. God and SA saved my life. I pray they will continue to save others.

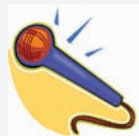
—L.A.



Call for Feedback: Member Reactions to Lust Questionnaire Findings (Shown on pages 18-19)

What do these findings signify about where we are as a fellowship in lust recovery? How does this apply to fellowship unity and adherence to our Third Tradition? What steps can we take, if any, to strengthen unity of spirit on what constitutes lust sobriety?

Please submit your thoughts related to the questionnaire findings to Essay@sa.org



Upcoming International Convention



Welcome Home

July 11-13, 2008, Akron, OH

The Birthplace of Twelve Step Recovery

Akron, Ohio—the birthplace of Twelve Step recovery—will host the July 2008 SA/S-Anon International Convention, entitled “Welcome Home.” We who live in Akron are reminded of our rich recovery history simply by driving down a neighborhood street and seeing one of many Twelve Step landmarks. The power of faith, humility, willingness, acceptance, surrender, service, sponsorship, and working the Steps has been demonstrated in Akron since the summer of 1935, when Bill W. and Dr. Bob met here and founded Alcoholics Anonymous. This rich history of Twelve Step recovery has served as the foundation of our convention programming. We want all conference attendees—both SA and S-Anon—to experience the power of Twelve Step Recovery.

In addition, we are offering guided tours (at an additional cost) for those who wish to visit some of the historic Twelve Step landmarks here. Each tour will visit Dr. Bob's home and the newly established archive next door, along with the Gate House at Stan Hywet Hall and the Smith gravesite.

The convention will be located at the Radisson Hotel Akron City Centre in downtown Akron. A special convention room rate is available by visiting www.radisson.com/reservations/ and entering the promotional code “WELCOM” or by calling 330-384-1500 or 800-333-3333 and mentioning the “Welcome Home” convention. You may register online at www.welcomehomeakron.com, or you can mail the brochure included with this issue of *Essay*.

If you have a particular need, interest, or suggestion regarding programming of the “Welcome Home” convention, please contact program@welcomehomeakron.com. For additional information, call 330-315-2008 and leave a message, or email us at info@welcomehomeakron.com.

—Rich D., SA Convention Committee Chairperson



Lust Questionnaire Findings

Results of Survey Conducted at July 2007 International Convention

Following are the results of the lust questionnaire distributed in July 2007 in Adelphi, MD. SA members participated on a voluntary basis and submitted their questionnaires anonymously.

A total of 176 SA members participated in this survey.



Q1. Respondent gender

| Male | Female |
|------------------|--------|
| 158 ¹ | 18 |
| 90% ² | 10% |

Q2. Marital status

| Married | Single | Other | Not given |
|---------|--------|-------|-----------|
| 94 | 55 | 25 | 2 |
| 53% | 31% | 14% | 1% |

Q3. Main acting out and fantasy

| Same Sex | Opp. Sex | Both | Not given |
|----------|----------|------|-----------|
| 40 | 119 | 13 | 4 |
| 23% | 68% | 7% | 2% |

Q4. Length in SA (in years)

| Avg | Max | Min |
|-----|------|------|
| 5.8 | 22.2 | .003 |

Q5. Length of physical sobriety (in years)

| Avg | Max | Min |
|-----|------|-----|
| 3 | 21.9 | 0 |

Q6. No. of relapses from physical sexual sobriety?

Responses ranged from zero to countless

Q7. Length of lust sobriety (in years)

| Avg | Max | Min |
|-----|------|-----|
| 1.6 | 16.5 | 0 |

Q8. Want to stop lusting?

| Yes | No | Not given |
|-----------|--------|-----------|
| 171 (97%) | 4 (2%) | 1 (1%) |

Q9. Ways you lust or are tempted to lust

| a. Pornography/media-based lust | b. Lust after other people | c. Romantic/sexual fantasy | d. Lust after myself |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| 120 (68%) | 138 (78%) | 134 (76%) | 50 (28%) |
| e. Provoke lust in others by words, dress, or actions | | f. Other | |
| 64 (36%) | | 47 (37%) | |

Q10. What do you want in lust recovery?

| a. Stop all in #9 | b. Lust free (no temptations) | c. Free not to lust/choose not to lust when tempted | d. Want to stop only specific behaviors |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| 95 (54%) | 70 (40%) | 130 (74%) | 9 (5%) |

Q11. How do you interpret the Third Tradition?

(The only requirement for SA membership is the desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober.) I think the membership requirement means. . .

| a. Want to stop acting out physically only | b. Want to stop both willful lusting and physical acting out | c. Don't have to stop anything. I'm a member if I say I'm a member | d. Other |
|--|--|--|----------|
| 9 (5%) | 153 (87%) | 9 (5%) | 44 (25%) |

Q12. Do you personally think people are sober if, though not physically acting out, they still resort to:

| a. Willfully using pornography or other media-based lust material or literature | | b. Willfully lusting after other people | | c. Willfully resorting to romantic or sexual fantasy | |
|---|-----|---|-----|--|-----|
| Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| 36 | 138 | 42 | 127 | 51 | 121 |
| 20% | 78% | 24% | 72% | 20% | 69% |
| d. Willfully lusting after themselves | | e. Willfully provoking others to lust by words, dress, or actions | | | |
| Yes | No | Yes | No | | |
| 38 | 127 | 40 | 124 | | |
| 22% | 72% | 23% | 70% | | |

Q13. For me, the phrase "progressive victory over lust" means that I will steadily progress toward the point that:

| a. I might willfully lust but won't be compelled to act out physically | b. I will continue to be tempted to lust, but will be free not to lust | |
|--|--|-----------------------|
| 6 (3%) | 138 (78%) | |
| c. I will not be tempted to lust | | d. Own interpretation |
| 28 (16%) | | 46 (26%) |

Q14. Where are you actually at in lust recovery today?

| a. I sometimes willfully resort to lust but don't act out with myself or others | b. I sometimes willfully resort to lust and stimulate myself, but not to the point of orgasm | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| 43 (24%) | 22 (13%) | |
| c. I am not willfully resorting to lust, though tempted | | d. I am not tempted anymore |
| 76 (43%) | | 1 (1%) |

¹ Number of responses out of 176 total respondents

² Percentage of total responses

None of Us Is as Smart as All of Us: The Power of Meetings

I'm battling a disease that is much greater than I am, and which needs no rest. My disease is focused on driving a wedge between me and everything I hold dear. It is intent on killing me. It knows that by isolating me it can make me believe its lies—but as long as I have others to talk with, I can keep my addiction at bay. The disease is more cunning, baffling, and powerful than I am. If



I am left to my own accord, it will overtake me. It may take a month or a year, or maybe only days—but eventually, without help, I will be trapped again in the disease. No matter how much sobriety I have, or how long I have been in SA, my sanity depends on working with others.

Communication is a vital element in the combat of the disease. When we hold hands in a circle and pray together we are pledging our faith and love to each other. Faith that if we apply the tools of the program, we won't have to hurt forever; that if we work this program to the best of our abilities, we will get better—just like those who have gone before us.

Love is the enemy of this isolating disease. Love that is given freely, expecting nothing in return. This is the love we felt at first from others who did not know us. They loved us and made us feel comfortable when we were hurting.

When we sit in a circle and talk about what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now, we are passing on a tradition as old as humankind.

Cave dwellers sat in circles around a fire and talked about how to survive in a wild world. We are doing the same thing. We each go out and live our lives, then we meet again to talk about what we've learned.

None of us is as smart as all of us. When we openly communicate about the things in our heads we share common experiences. I can remember my first meetings. I was blessed that many members with long-term sobriety spoke openly about their thought processes. I would think, "Hey, that's me! I've had those same thoughts. I know exactly what this person is talking about." The more I listened, the more I learned. I'm

grateful today that I had the opportunity to learn from old timers who shared. Their willingness contributed to my getting sober and staying sober.

When I first came to meetings, I said very little. I knew my thinking was tainted, and that I needed to find a new way to think. I had never had a God-focused life and needed instruction on how to obtain that lifestyle. I listened, then listened some more. I'm not much on reading; I'm more auditory and visual. I have trouble reading "how to" books, but if I can see your face, feel your spirit, and watch you as I listen, then I have a good chance of understanding what you are saying.

I wonder sometimes, now that I'm one of the old timers, whether I'm capable of giving back to the group what I received as a newcomer. I'm not as well-spoken as others in the program. But I also know that I am what I am, and as part of a group, I do not have to carry the whole meeting. Me added to any one of you makes "us" smarter than me!

Recovery today is more than sexual sobriety. Recovery includes relationships with my higher power, my spouse, my children, my coworkers, and everyone with whom I come in contact. My recovery is God-centered. I pray before each meal, pray when I'm starting to get angry, and pray when I'm happy. I pray often.



Recovery is a lifestyle that incorporates every fabric of my being. People don't say "Hey that's Paul, he's sober." They say, "Hey that's Paul, he's a pretty cool dude. He's in recovery and God has changed his life."

The power of the group is magnificent. We learn early on in recovery that it's meetings, meetings, meetings. It's important that we listen to shares from all members. Those who are new remind us of what it was like before, and that truly helps their recovery and ours. Old timers need to share about what has worked.

At one time, I had completely given myself over to this disease. My wife left me and I had a four-bedroom house full of stuff. I was so overwhelmed that I could not do anything. I was paralyzed. I had a small inheritance so I did not have to work,

and there was no work to be had in the small community where I lived. The disease had me where it wanted me. The shades were drawn tight and the rooms were dark. There was nothing in the refrigerator. The grass outside was knee high. I sat inside and stayed on the computer for days at a time. No one came over, no one called. I was alone and slowly falling apart.

I was lost inside myself. I had no moral compass. I was drinking heavily, I was smoking pot every day. I masturbated constantly and was consumed by my hunger for sex.

There was almost no room left for me because the disease had all of me.

I believe God allowed me to experience that bleakness so that when I finally got the chance to leave I would know I was not leaving anything I wanted. God's grace prevented me from experiencing the full consequences of my disease, and He kept a speck of me alive. He took that one speck left and put people in my life who could help me.

Because I was willing, I could receive the words. When I was ready, I came to meetings. God used the group to talk to me. Never have I been to a meeting where I walked away and thought I had wasted my time. Every meeting I have attended

Sponsorship in SA

For me, honesty is the basis of a sponsorship relationship. I'm honest with my sponsor right away if a behavior is becoming a problem. I'm honest with her about what situations I must avoid. I also know what I am able to handle without problems. I'm the only one who can say what situations cause me problems. If my sponsor has an issue with a particular situation and it's in her list of bottom lines, but that situation does not cause me problems, my sponsor doesn't add it to *my* abstinence list. Although I talk everything over with my sponsor, she does not have the right to play God. It isn't healthy for her (no ego

has spoken to me in some way.

We may think that we have little to share. We may think we are unworthy of an audience with this esteemed group of sexaholics. I heard someone compare a meeting to a large fire. Individually, we all have twigs, branches, and logs, but we cannot warm ourselves with these. But when we combine all of the fuel and make a large fire, we have enough energy to keep everyone warm. Whatever small part we contribute is used for the greater good of the group. None of us is as smart as all of us.

— Paul D., San Diego



reduction) and it isn't healthy for me (can lead to more defiance).

Through sponsorship I learn very clear boundaries. My ego is deflated by following my sponsor's guidance and by being a humble sponsor. Being a sponsor myself has helped me strengthen my own program. Sponsoring others helps me maintain my own recovery. I can't keep it unless I give it away. It helps my commitment to sobriety because if I lose my

sobriety, I would not have the honor and joy of sponsoring others.

The situations, questions, and issues that come up in my sponsees' lives usually parallel mine, whether current or past. I don't need to have all the answers; I can ask for assistance anonymously from my sponsor and others. Sponsoring has helped me reach inside myself more, to stretch, to relate my own experience. It has helped me get more deeply in touch with myself. It has helped me become more conscious of my time, and be committed to being available at agreed upon times. I learn to respect others' time by calling my sponsor on time and staying to the point, so that I'm done in the 15 minutes she has graciously given me each day.

As a sponsor, I consider my primary role to be a cheerleader. I cheerlead from the sidelines as my sponsee goes through the Steps. I

don't play God, and I don't work harder than she does. But I do share of my own progress and recovery, to offer others the hope and inspiration to keep going.

I'm also listener and a guide, but not a therapist. I am not responsible for their recovery. I sponsor those who are willing to consistently do the work (the Steps and other tools), and who are willing to be consistently accountable.

Sponsoring has been gratifying. I celebrate every one of my sponsees' successes. I celebrate their abstinence anniversaries. I commend their Step work. I marvel at being able to help someone who wants to get better and who is willing to do what it takes to get there. It brings me joy to witness the new free, enriched lives they are leading.

—Lia F. 2/4/07

Working the Steps

When I first got into SA recovery, I had been attempting for a month to recover—on my own—using a popular Twelve Step study guide, but I was slipping constantly. I happened upon an online SA meeting and posted my complaints about the triggers that were overwhelming me. My sponsor-to-be responded, and within two days, on December 1st, 2006, I was reading Steps One, Two, and Three to my sponsor over the phone for 2 ½ hours,

Maine to Texas, sitting in my car.

I had “come to believe in the hopelessness and futility of living life as I had been living it” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, “There is a Solution,” 25), and there really was nothing left to do when approached by my sponsor, except pick up the simple tools he gave me. I felt fortunate that the first person who approached me had a solution that worked for me: using *Alcoholics Anonymous* as a basis for

working the Steps.

My sponsor spent up to two hours on the phone with me, three to four times each week for the next eight weeks, taking me through all Twelve Steps. He treated my situation as the emergency it was: “We are unable at certain times, no matter how well we understand ourselves, to bring into our consciousness with sufficient force the memory of the suffering and humiliation of even a week or a month ago” (AA, 24). He knew that I was actively mentally preparing for my next acting out adventure, because that’s what addicts do as the memory of the pain begins to subside. My sponsor knew he had to act fast. There was no room for small talk; we had to get down to the business of saving my life.

At first I worried that we were moving too fast. I had learned during years in therapy that I had to give myself time to process problems in my life. But now it occurred to me that this might be one of those preconceived ideas I had to cast aside. I remembered that I didn’t have a clue how to recover from this thing (even with my past AA experience), and that I had better follow my sponsor’s direction. I never said anything to him and just continued on.

What was the result? I had a “vi-



tal spiritual experience” (AA, 27). The constant chatter in my head (from the resentments, fears, and remorse that ruled me) was gone. An example of the shift that had taken place in me is an experience I had at work shortly after completing the Steps in SA.

I received an email from a coworker that angered me. I immediately fell into my old victim stance and was fuming from the injustice done to me. I started writing my typical snooty reply, but then realized I was indulging in a character defect: reacting in anger. I cancelled the reply but then stood up to share the story of the injustice with my fellow workers. But it occurred to me that I couldn’t do that either! I was falling into another character defect: collecting pity for myself. So I sat back in my chair, closed my eyes, and took an inventory of my anger. I saw my part and asked God to remove my shortcomings. Then I went back to work. That was a pretty drastic shift. Since then I have been able to habitually respond to upsets with an inventory instead of automatically resorting to my character defects as the solution.

I recently heard someone share in a meeting, “If I just keep coming to meetings and talking about my problems, I’ll get what I need.” But, for me, I’ve found that the only solution to my problems is to “turn to the entire Twelve Steps for the answer” (12&12, 111). I have found that if

I turn to the Steps whenever I run into a problem, God provides a way to resolve it. By way of the Steps, I turn my ideas about how the problem should be handled (my willfulness) over to God, thereby unblocking the flow of the Spirit, so He can solve the problem. The Steps get me, with all of my self-centeredness, out of the way, and provide a solution

that helps everyone involved, not just me.

Today I feel that I’ve been “rocketed into a fourth dimension of existence” (AA, 25). It is a miracle and I am proof that miracles do happen—especially as a result of working the Steps.

—Beth

Working Step Three

“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.”

I’ve always had a large ego, which never allowed me to acknowledge that I needed God.

I looked down on people of faith, thinking they were foolish or weak, and that they used the notion of God as a crutch. I would bristle with anger when watching a football player who had scored a winning touchdown and then gave the credit to God. Why would God choose one side to win and not the other? It made no sense to me. Looking back, I see that anger and my negative attitudes toward people of faith as jealousy. The people who had faith in God seemed happy; why was I so miserable? But what’s wrong with getting comfort



from a belief in a higher power who loves us and guides us to do good?

I’ve always tried to play God, thinking

I didn’t need anyone’s help. That thinking hasn’t gotten me to the place in life where I thought I would be. I’ve made a lot of poor choices by relying on my own self-will. But now I realize that without God, I would be lost in a hole of depression, still acting out, still lying to my wife, and still trying to convince myself that I could stop lustung on my own.

Over the past 16 months, I’ve come to realize that a power greater than me has been working in me. I now recognize that it is God who is guiding me to make better choices,

and who is giving me a sense of peace that I haven't had for a long time. I now find myself asking what God would want me to do in certain situations.

"I am my brother's keeper" is a phrase I've always thought I believed in, but I never practiced its message. I was always out for myself, and would help others only if I could get something in return. I've always sought to be successful and have resented other people's success, thinking, "I've worked harder than him, I'm smarter than her, I deserve the rewards more than that guy." But thinking I was smarter and couldn't learn from others who were leading happy and joyous lives pushed me deeper into isolation. I was great at criticizing others, because I didn't want to face what was wrong with me. Jealousy is a big weakness for me. With friends who are financially comfortable, I'd think, "He has a lot of money, but something's missing. I may not be rich but at least I'm happy." It didn't matter whether my friend was happy or not. To mask the unhappiness in my own life, I had to criticize others whose lives were working. In reality, I wasn't smarter at all.

I've been blocking God from my life by destroying little pieces of myself over the years. My fear of discovering



who I am and what makes me tick put me in a downward spiral of isolation and self-hatred. My compulsive acting out was my relief from all of my troubles—or so I thought. I couldn't see how separated I had become from others, especially from my wife, who always showed me love and understanding. I built up a lot of resentment toward her for that. Sometimes I even blamed her for my isolation. Early in our relationship, we watched porn and acted out together. But she understood early on that it was dark, and she felt disconnected from me as a result. She didn't want any part of it. But I couldn't give it up and resented her because it was now something I had to do alone and in secret. The shame and guilt I felt caused more resentment. I would get angry with her and lash out. I didn't see that I had lost that connection with her, and with God.

My understanding of God today is that there are two voices in my head. One is *my* voice, telling me that I should be resentful when things don't go my way, that it's okay to be jealous, fearful, angry, lazy, hurtful, mean, deceitful, or dishonest. My voice believes I don't have any real problems, and those I do have I can solve on my own. The other voice is asking me to be kind, thoughtful, giving, understanding, generous, trusting, and

honest. This voice tells me to do the right thing; it comes from the light rather than the darkness. It tells me to surrender. I hear this voice in the shared experiences of the group, telling me I'm not alone and it's not all about me all of the time. It tells me there is hope and that I don't have to depend on myself to solve my problems. It says, "Trust me and I will help you." Today I am beginning to recognize this voice as God's voice.

I've come to realize that depending on God is a way of gaining true independence. I had been trying to play God myself and in doing so, losing the connection with others, especially with the people who are closest to me. I know now that I can't stop my addiction on my own. I realize

Tradition Three

"The only requirement for membership in SA is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober."

Recently, I have begun to recognize a change over time in the nature and quality of my own desire for sexual sobriety and recovery.

As I understand AA's history with the Third Tradition, there was some idea that this requirement should be qualified as an honest or sincere desire. Fortunately for me, that idea was abandoned and no one (including me) was called upon to judge the quality of my desire to be in SA at first. Thanks be to the God of

now that turning to goodness, caring, love, and service is a liberating feeling. In Step One, I realized that there is a power greater than myself. I am powerless; I couldn't stop my addictive behavior. Step Two, together with a fairly good length of sobriety, the power of meetings, and the shared experience with others in recovery led me to recognize that there is a positive power that is restoring me to sanity. I could see progress. Surrendering my will to a power greater than myself has taken me to Step Three—and I can honestly say now that God *is* a crutch. A crutch I need to walk in His path, and I am willing to turn my life and will over to him.

—Rick C.



my understanding!

My desire for SA sobriety was born of pain, suffering, and the fear of profound loss. "It is by circumstance rather than by any virtue" (12&12, 38) that I came into SA. So true of me! I wanted the anguish to stop; my flirtations with suicide to end; my family to remain intact; and the insanity of wanting to do an ordinary thing—like getting home on time but instead ending up "back out there"—to end once and for all.

My first SA meeting was at the International Convention in Milwaukee in July 1989. I immediately wanted what I saw in the faces of the members there, what I heard in their stories, and what I discovered in *Sexaholics Anonymous* (which was introduced at that convention). Many of these folks shared victories over lust that gave them freedom from pain, restored integrity, and the capacity to live open and honest lives.

I wanted all of that and more. In the past I had gotten some of it in bits and pieces, with various lengths of sobriety, but real recovery eluded me. I was going through the motions, believing that I was sincere. But now I see that I wasn't really willing to bear the type of pain that is part and parcel of this program. I wasn't willing to "face the Wild Elephant" (*Sexaholics Anonymous*, "Step Four," 105).

Many factors have shaped my desire for sobriety and recovery today. These include time, meetings,

pain, consequences, the grace of God, the experience of others, the love of others (when I couldn't or wouldn't accept love), working the Steps, and working with others.

Today I still want freedom from the pain that comes with living in the "problem." But even more I desire that "positive sobriety"—the sobriety that draws me to an intimate relationship with my Higher Power, allows me to "take the actions of love to improve my relations with others," gives me the opportunity to be useful to God and my fellows, and allows me to live with integrity and to be happy, joyous and free. My desire today is for a sustained spiritual awakening—for the "Real Connection." This is my hope. I have read that "Hope is the belief that there is good worth working for." Today I am willing to do that work.

—Gary L., on the SA path since 7/89; sd: 3/12/2003



non-stop, and listen to tapes all the time—but I don't think I ever gave up lust 100%. I always felt there was something wrong with my program, but I didn't know what it was.

The Tools I Use Today

I've been hit hard by lust this last week. When that happens, my only choice is to surrender and turn to my Higher Power. The program becomes really simple after that.

In the past, I would work the Steps over and over, volunteer for lots of service positions, call 10 people each day, read program literature

Today, by the grace of God, I give up the first drink 100% of the time and turn to my Higher Power (Steps One through Three in a nutshell). Suddenly the program becomes simple. Today, I don't feel there is anything wrong with my program, but I have to keep working it. Today I feel clean, and I have felt that way for 120 days. I have had several years of "technical sobriety," but I never felt clean like I do today.

Today, I believe that the proper use of my willpower is in working the Steps, which removes the blockages between my Higher Power and me, between my head and my heart, and between myself and other people.

Something happened on Sept 14, 2007, that caused this change to happen. I'm not sure what it was, but several things come to mind:

- I knew the desire for lust was never going to leave, but today I have a choice in how I react.
- I knew that the lust package consisted of an upside (that gratifying rush) and a downside (the unmanageability it created). I had to give up the whole package.
- I knew I had to give up something I wanted. I'd never done that before.
- In giving up something I want, I have to experience the unavoidable pain of withdrawal.
- The tools for enduring withdrawal are my HP and the program.
- When the lust hit comes again, I have to give it up 100% and turn to

prayer, call someone, go to a meeting, or read some literature.

- The new life of recovery takes place in the space that is created between the desire for lust and taking the first drink of lust.

"Low-level" lust is really sipping at lust until one day it explodes inside of me and I end up acting out. All lust can be traced back to the first drink. If I surrender the first drink, I don't have to worry about any other form of lust. Then I can look at the blockages inside of me that cut me off from my HP, other people, and from myself.

After 16 years in the program, I feel like a newcomer, like I'm getting it for the first time. Today, three tools help me stay clean:

- The St. Francis Prayer (*12&12*, 99), especially the part about God making me a channel: for peace, love, forgiveness, harmony etc.
- Working the Steps with the idea of that channel in mind. This helps me remove the blockages in the channel, so the sunlight of the spirit can shine through me.
- The passage in *Alcoholics Anonymous* (86-88) regarding taking a daily inventory. I read this passage every morning and evening. It gives me tools I can use throughout the day in any situation.

These things help me to keep the program really simple, one day at a time. Thank God!

—Jim L. Mississauga, Ontario
Canada

A Note from the Delegate



Concept 9: Good service leadership at all levels is indispensable for our future functioning and safety.

Dear Fellow SA Members:

I would like to explain the process of selecting SA Delegates and Trustees. Selection of Delegates begins at the group level. Individual SA groups elect representatives to serve them at their Intergroup, Intergroups elect Representatives to represent them at the Regional Level, and Regions elect Delegates to the General Assembly. The Delegates set policy and elect Trustees to carry out the assigned tasks. The Trustees form committees to do the work, and they hire staff for SA International Central Office (SAICO).

At each level we are entrusted to do our best for the good of the whole fellowship (Step Twelve). "...Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern" (Tradition Two). As my sponsor (21 years sobriety) says, "SA was here when I needed it, and it is my obligation to see that it is here when someone else needs it." All SA members are welcome to serve on committees. Please join us in Twelfth Step work; many say it is a big aid to their recovery.

Your current Delegates and Trustees are identified on the next page. We are all available as your servants. Call on us for support and concerns. Also, hold us responsible! Frequently I say, "If I don't do my job, replace me! That is your responsibility."

—In service, Larry H., GDA Chair



SAICO Announcements

Wanted: Member Stories

Please describe what it was like before, what changed, and what you are like today. Submit stories to Essay@sa.org

New Groups



India
New Delhi

USA

Abilene, TX
Chico, CA
Hinesville, GA
Manitowoc, WI
St. Meinrad, IN
St Petersburg, FL
Sioux Falls, SD

Articles for Essay should be submitted to Essay@sa.org.

Trustees and Delegates and Their Committee Assignments

| Delegates | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| Region | Delegate | Committees | Alternate |
| Mid-Atlantic | Larry H., <i>Chair</i> | RAC, Structure, Nominations | Brian S. |
| | Tom A. | SACFC, Conventions | |
| | Will K. | | |
| North Midwest | Bob A. | Nominations, Finance | Paul M. |
| Northwest | Judy C., <i>Alt Chair</i> | Literature | Farley H. |
| Northeast | Mike F. | Literature, RAC | Tom V. |
| South Midwest | Glen J. | | John W. |
| Southeast | Steve S. | COMC, H&I, Finance | Dave M. |
| | Chuck P. | COMC, H&I, Conventions, Agenda | Gary D. |
| Southwest | Mike S. | Conventions, Agenda | Richard G. |
| | Jerold L. | Translations | Tom K. |
| UK, Ireland | Nicholas S. | International | |
| Germany, German speaking | Hans-Friedrich L. | International | |

| Trustees | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Trustee | Committees |
| Luc B. | Internet |
| John C. | SACFC, COMC, RAC |
| Gene J., <i>Chair</i> | Finance, Nominations |
| Lawrence M., <i>Alternate Chair</i> | Literature, Translations, International |
| Sean R. | Finance |

Prayer After a Meeting Prior to Closing Prayer

My lord, I thank you for again providing us the opportunity to come together, to share, to help and be helped. I offer myself as a tool for your works, asking that you guide my thoughts, words and actions; and please guide those who could benefit from this program to find their way here. Amen

—Larry H., Pgh., PA

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

Calendar of Events



April 5, 2008, SA Beginning Steps Workshop, Jacksonville, FL. *First Steps Into Recovery*, Contact: Ben D. 904-704-5998

April 12, 2008, Mountain Spring 6th Annual SA/S-Anon Marathon, Asheville, NC. *Renewing Our Recovery*. For info: SA, Clyde B. (828) 628-7821; S-Anon, Joan B. cjbolin@charter.net

April 25 - 27, 2008, Retreat, Waynesboro, PA, sponsored by MD DC NoVA IG. Contact is Howard S. at 202-529-4800, ext. 108 or dawes1b@yahoo.com

May 16 - 18, 2008, SA Spring Retreat, Carnation, WA. *Working the Steps: An Experimental Crash Course Through the 12 Steps*. Contact: Richard

(206)920-3195 or Bob D. (206)890-3412; or email info@pugetsoundsa.org

May 23-25, 2008, Edmonton area SA/S-Anon Spring Retreat. *A Spiritual Awakening*. For info call SA hotline at 780-988-4411, email at essayedmonton@yahoo.ca, or contact webmaster at www.edmontonsa.org.

May 30-June 1, 2008, SA Men's retreat, Big Bear, CA. Info at www.sasandiego.org or George F., 619-203-7691.

September 19-21, 2008, SA/S-Anon Regional Conference. *Clearing the Wreckage*. Irvine Marriott, Irvine, CA. Info at recoverystuff@gmail.com.

November 7 - 9, 2008, 3rd Annual Veterans Day Week

end Workshop, Marietta, SC. *The Steps We Took*. Contact: David G., mybigdaddyskid@yahoo.com, 864-642-5039

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

Submit info to be listed in June 2008 Essay by May 1, 2008.

Please submit dates, theme, place, and points of contact. Event flyers are helpful for responding to member questions.

Please contact an international operator for guidance on making international calls.

Upcoming International Conventions

2008



July 11-13, 2008, Akron, OH. *Welcome Home*. Info at www.welcomehomeakron.com or email info@welcomehomeakron.com.

2009

January 2009, Nashville, TN

Look for details in upcoming issues of Essay

July 2009, Denver, CO

Look for details in upcoming issues of Essay



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 Essay 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. SA is not a forum for non-SA sobriety. In submissions, please do not reference unadjudicated illegal actions.

God,
grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

