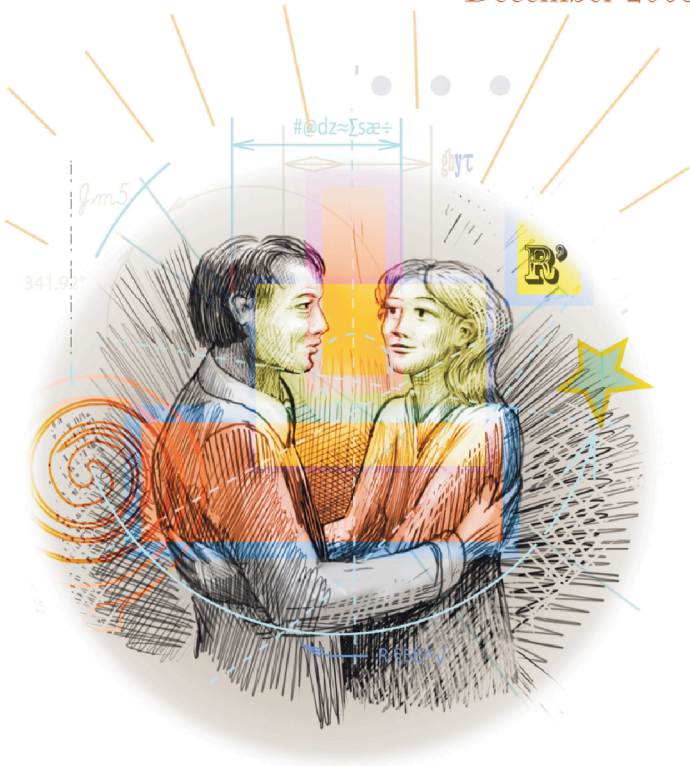


Essay

December 2008



THERE IS GREAT HOPE HERE



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 lust 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.

Essay . . .

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Newcomers: Contact SA by telephone toll-free at 866-424-8777; outside North America call 615-370-6062; email at saico@sa.org; or SA website at www.sa.org.

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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An SA Couple in Recovery There Is Great Hope Here



I can't have true union with my [husband] while lust is active, because [he] as a person really doesn't matter; [he's] even in the way. . . . But there is great hope here. By surrendering lust and its acting out each time I'm tempted by it, and then experiencing God's life-giving deliverance from its power, recovery and healing are taking place, and wholeness is being restored—true union within myself first, then with others and the Source of my life (SA, 42, 43).

I remember sitting in my counselor's office when my husband told me he wanted a divorce. I was devastated. Not because I loved him all that much. My ongoing emotional affairs with the men at work, combined with sexual fantasies and masturbation, were dearer to me than my husband was at the time.

I wasn't any happier in our marriage than he was, but we are Christians and divorce is "wrong," and I would be humiliated if he divorced me. What would the people at church think? I was terrified by thoughts like: Where would I live? Who would support me? I had a well-paying job, but I was afraid of ending up penniless and alone. Mainly, though, I was mad that my husband would divorce me, when *he* was clearly the problem in our marriage.

Instead of seeking divorce, I would fantasize that my husband was dead and I was married to one of my fantasy partners. But they were

mostly all married, so I would also fantasize that their wives were dead. I was in complete denial about my own part in our marriage problems.

After the counseling appointment, I asked my husband if we could go to lunch and talk. I told him I would not move out; he would have to throw me out. I asked two friends to pray for us. Somehow, he woke up the next morning announcing, "I repent, I'm joining the counselor's group." The date was June 12, 2001, which is also my husband's SA sobriety date. I had no idea what he was talking about.

When he told me several weeks later that he was in a Twelve Step recovery therapy group for sexaholics, I was shocked. I knew instantly that was the name of my own problem. I was surprised that it was also his problem. But because of the complete lack of intimacy in our marriage, I did not say a thing.

I will be forever grateful to my

husband (whose story follows this one) for choosing recovery that day, because his decision saved our marriage and changed my life.

Growing up, I had no ability to relate to others. I didn't feel loved in my family. We mostly all stayed in our rooms with the doors shut. We didn't talk much at all. When I was in first grade and at school all day for the first time, I would go to the bathroom during lunch and cry because I didn't know how to talk to people.

I did not feel safe in my family. I remember my brother once breaking my door down with his fist after I shut it in his face. My dad said it was my fault because I was the oldest. My dad once hit me with his belt for not getting straight As. I diligently tried to be perfect.

I also learned the disease of sexaholism from my family. Well before puberty, I would read the Playboy magazines my dad left lying around the house. I didn't have a clue what sex was at that time, but from the stories I read, the sexual activities seemed exciting.

The magazines also taught me what grown up women were supposed to look like. My father encouraged me to dress this way. He commented on my clothing and body a lot. This was the only positive attention I ever got in my family. It made me feel special.

My family was socially rejected in the neighborhood where we lived.

We did not have the right brand of clothes or any of the social graces. But when I was in high school, the popular guys started asking me out because of the way I dressed. I enjoyed the physical activities initiated by those guys, but they dumped me when they discovered I was not ready for sex.

In college I met a guy who introduced me to Christianity. He also jump-started my sex addiction. We spent long hours in his dorm room alone. He had the attitude of "everything goes" except for actual sex. That became my acting out pattern up until marriage: intense sexual activity but no "sex."

I did not discover masturbation until my early 20s. My previous sexual behavior always left me frustrated, but now I found a wonderful release from the tension. I spent the next 30 years perfecting that feeling.

In my early 30s, a career fell into my lap. My boss asked me to edit a huge document overnight. When she reviewed my work, she said, "You're better than I am, I hate my job, I quit. I'll recommend you to fill it."

It was a pressure-cooker job of long hours, tight deadlines, and multiple activities to coordinate. I was instantly in charge. I was hopelessly insecure about my own abilities—but the high-paced atmosphere suited me perfectly. I seemed to thrive on it. The adrenaline rush of constant

deadlines plus the ego-boost of the “status-y” job enabled me to mask my deep insecurities.

I found that an effective way to control things on these huge projects was to yell a lot. The guys who respected my work found this “aggressive” quality attractive. My husband did not.

My career involved constant travel. I was surrounded by men. I could act out to images of a wide variety of men in my various work environments. With some of them there was a lot of public flirting. The guys who resented me being in charge reported my behavior to my husband. I claimed innocence.

My husband and I had gotten married while I had this job. Our relationship prior to marriage consisted almost entirely of acting out. We believed sex before marriage was wrong, but we somehow didn’t think of mutual masturbation as sex.

For the first six months of our marriage, I was out of town on a big project. Sadly, marriage hadn’t cured my compulsive masturbation as I had hoped. I had looked forward to the sexual union as the ultimate high, but I found actual sex to be disappointing compared to the high of masturbation. I thought I might have married the wrong guy.

Over the years, as my sexaholism

intensified, my resentment toward my husband increased. I would compare him with the guys at work, who were basically wooing me. Around our eighth year of marriage, I insisted we go to marriage counseling to see why he didn’t treat me like these other guys. The fact that he seemed not to care that there were other guys competing for my attention infuriated me. The marriage counseling accomplished nothing.

When we had been married nearly 12 years, I quit my job and, for the first time, we lived together in the same city all the time. Rage became the main characteristic of our marriage. One day after a big blow up, my husband said he was going to see a counselor because he was “afraid” of me. I refused to go. The counselor, it turned out, was a Twelve-Step sex addiction specialist.

After my husband joined the therapy group, the counselor wanted me to join a similar group for spouses. I refused. I considered myself too spiritual to be in a recovery group. I was better suited to the Bible Study group that met at our house. But the counselor insisted I join the group, so I went, just to get him off my back. My goal was to get kicked out.

The first night I was surprised



to find that the women in the group seemed more like me than like the “druggies” I had imagined. When I opened the group’s Twelve Step workbook for the first time and looked over the questions, I could tell I would have to be deeply emotionally vulnerable. I was scared, but I knew immediately that the process was meant for me.

My husband and I each completed the Twelve Steps that first year in our groups. I couldn’t work the Steps with much honesty that first time through. I was terrified to show weakness. I confessed my own addiction by saying “I used to masturbate.” But after working through those Steps, I felt something had healed in me. More important, I noticed from the beginning that my husband was changing. We still did not get along well after the first year, but I could already see that the Twelve Step process was healing our marriage.

The second year, we went to a couples Twelve Step recovery group. The meetings involved communications exercises between individual couples, followed by a large group time for sharing the experience. My husband and I usually had nothing to share because we hadn’t completed the exercises. We spent most of the time fighting over the correct way to do them. But by the end of the year, we were getting along better. The exercises—even though we had not

done them “correctly”—enabled us to work through years of pent-up hostilities. When the group began again the next January with similar exercises, we had very little conflict because we had worked through the stuff!

But the biggest turning point in our marriage was when I joined the large SA group that my husband is in. It had taken me years to get my SA past completely out in the open, especially to my husband (even though I had often said, “I’m a sex addict too”). Besides the couples group and spouse’s group, I attended a women’s Step study group of mixed addictions (which included another female SA) and S-Anon. I knew the SA sobriety definition from the time my husband started recovery, and have been sober since December 2001. But the only SA meeting I knew of was my husband’s group of more than 40 guys, including guys who knew me from being in groups with their wives. I was mortified at the thought of attending a group with them.

Then, in 2005, at our local regional convention, I attended a meeting entitled “Women Who Work Two Programs.” I was surprised to see S-Anon women I knew from my city. I was also surprised to learn, for the first time, that there is a women-only SA meeting in my city.

Around that time, I completed my first thoroughly honest Step One sexual inventory and read it to my

sponsor. The detailed descriptions about my years of acting out brought me to my bottom. I felt intense shame. I was weepy for months. I started attending the women's SA meeting—and I felt the miraculous freedom of sharing my weaknesses with others who are just like me.

My sobriety up to then had been mostly based on avoiding all men other than my husband. It was a continuous struggle. I could hardly be around a guy without being triggered. But in SA, I saw that being completely vulnerable (the thing I had feared so much) is what would set me free.

Soon, one of the women challenged me to go to the mixed meeting, where she said I would learn “to not sexualize men.” She was suggesting my husband's group—the one I had avoided for so long. This was too scary. What would my husband think? What would the men who knew me from the past think? How would I deal with constant triggers? After all, most of my “acting out partners” had been the men I was around all day.

In spite of my fears, I went, and I felt welcomed by everyone, especially by my husband. A few people had expressed surprise at first that my husband and I would be in the same group, but soon almost everyone embraced us.

The acceptance of that group has enabled me to deal with the shame of my own past. Because the group

is large, I heard a lot of people share their experience, strength, and hope each week, as well as their failures. I heard great examples of rigorous honesty and getting the inside out. I observed healthy boundaries in the guys as they related to women. All of this gave me the courage to begin sharing my own shame. Whenever I shared, I felt accepted—because I'm just an addict with character flaws, like everyone else.

The mixed group has also enabled me to relate to men in healthier ways. From listening to their shares, I could tell that men have struggles similar to mine, but working my program alongside them (as described in SA) has brought great healing:

What better place to work on overcoming temptations than the sanctuary of a meeting where temptations may be present? This is where we can bring temptation to the light, talk about it, and work through it without having to lust. . . The meeting is the crucible in which our recovery can be safely tested and purified (SA, 178).

Today, I feel some reprieve from constant triggers. Some days I can be in the group and not think of the guys as guys at all, but just as friends in the program.

My husband has become one of the guys in recovery with me. He is someone with whom I can be

vulnerable and feel safe sharing my weakness. He forgives me and loves me in spite of my character flaws. I don't get mad at him for anything he shares; it is just his share. Also, the group has become a safe place for us to share bits of our past with each other, buffered by so many people. My husband says, “It's cheaper than therapy.”

This past June, we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary—a miracle based almost entirely on the Twelve Step program of recovery. I'm still a self-centered sex addict. On a bad day, I get irritated with my husband for not noticing that the world revolves around me. We both have highly dominant personalities. We are not cured of anything, but today we have tools that work, and that



I pulled off a crazy surprise party stunt for my wife's 40th

birthday. My wife (who wrote the previous story) had a high-pressure job where she would fly out of state and work 18-hour days on a proposal and then collapse at home every other weekend. We got along better then, probably because she was gone most of the time.

enable us to communicate even in the midst of a heated argument. One huge surprise is that, after a period of abstinence and several years of sobriety, our sexual intimacy is much more fulfilling today than the high of acting out ever was.

Over the years, God has taken my feeble efforts at working this program and given me back so much more. As I have worked this program (slowly), I have learned (slowly) to relate better to God, others, and myself—and this has overflowed to true union with my husband.

—Anonymous



Surprises

She was working in town at the home office for a change, but would be working right through her birthday because a deadline was looming. I got the okay from her CEO and planned a surprise party at the deli next door to her building and had her assistant ask her to take a walk with her to relieve stress. We all jumped out yelling “Surprise!” when they came around the bend. You'd think she was having a heart attack. She was in total shock. Later she told me to never to do that again. There is a difference between a

surprise and a SHOCK, she said. So I spent the next few years figuring out bigger ways to jolt her senses when she turned 50.

But a lot had changed in 10 years. Over the years, I had sought other ways to get the intimacy I thought I deserved. My wife traveled a lot 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 finally had a physical affair with one of my customers. I told myself that I didn't feel guilty. I only wanted more of the same.

When my wife quit her jet-set job, she was at home most of the time. This was like tying two alley cats' tails together and throwing them over a clothesline. Feelings of fondness were gone, replaced by survival instincts. In my immaturity, I felt so scared of my wife that I sought help from a therapist. I was sure that every problem in our marriage was HER fault. On my first visit he told me that I had the biggest ego he had ever seen, a huge false front.

I had wanted him to fix my wife, however. I was positive her father must have molested her and she had

blocked it (otherwise, why did she not enjoy sex with me?), so I insisted that she go see my therapist. She went, and both of them announced I was wrong (something about she didn't dislike sex, she disliked me). My over-blown ego could not handle this idea. I was sure the therapist hadn't asked the right questions, so I sent her back again, only to hear the same verdict. The therapist said, "What does it matter anyway? You can only work on today." I was mad at both of them!

By this time, my sexual addiction was raging out of control, and I was looking forward to some day when I might be freed from my marriage.

While I was marinating in that attitude, I received a call from my mother-in-law asking what we were going to do for her daughter's 50th birthday. She was willing to fly out and participate, but I discouraged her, saying that

I had everything under control. The truth was, I thought I would be long gone by the time her birthday came around, so I didn't invest a single second in planning anything for her big event, which was still 10 months away.

One day, at a joint session with my therapist, I announced that I wanted a divorce. I'm a big chicken. I never mentioned the word "divorce" until there was someone around to



referee. This announcement did not go over very well. My wife and I spent a lot of time together the rest of that Monday, going out to lunch and out for ice cream. She made it known that she would not leave the marriage without a fight, and that it would cost me a ton of money. I know what that's like; I had been through two divorces already.

The next morning was when the Miracle happened for me. I woke up on Tuesday and turned around to find God behind me. He had been there all along; I had turned away from Him to pursue my addiction. I suddenly knew that I would be walking a different path than I expected the day before, even if I might be miserable for the rest of my life!

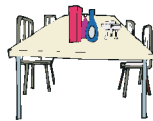
I told my wife we would not get divorced, and that I would go get help for myself. I called my therapist and got into his therapy group for sexually addicted men the next night. One day at a time, God has kept me sober ever since that Tuesday morning, June 12, 2001.

Of course, just getting into recovery doesn't fix everything right away. There was still this broken relationship. Very slowly we made progress as I worked my program and she worked hers. But soon her 50th birthday was upon us, and I still hadn't done a thing about it.

My idea of celebrating her big

event was to invite a couple who we hardly knew out to dinner at a nice restaurant. This was already a few days past her actual birthday. Later that night she let me know that it was not an acceptable celebration for such an important milestone. All of a sudden my brain did a somersault and I realized the enormity of my problem: after deciding to stay in the marriage, I had forgotten to pick up the planning for her birthday. (I have mental lapses like these all the time!) I was in trouble. It was already Thursday and I did not have anything else planned, except for us to spend Friday and Saturday at our favorite hotel 60 miles up the coast.

I felt horrible, so I called up a limo service and arranged for the driver to pick up 18 people at a church parking lot at a certain time on Friday afternoon. I called our favorite restaurant near the hotel and made a reservation for 20 people for Friday evening. Then I called my best friend and said, "If you have any plans on Friday, I need you to drop them." He did, and he did. Then I went through a short list of people



who had to be there, and called them with the opening line, "Whatever you are doing on Friday night, cancel it." By Thursday afternoon I had 18 people who were spontaneous enough

to agree to the plan.

That night, my wife asked why we always had to go to the same restaurant every time. She was now tired

of that one. The best laid plans, even if they are only five hours old, can be reduced to ruins in a heartbeat. I said that I had been craving their special soup, and that we could go someplace else after that if she wanted. This worked, so the next afternoon we drove up and checked into the hotel. I slipped away and called my friend's cell phone and he said that all systems were in place and they were being seated at the long table. We drove to the restaurant and walked in.

It took my wife half an hour to stop shaking enough to pick up a fork. But all went well after that. Everyone had a great time. My sorry self was rescued from a fate worse than death. She explained again later that night that surprise is good; shock is not. But she didn't seem as angry this time. For the first time since we entered recovery eight months before, she expressed her love for me!

A few years later, in the office of the same therapist, I listened while my wife described to me, in some detail (prompted by the therapist because I hadn't been listening), enough evidence to prove that she was also a sexaholic. We made this appoint-

ment after she disclosed to me the problems she had with the contractors who had worked on our house remodel.

I had asked her to manage our remodel because I didn't want to be bothered with it, and because in her job she was good at managing crises. But she kept asking me to be there with her when she interviewed contractors. Several times she said she didn't think she should be around the house with those guys all day. She would say, "I'm a sex addict too." In my denial, this went in one ear and out the other. The remodel was supposed to be *her* job. Besides, she couldn't be a sex addict like me!

Now, a few years later, she had awakened with a flashback memory of spending too much time hanging around those contractors, feeling triggered, and making some poor decisions as a result. She was suddenly feeling responsible for a large part of our remodel disaster, whereas before we were both blaming me! She wanted to disclose the truth to let me off the hook for some things. But in spite of her good intentions, I wasn't too happy with her disclosure.

In the safety of the counselor's office, we talked about the contractor scenario, and then she began disclosing bits of her past, until the therapist told her to stop. I was SHOCKED.



It finally sank into my thick skull. I said, "You mean, she's an addict, just like me?" I thought, "My spiritually superior wife has also been living a double life as a sexaholic? She's a better liar than I am!" I was furious with her for the whole weekend. What else about her past had she lied to me about?

But in a few days something wonderful happened. I realized, "She is one of us. A friend in the program. No crosstalk. Thank you for sharing. Rigorous honesty. Experience, strength, and hope. Trudging the

happy road." This has turned out to be a happy surprise for both of us

God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Now we both go to the same large meeting, and sometimes we share things the other has never heard before. "Thank you for sharing!" It's cheaper and better than therapy.

I wonder what I should do when she turns 60?

—Anonymous



Leprosy

Leprosy is a dread disease. It horribly disfigures and numbs one to pain. If that were not enough, there is an immense social stigma involved. People do not associate with a leper and keep their distance. The leper cries out, "Unclean! Unclean!"

Sexaholism is also a disease. It can disfigure a life. It certainly tries to numb me from my pain and my feelings. There is a huge social stigma linked with sexaholism. It is the "leprosy" of all addictions. People do not knowingly associate with me. Although I do not cry out "unclean," my guilt and shame have certainly made me feel that way.

Modern medicine is now able to arrest the disease of leprosy and prevent many of its devastating effects. By the grace of God and the program of SA, my disease can also be arrested. I learn to feel my feelings. I am given the tools to deal with my pain. The guilt and shame are lifted as I begin to walk in sobriety and true recovery. Thanks be to God that in this day there is a program for me.



—Nancy S.

Making Real Connections

SA/S-Anon Australian Conference, September 26-28, 2008

My name is Jo; I'm a recovering sexaholic in New Zealand. I have been sexually sober by the grace of God since April 7, 2007.

I recently attended the 17th Annual SA/S-Anon Australian Conference in Melbourne. This was my first-ever SA conference and I want to share my experience with others.

Initially, I didn't want to go at all. I had listened to the speaker CDs from last year's conference, and enjoyed them very much. My sponsor suggested that I attend the 2008 Conference in person. I didn't see why I needed to go all the way to Australia—I thought I could just obtain the speaker CDs again and that would be good enough.

But she *strongly* suggested that I go, so I came up with my next objection, which was legitimate: lack of funds. The round trip would cost about \$1,000 and I didn't have that sort of money. I'd recently taken on a new role which paid much less. I had done so to reduce my business travel and ultimately protect my sobriety.

She still *strongly* suggested that I go. So I applied for financial assistance. I was surprised to subsequently be awarded the funds to cover registration costs, and thus I had only the airfare to find. Most of that was taken care of by frequent flyer miles,



so now, as there were no objections remaining, I committed to attending. I was due to leave New Zealand on Friday afternoon and arrive at Melbourne Airport that evening, to be picked up by a member and driven to the venue.

As late as the Wednesday before the convention, I told my Sobriety Renewal Group I was not going. I had apprehension in buckets. There would be hardly any other women. I would have to see Member X, and I find him triggering. I would have to share a room, and that would be triggering. I would have to meet the (male) members of my Sobriety Renewal Group and I didn't want to. I was enjoying the anonymity of listening to their check-ins by telephone each evening without knowing what they looked like.

But I prayed, and I surrendered, and I went to the airport and got on the plane. It really came down to Step 11: "...praying only for knowledge of His will for me and the power to carry that out" ("God—what You say goes"). Despite my reluctance, I sincerely believed I was meant to attend the Conference.

As arranged, I was collected at Melbourne Airport by a female member with whom I had previously enjoyed fellowship in that city. Since

leaving Australia and returning to New Zealand seven months earlier, I had been an SA loner. There is no group on the island where I live, and in fact, there are no other recovering female SAs in the whole country!

My friend and I enjoyed a good catch up in the car. I was saddened to hear of the suicide of one of our SA members in Australia. This focused me on gratitude, on the "Just For Today" tool, and on the need to stay close to programme, to fellowship, and to God.

As we approached the venue, we both had reservations and concerns, so, leading with our weaknesses, we started to share them out loud in the car, one at a time and one after the other ("I'm nervous about..."). It really helped me. The venue turned out to be a secluded hostel in the middle of bush land where we awoke to bird song and beautiful weather.

It was an incredible weekend. The schedule was structured around meetings; each meeting focused on one or more of the Twelve Steps or on a selected recovery-related topic (and included a spiritual concept meeting). Three members would get up and share their experience, strength, and hope and then other members would be invited to share at the microphone. All meetings were recorded, in the spirit of the Twelfth Step.

Members were at different stages of recovery, from a few days sober

to old-timers. There were about 30 of us total, from across Australia and New Zealand. And yes, they were nearly all male (three female SA members, plus the female S-Anons) but almost without exception, I found the male SA members to be welcoming, appropriate, and bounded. I was very grateful for that. It helped me keep to my own programme and learn new relating skills. I am very poor in that area. Before SA, and even into SA recovery, lust had characterized every interaction I had with the world at large. Now I understood what my sponsor had meant when she said I would learn how to make real connections at a conference.

At times I felt overwhelmed and went to my room for a nap or some quiet time and conscious contact.

Turns out that I was allocated a single room! So grateful. At mealtimes, I would try to ensure that I sat with another female at the table, either SA or S-Anon. I would keep personal information about myself to a minimum. It felt very odd not to be "carrying on" like I always used to. I remembered all those weekends away in the countryside for work, team-building and the like, where I made myself the centre of attention, flirted, lusted, and acted out. This was very different.

Saturday evening was a "Variety Night" where members entertained us with piano recitals, singing, guitar playing, a comedy routine, and some



Native American dancing. I had not planned to attend, thinking it would be weird and creepy to socialize with SAs, but I could not have been more wrong. I laughed a lot. I was very moved by the obvious talent that some members possess. I thought about how long it might have been hidden away behind lust and sexual acting out.

A highlight for me was attending the mixed SA/S-Anon meetings (there were two of them). I had not given much thought before to our sister fellowship or its members. But suddenly, hearing the stories of the women and men whose lives had also been affected by sexaholism was very poignant. I was left filled with respect and admiration for those who journey alongside us SAs in that program. My own marriage did not



survive the disease, but it was good to see that other marriages had. I also had the opportunity to take afternoon tea with a female S-Anon member and to hear more of her personal story. Again, I was learning how to make real connections.

When Sunday afternoon came, and with it the close of the Conference, I was quite sad to be saying goodbye. I felt I had begun to relax a little and would have liked the Conference to continue. But I got to have more tea that afternoon with an SA and another S-Anon, this time in their home, and it was a really lovely experience.

So many people said as they were driving away: "See you in Canberra in March!" (when the next Australian Conference takes place). And you know what—I might just be there. At least, I've started to save....

—*In fellowship, Jo J.*

Improving Our Conscious Contact

One Day Silent SA Retreat, Pacific Northwest, October 2008

On a beautiful October weekend in the Pacific Northwest, eight recovering sexaholics retired to a quiet retreat overlooking the San Juan Islands to spend one day in silence with the God of our understanding, and one more day in thankful and joyous fellowship. For this sexaholic and recovering control freak, it turned into a wonderful exercise in letting go

and letting God.

I let go of the ego-driven notion that we needed to spend exactly twenty-four hours in silence. As it turned out, about twenty-one and a half hours seemed to work out just fine for everyone. It also took a lot of the stress out of that extra hour trying to get there through the clogged traffic on the interstate.

I let go of the worry over whether there would be room for everyone, or over whether anyone would show up at all. A few weeks prior I looked into renting a larger facility, but wiser counsel prevailed and we chose to keep it simple. A member stepped forward to offer his vacation property and God provided just the people to fill the space.

I let go of the need to have every minute planned out. Even after some years in the program, I still maintain a healthy respect for the challenges of unstructured time. However I'm also growing in the ability to trust the God of my understanding with my will and my life—and my time.

I'm also growing in my ability to trust God with my fellows in the program. I definitely had my doubts when pumpkin soup appeared on the menu, but it turned out that our trust in Steve's culinary talents was amply justified. I was in some fear when I saw the Sunday morning hike suddenly become a kayak trip, but again, a bit of trust in my Higher Power, and in the skill and judgment of our host, was rewarded with a glorious new perspective on another corner of my

world. I did appreciate that our host waited till halfway through the trip to regale us with stories of past disasters in the wild. He did, after all, live to tell the tale.



That's a reminder I get every time I hear a First Step.

I let go of the compulsion to try to use the weekend to "catch up"—to rehash neglected Step work or program reading or any number of other goal-driven habits of mine. Miraculously, at least most of the time, I was able to simply ask God for the next thing He had for me.

Most of all, I let go of the fear of being alone with myself and with God. It turns out I really am an OK person to hang out with if I give myself half a chance.

I also let go of my need to win at Apples-to-Apples and was rewarded with an admittedly awesome performance in Uno. I especially thank God for seven fellow sexaholics with the willingness to forgo their own agenda, at least for one weekend, on the off-chance of discovering some of God's agenda.

—*Ned O., Seattle*



**Upcoming International Convention,
January 9-11, 2009, Nashville, TN**
We Absolutely Insist on Enjoying Life

Call for Articles: Convention attendees, please describe how attending the convention has enhanced your recovery. Submit articles to essay@sa.org

Welcoming Newcomer Women

Recently my local Intergroup inspired me to create a flyer that could be handed out to women attending their first SA meeting. An SA's first meeting can be such a key moment of willingness and admission of powerlessness. And for those of us who are women, we often feel very, very alone during that moment as we look out over a sea of male faces and wonder how we're going to get well here. It has taken me a couple of years in SA to



figure out how to make a connection with other women in recovery, and my Intergroup was happy to collect and share some of that information in the flyer shown here. The flyer was drafted with input from the women at my face-to-face meeting and the men at my Intergroup. Please feel free to make copies of it, revise it for your local area, or use however you need. Take what you like and leave the rest.

—Anonymous

Welcome Women! We're Glad You're Here!

Women newcomers who think they might have a problem with just are welcome to any SA meeting that is not specifically marked on a meeting list as "men only." In addition to coming back to this meeting, you will probably also want to find a way to connect with other women in SA recovery. Women in SA make phone calls to each other for support outside of meetings, ask other women to be their sponsors, and make plans to attend co-ed meetings together. Because there are currently more men in SA recovery than women, we know it can be a challenge to reach out if there aren't any other women at your first meeting. Please know that there are sober women in SA. Following are a few tips for making a connection with them.

★ **Attend Local Women-Only SA Meetings.** The closest face-to-face women's meeting is in [City, State, Time, Location]. You can find directions on the SA meeting list (as well as directions to other co-ed meetings). If you would like to speak to one of the women who attend the women's meeting, call the local SA hotline at [Number] and ask for a woman to call you back about the women's meeting.

★ **Attend Women-Only SA Phone Meetings.** A telephone meeting for SA women occurs every Saturday night from 8-9 pm Eastern Time USA. For directions on how to attend that meeting, please call 888-802-5376. An SA woman will call you back, tell you a bit about what to expect at the meeting, and give you the number and code to call to attend. If you don't get a call back in a few days, please call again and someone will get back to you.

★ **Attend Co-Ed "Sobriety Renewal" Phone Calls.** These daily calls occur throughout the day and are often attended by SA members from all over the world. A few women are usually present in addition to men. Some calls are men-only. Contact www.denversa.org to find the up-to-date phone number, meeting times, and meeting descriptions.

★ **Contact SAICO.** The SA International Central Office maintains a list of SA women who have volunteered to take calls from women newcomers and who may be available as sponsors. Contact SAICO at saico@sa.org or 866-424-8777 and ask for a copy of the phone list.

★ **Attend the SA International Conventions.** These are held every January and July. Conventions are announced at www.sa.org and are always attended by women SA members from around the world. At these conventions, many women find sponsors, meet other women in recovery, and share stories and phone numbers with other women.

★ **Buy SA literature.** Literature is available for sale at face to face meetings or at www.sa.org. Literature that specifically contains stories from women includes Member Stories, the "Step Into Action" series, and the quarterly publication *Essay*, specifically the June 2007 *Essay* which focused on SA women. The fellowship is in the process of preparing a brochure for SA women. Watch for it at www.sa.org.

★ **Keep Coming Back to This Meeting.** Even though you may be the only woman here tonight, you are not the only woman with the disease of sexaholism. Women and men alike have found recovery in SA. Many members have been helped by the suggestion to try six SA meetings before deciding whether the program is right for you. Keep coming back! SA works if you work it and you are welcome here.

Contact Information for Phone Meetings

Women-Only Saturday Phone Meeting: 888-802-5376

Daily Sobriety Renewals Phone Meetings:
www.denversa.org



A Dad's Message to His Son

Step Nine: Made Direct Amends Wherever Possible . . .

Dear Son:

It is amazing to see the very same issue that I experienced with my mother reappear in my relationship with you. The same wedge of estrangement, resentment, and detachment that I created and nourished with her has also developed in my relationship with you. I'm not surprised, considering the damaging behavior I inflicted on you in my addiction. I'm now aware that the same feelings I have toward my mother are present in your attitudes toward me.

With my mother, no matter what I did, it was never good enough. No matter what I thought, it was never right. I could never measure up to her perceived expectation. As a result, I found everything intolerable, and I built a wall that was impenetrable around me. Unfortunately, I chose to escape this resentment and self-pity by acting out sexually; first with myself and then with others. All the time I had an insatiable need for more and more pornography.

Living inside my head, I deluded myself into lusting for newer and different behaviors to increase my sexual high. Whatever I did was never enough, and it took me to places of great pain and shame. When I let myself be consumed by lust, I lost all



touch with reality and with life. No one else existed and the only things important were my own needs and desires.

This has been a progressive disease for me, beginning with some very early shame-based events that occurred in my childhood. The main memory seems to be the time my mother beat me severely for dressing as a girl when I was playing beauty pageant with my younger sister. I retreated into myself and knew that I had to hide from her and the outside world. (A part of me knows the behavior was innocent, but another part sees it as wrong.) That sense of shame and want became inseparably coupled in my head; one could not exist without the other. The endless cycle of searching for more and more lust continued with greater and greater shame.

I'm so deeply sorry that this illness of mine permeated your childhood. The worst part was my acting out behind closed doors with mom's computer while you and your sister were watching videos on the couch in the living room. I would also stay up late at night acting out via online dating sites and porn sites, and then think I could awake the next day and be a "good father."

I started putting my being back together with a commitment to recovery in SA in Spring 1998. I did well after a few weeks and was able to stop the acting out in May 1998, but then I found a host of character defects, especially my rage, resentment, and self-pity appear as the driving forces of my addiction. I'd like to think things were somewhat better for you, but I know I was still a very emotionally broken person.

I stayed sober until April 2003 but then lost my sobriety to a single bout of masturbation. My ego had gotten the best of me; I thought I deserved a reward for my great service to SA. I was wrong and got back into sobriety.

In August 2004, your Mom told me that I had become the man she had always hoped I would become. My ego ran with the thought that I was fixed. It wasn't too long before I allowed myself to go back to my past behavior, starting with once-a-week masturbation. But in my mind there was no sanity, and it quickly escalated. Soon all walls were down and I was back online looking for more of the same old crap. I simply had to have it. I thought I deserved it and that I needed to get it before I was too old to enjoy it. My sick mind when unleashed looks for any and every sick thing it can find and excludes all else.

After the terrible revelation to your Mom, I was able to at least stop acting out and got back into meetings. I acted out three more times over the next nine months. Finally, in August 2005, I saw the despicable nature of my sickness when I tried to engineer a load of resentment toward her just prior to her leaving on a business trip. I acted out the last day of her trip just prior to her coming home and realized the full extent of the damage I was doing to myself. The "high" was gone and I saw that I had never given up this addiction for myself. I have been sober since that day.

I finally told Mom about this last episode this past summer, because she



has told me that if we are honest with one another, there is no addiction. This program means having my life back. If I act out I am lost and gone. Life

means doing the business of the SA program. It means going to meetings, and for me that is three per week. It means talking to people at the meetings about our problem and our solution. It means helping the newcomers find sexual sobriety. Now we have over 50 people that come to meetings in the area. Sobriety means that I give back what I have been given in order to keep it.

The other big component of Twelve Step recovery is making amends. The other night, Mom ex-

pressed to me her deep remorse about the childhoods we may have given you and your sister and our sadness that we didn't do what we should have done to help you. I became defensive (as addicts often do when challenged), but I've since thought about her comment. She's right. I need to make amends to help heal this hurt.



Son, I am profoundly sorry for the effects of my acting out sexually that have directly impacted your life. I was an unfit and broken father who inflicted negativity and soul-sickness into our family, our home, and our lives. My negativity permeated our lives and did great harm. You see, I sincerely believe that this illness is passed on. I know that there are many parts of this disease that came from my mother. I have never quite forgiven her for that behavior—but I know I must forgive her for my own continued sanity and sobriety.

I was wrong for letting sexual lust preoccupy my being especially during your childhood. I know it may seem trite, but I sincerely ask for your

forgiveness. I have a deep desire to have a better relationship with you. I want you to know I love you very much. I work and pray every day for your happiness in life.

I have seen great benefits come into my life as a result of letting go of resentments, pain, and character defects. It is not easy, but it can be done. I have seen this miracle come into the lives of many people I associate with on a weekly basis in our meetings.

You are now 21 and your own person. My attempts to shape and control you are no longer needed or useful. You are your own man and need to be making your own decisions. It is not my place to impose my judgment or criticism.

As I recently heard in a meeting share: "What makes me think that God doesn't have your best interest in mind all the time?" My amends to you is to live each day physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually sober, to be a loving husband to your mother and a kind and loving father to you and your sister; and to give this gift of sobriety to others.

—Love, Dad (Anonymous)

Now Available!

Step Into Action Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve

A great tool for doing SA Step work!

Cost is \$8 plus shipping and handling. Contact SAICO at SA Central Office, PO Box 3565, Brentwood, TN 37024-3565; saico@sa.org; or call 615-370-6062 or toll-free at 866-424-8777



In Memoriam

Dying Sober



I had just arrived at the Nashville airport when I got a voice mail from Jim. The message was "I just got back from the doctor and he told me I have six months to live." Jim was dead within two weeks. After receiving the message, I immediately called him. I told him how much I loved him and how he was always the brother I never felt I really had.

A few weeks prior to this conversation, Jim was in a great deal of fear not knowing whether his various cancers had come back again. As his friend, I was heartsick thinking he might be having recurrences. As his sponsor, I reminded him of how we had been having a daily reprieve from a fatal disease for almost a quarter of a century. I reminded him of the miracle he had been experiencing as he flourished in his SA recovery.

I knew Jim through SA for more than 23 years. For the past 15 years I was his sponsor. I never ceased, in all those years, to be amazed and transformed by his spiritual greatness. We talked often about our weaknesses, but this never stopped Jim from moving on and on into even higher spiritual realms. He worked for years in the United States helping clergy who struggle with addiction issues. He eventually spent years in Uganda helping clergy with addiction issues.

He did this while coping with his own medical chemical imbalances that required various medications at times. I'll never forget the conflict he shared with me, in deciding whether to minister to others in Ireland (his ancestral homeland) or go to Africa. He was led by an inner voice to go to Africa where he found his spiritual home land. If he had not gotten sick, he probably would have remained in Africa.

I need to remind the fellowship that Jim had been celibate for almost 25 years. He was single for his entire SA recovery. By the way, not having sex of any kind did not kill him. It was the cancer that got him.

In closing, I received an email from a priest saying that to Catholics, Jim was a Saint. I needed to remind this man that Catholics did not have a monopoly thinking Jim was a Saint. I, as a Jew, also believed Jim was a Saint. This tall, distinguished looking, soft-spoken man was a spiritual giant. His sexual addiction was not a curse for him to bear but was a transcending challenge to his spiritual life. He was able to remain in recovery through thick and thin. Some of the last words I said to him were that

if there is anything I accomplish in life, it will be to die sober. I truly believe he was able, through the Steps, his Higher Power, and the fellowship

to die a sexually sober man. May he rest in peace.

—*His good friend, Harvey A., Nashville*

Taking the Actions of Love

My father was admitted to the hospital in June 2008. The doctors said he needed a heart valve in order to live.

He risked the surgery so that he might be around longer for his grandchildren. It didn't work out so well: he was in a coma between life and death for six weeks. It was hard to see him so powerless.

My sisters hovered around him, so I focused on my mother. Practicing the principle of surrender made me available for others. My dad emerged from the coma completely paralyzed, but he still had his mind. My ability to express gratitude for his condition and for the care he received contributed to the acceptance of this hard reality for my whole family. I was able to be "part of." I did my best to take the actions of love.

I was able to spend entire days with him, at times without talking much. Although I live and work quite far from my home town, I did my best to call or travel to be with him. I stayed sober throughout the process.

Twenty weeks after the surgery, the family enforced his decision to not support his life with harsh



treatments. His condition quickly worsened. I was notified by phone and flew back home.

I arrived late Sunday night. My sister picked me up and said "Hurry, he's waiting for you." I was able

to spend a few hours with him that night, talking softly. We didn't say much. He had already given me all he had to give. I only wanted to be there with him. What a blessing.

He eventually went to sleep. I spent the night by his side. The next morning he didn't talk at all. He grew faint. He passed away in the afternoon, with all of us around him, his brothers and sisters included.

I thanked God that I was able to tell him how much I loved him and how much he had given me. We had been very close. We shared hobbies, travels, and interests. I learned later from my mother how much my father admired my work. I didn't know how much until then. The tears I have shed for him are a unique mix of pain and joy. Writing about this is healing; I hope it helps others.

The knowledge that my father loved me so much that he would

wait for me before "leaving" shows me how much my Higher Power loves me. He knows more about me than my earthly father knew, and He brought me back to my father with perfect timing.

I had shared "The Solution" with him before his disease and surgery. Conflicts between my mother and father were frequent. I had suggested, "It's not a question of knowing who is right, the verdict is not going to be given until much later anyway." He liked that, and he told me before dying that this had worked well for him in surrendering arguments. He knew my struggles and he saw how The Solution had worked in my own life.

He was a spiritual man and loved a lot. He also admired the idea of perseverance. He had survived the brain stroke completely paralyzed but lucid for two months. Yet he never raised his voice or rolled his eyes. He kept his sense of humor and expressed his gratitude to all around him. He had surrendered to his complete powerlessness. I like to think that he was using the tool we had shared years before in the area of gratitude. I also know that it was not of my own making, but my Higher Power was at work.

I was able to participate in the celebration of his life. As the only son, I was able to claim for myself the time and space to honor him. The

final process was serene and bright. I had the emotional clarity to share the hope and strength that his way of life had given me: talent, compassion, and passion, to name just a few. I'm blessed that my father had taken so many actions of love.

I prayed a lot that he would find his final destination. I trust that he has. Today, I grieve him. I also hear him calling me when I arrive home by myself, dealing with life on life's terms. He says "*Bonjour Maw-teen.*"

His spirit lives within me, and has a calming effect on me. I take this new presence as part of his Higher Power available to me. It actually closes the loop with the idea I had of a Higher Power when I first entered the fellowship: the power of our ancestors looking after us.

The voice I hear today is one of total acceptance and love. He is my father. How about my mother? When I am not just simply loving her, I am "working" with her and practicing the principles I have learned in this program.

I am convinced that this experience would have been far different had I not been sober. I am also certain that my sobriety helped others. That is a far better "bottom line" than the other option.

They will, not mine be done.

—*Martin*



Growing Up

Mark told me once that no one ever died from sex. He said, "Alcohol, on the other hand, will kill you. It's a chemical fact. If I drink I'll die." What Mark didn't say was that he was going to die anyway.

Mark was my friend. Funny and smart, he knew so much about so many things that traveling with him was like having my car driven by an encyclopedia. "See those trees over there? They only grow in Colorado, did you know that?"

He had a gift for connecting quickly with people and a contagious smile in his eyes. He would strike up conversations with strangers and within minutes would have them smiling and enjoying their day.

Mark loved food of most any kind and would dream of cooking great gourmet meals or pot roasts, eating cookies or buying brisket. He was a prolific daydreamer.

Mark's intellect allowed him to dream in ways that most people can't imagine. Diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2003, Mark got the clinical answer that always eluded him. He really did think differently from other people. The diagnosis explained why he could feel terribly depressed, followed by times of hyperactivity when he couldn't sleep for days.

Maybe part of Mark loved the rapid phases. With thoughts coming rapid fire, he would solve world peace while developing a recipe for dinner.

I lost track of Mark in early 2008. We bonded in mid-2007 over our common out-of-control sexual behaviors, and we attended many Twelve Step meetings together. I frequently picked him up at a local coffee shop at 6:00 am. He would be waiting with a fresh, steamy cup of java.

Mark loved to drive. It helped calm his mind to have something important to concentrate on. I can't imagine the burden he felt, being able to think, think, think and not have an "off" switch. Sex could have been that switch. If you're Mark, how do you give that up? Driving brought peace from the noise. Peace from his brain's zillions of thoughts. Maybe he felt that he could temporarily re-format his mind, creating a time and place where all things were possible. But in my experience, it is a re-format illusion. The "data" always returns, and I feel more confused and powerless than before.

Today I am at the 15th Street Club downtown. They're having a special meeting tonight. Our brother Mark is gone.

Mark dropped out of the sex-addiction program and continued to help his alcoholic brothers. But some



people here say he changed over the years. He wasn't around as much and had lost something in those eyes.

What killed him? I believe it was his heart. Some say it was a fast moving cancer, but I am betting on the heart. His heart was so big, so giving, and so broken.

Was this Mark's destiny? Did God bless everybody with big hearts or hyper intelligence? Over the years, were there signs, warnings, and omens of God's will and grand plan for Mark?

I remember back in 2007 hearing a veteran AA member share something like, "If I drink, I'll die. If I don't drink, I'll die." Mark told me that no one ever died from sex. But

he was wrong. For years, men and women have died from AIDS, syphilis, hepatitis-C, and other conditions resulting from their lust-based sexual acting out. Besides, living a life without living in God's will is not a life. It's a sentence, something to get through and endure. It's the ultimate con: "If I act out, I'll never die."

God's will is never easy. My journey teaches me that God requires faith in the uncertainty of life and the courage to ask, "God, what is your will for me today?" Today I hear, "Leave the comfort of darkness for the unknown territory known as growing up."

God bless you Mark. I miss you.
— Jimmy McC., Denver

Member Shares

It's a "We" Program

It took me a while to let go of the idea that I could do this program on my own. I'd been raised to be self-sufficient. I had to figure out how to take care of myself and solve problems on my own. As you can guess, this hasn't worked for me. Today I know that there are many things I can't do by myself, including making progress in my recovery.

What I've learned along the way is the same lesson I preached during my military and business careers: it takes teamwork. I now realize that nowhere is this more important than recovery from my addiction. So I

have developed what I call the "We" program, which is made up of three parts:

People. Who are the people in my program? It's funny now, disconcerting then, but when I first wrote out this list my Higher Power wasn't at the top. Today my Higher Power is my number one person. Other people include my wife, my sponsor, my spouses, the guys in my daily check-in group, other friends in the program, and now even some healthy non-program friends. My Higher Power put these people in my life to



help me navigate my recovery.

Actions. People are not the whole story. As we have been told time and again, this is a program of action. It takes action to recover. The actions we take connect us with the truth of our lives and with recovery.

Actions I take include: prayer, daily check in, journaling, step work, service work, calling other program friends, practicing the principles of the program, and living in integrity. Over time, the positive actions I take have changed my self-centered, self-defeating attitudes and actions into positive and healthy attitudes, resulting in a new way of living. Progress has seemed slow and even like going backwards at times, but each day gives me a new chance to live in in-



Self-Pity

I had a dream in which a woman who was dumping me explained what she thought was wrong with me: "You are lost in self-pity," she said. I awoke with nausea and a sense of dread. Oh no! *Not* self-pity!

And it occurred to me that if I am judgmental of a character defect in others, it interferes with my inventing of it in myself. If I notice it in myself, I will instinctively judge myself and beat myself up for it, or avoid seeing it simply for what it is.

Self-pity is an example. I get

tegrity and make different choices.

My walk down recovery way has not been a straight line, but I'm grateful to have the combination of people, program, and actions I can take to keep moving forward.

Commitment. I know that people, program, and actions are good things. But in the end they are just things. It takes something more, something that I must want to give. Today I know that at the heart of my "We Program" is commitment. I must love myself enough to commit to the program and the "We" concept, and to give of myself to others.

Today I make a P-A-C to join the "WE" program.

—Steve S., Maryland

really annoyed when other people are in self-pity. It becomes rather difficult for me to feel patience, tolerance, understanding, and love toward them, or to act as if I do. But if I'm in self-pity and someone tries to call me on it, I will defend myself like crazy, because I so badly want them to be wrong. Or if I know they're right, I at least want them to cut me some slack and stop talking about it already.

I suspect such character defects might be the ones I wrestle with and "work on," because I can't stand myself for having them. That gets me into a real bad fit of "playing

God." There I am, trying to "work on it," and at the same time not wanting to be honest with myself about it. It's kind of like trying to drive a car on a busy highway when I'm not tall enough to see over the steering wheel or reach the pedals. I wonder what the problem is? Maybe it's on account of all you mangy varmits out there? Probably I should just be at home, watching cartoons or riding my Big Wheel or something.

So maybe before I can become

I was at a meeting today where a member shared about his anxieties and fears regarding events happening here in Denver. I wanted to grab him and tell him there is a solution—because in my own life I've had some victory in overcoming fear.

The literature says that fear is a manifestation of self that can easily lead to acting out. It also says that fear is an instinct. So it's normal to feel fear. What matters is how one deals with it.

When I harbor fear, I'm essentially saying that I don't trust how God is running my life. I'm taking back my Step Three decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of God as I understand him. Worse, when I act out of fear—when my actions are controlled by fear—I am no longer capable of choosing to do God's will and am instead acting based on my will. And I've already learned that

fear of self-pity, I have to become willing to see it in myself. And maybe it helps me see it in myself if I can still like and love myself after I've noticed it. And that only works if I can like and love others while I'm noticing their self-pity.

Note to self: Put self-pitying people on my Step Four list. Also, people who write notes to self!

—Steve S., Memphis, TN

Fear

things quickly go downhill when I'm running the show.

Many times

I've found that fear hides behind anger. I'll find myself getting irritated, angry, or upset and then take a moment to figure out what's going on inside my head (a mini-Tenth Step). I let go of the anger, only to find that I was angry because I was afraid that something bad would happen to me—typically because things weren't going the way I wanted them to go.

Then I pray that wonderful prayer, "Thy will, not mine, be done." I have to make a decision to let go of the fear and trust that God knows how to run my life. And the fear goes away, at least for the moment.

—Chad C. sober for 2239 days



Who's Sitting Next to You?¹

I know who you are. You are "X" who attends the "ABC Meeting" at the "XYZ Club" where AAs meet in Anywhere, U.S.A.

I saw you there the other night at the eight o'clock meeting. I don't know how long you've been sober, but I know you've been coming around for a while because you spoke to a lot of people who knew you. I wasn't one of them.

You don't know who I am. I wandered into your meeting place alone the other night, a stranger in a strange town. I got a cup of coffee, paid for it, and sat down by myself.

You didn't speak to me. Oh, you saw me. You glanced my way, but you didn't recognize me, so you quickly averted your eyes and sought out a familiar face.

I sat there through the meeting. It was okay—a slightly different format but basically the same kind of meeting as I attend at home.

The topic was gratitude. You and your friends spoke about how much AA means to you. You talked about the camaraderie in your meeting place. You said how much the people there had helped you when you first came through the doors—how they extended the hand of friendship to make you feel welcome, and asked

you to come back.

And I wondered where they had gone, those nice people who made your entrance so easy and so comfortable.

You talked about how the newcomer is the life's blood of AA. I agree, but I didn't say so. In fact, I didn't share in your meeting. I signed my name in the book that was passed around, but the chairperson didn't refer to it. He only called on those people in the room whom he knew.

So who am I? You don't know, because you didn't bother to find out. Although yours was a closed meeting, you didn't even ask if I belonged there.

It might have been my first meeting. I could have been full of fear and distrust, knowing AA wouldn't work any better than anything else I'd tried, and I would have left convinced that I was right.

I might have been suicidal, grasping at one last straw, hoping someone would reach out and pull me from the pit of loathing and self-pity from which, by myself, I could find no escape.

I might have been a student with a tape recorder in my pocket, assigned to write a paper on how AA works—someone who shouldn't

have been permitted to sit there at all but could have been directed to an open meeting to learn what I needed to know. Or I could have been sent by the courts, wanting to know more, but afraid to ask.

It happens that I was none of the above. I'm just an ordinary drunk with a few years of sober living in AA who was traveling and was in need of a meeting.

My only problem that night was that I'd been alone with my own mind too long. I just needed to touch base with my AA family.

I know from past experience that I could have walked into your meeting place smiling, stuck out my hand to the first person I saw and said, "Hi. My name is ----. I'm an alcoholic from ----."

If I had felt like doing that, I probably would have been warmly welcomed. You would have asked me if I knew "Old So-and-so" from my state, or you might have shared a part of your drunkalog that occurred in my part of the country.

Why didn't I? HALT. I was hungry, lonely, and tired. (The only thing missing was angry, and three out of four isn't a good place for me to be.)

So I sat silently through your meeting, and when it was over I

watched enviously as all of you gathered in small groups, talking to one another the same way we do in my home town.

You and some of your friends were planning a meeting at a nearby coffee shop. By this time I had been silent too long to reach out to you. I

stopped by the bulletin board to read the notices there, kind of hanging around without being too obvious, hoping you might ask if I wanted to join you, but you didn't.

As I walked slowly across the parking lot to my car with the out-of-state license plates you looked my way again. Our eyes met briefly and I mustered a smile. Again, you looked away.

I buckled my seat belt, started the car, and drove to the motel where I was staying.

As I lay in my bed waiting for sleep to come I made a gratitude list. You were on it, along with your friends at the meeting place. I knew that you were there for me, and that I needed you far more than you needed me. I knew that if I had needed help, and had asked for it, you would have gladly given it. But I wondered. . . what if I hadn't been able to ask?

I know who you are.
Do you remember me?

—Fran D. New Orleans, LA



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A Note From the Delegate



Dear Fellow SA Members:

I'm grateful that more women have been attending SA meetings in recent years. By participating in this fellowship, women get to experience the same benefits of SA recovery as men do. Also, men and women who attend meetings together find that the experience leads to improved relationships with the opposite sex (see "Mixed Meetings," *SA*, 178).

Although most women who attend mixed meetings feel welcome and safe, some incidents of inappropriate behavior toward women have occurred. One incident occurred in my home group recently; another was described in March 2008 *Essay* ("Handling Destructive Members").

We who are old timers in SA should take the lead in reminding others that Twelfth Step work includes welcoming *all* newcomers. We must cultivate an atmosphere of safety and acceptance in our meetings. An article in this *Essay* entitled "Welcoming Newcomer Women," written by a female member, provides suggestions for helping female newcomers feel comfortable.

Women have been providing valuable service to the fellowship for years, including serving as Representatives, Delegates, and Trustees! We cannot afford to scare away any trusted servants. I ask the men, who make up the majority of our fellowship, to help keep our meetings safe for all.

Speaking of doing our part, we currently have two Trustee positions available, and two more terms expire in July. The fellowship needs more Trustees! Candidates (with five or more years sobriety) are nominated by their home groups and must understand that this is an unpaid job requiring about five hours of service a week. Please send recommendations (along with a service resume) to the Nominations Committee via SAICO.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve,

—Larry H. Pittsburgh, PA

SAICO Announcements

Wanted: Native Speakers of Languages other than English

SA is seeking speakers who are fluent in a variety of languages (including French, Spanish, Japanese, Polish, Korean, Arabic, and Greek) to assist in literature translation and to sponsor non-English-speaking members. If interested, please contact the International Committee at saico@sa.org

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

Delegates and Trustees

and Their Committee Assignments

Delegates		
Region	Delegate	Committees
Mid-Atlantic	Larry H., <i>Chair</i> Laurens A. Will K. Brian S., <i>Alt</i>	RAC, Structure, Nominations International Structure, International
North Midwest	Marlene L. Gary L. Tony R., <i>Alt</i>	Nominations, Literature Literature
Northeast	Mike F. Tom V., <i>Alt</i>	Literature, RAC
Northwest	Judy C. Farley H. <i>Alt</i>	Nominations RAC
Southeast	Steve S. Bill S. Dave M. Gary D., <i>Alt</i>	COMC, H&I, Finance Finance COMC
South Midwest	Glen J. John W., <i>Alt</i>	SACFC
Southwest	Mike S. Jerry L. Eric S., <i>Alt</i>	Conventions, Agenda Literature, Translations SACFC
UK, Ireland	Nicholas S. Denise O., <i>Alt</i>	International International

Trustees		
Region	Trustee	Committees
South Midwest	Gene J., <i>Chair</i> David T.	Nominations SACFC, International
Northeast	Luc B. John C.	Internet, Translation COMC, RAC
Mid Atlantic	Lawrence M., <i>CoChair</i> Sean R.	Literature, Structure Finance
North Midwest	Carlton B.	Finance, Conventions



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

Calendar of Events

February 28, 2009, The Journey Continues Marathon, Norcross, GA. *Steps to Recovery.* Contact Gary 404-271-3533, or email gr8fulgary@hotmail.com

March 6 - 9, 2009, SA/S-Anon Australia Conference. Greenhills Centre, at the Cotter in the ACT, Australia. Contact: jfsbrown@yahoo.com.au

March 21, 2009, Spring Marathon, Glen Ellyn, IL contact: 630-415-0341; http://www.chicagosa.org; or contact@chicagosa.org

March 21, 2009, One Day Marathon, Greenville, PA *Theme TBD.* Contact 814-720-7928 or recovery22@zoominternet.net

Upcoming International Conventions

July 2009, Denver, CO *Serenity in the Rockies.* Look for details in upcoming issues of *Essay*

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



*Submit info to be listed in March 2009 *Essay* by January 15, 2009.*

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.



January 9-11, 2009 SA International Convention Nashville, TN

We Absolutely Insist on Enjoying Life.

For more info, call 877-434-9006, email us at nashvilleconvention2009@gmail.com, or visit our website: www.sanonconventions.org.

New Groups

USA
Blacksburg, VA
Charlevoix, MI
Corpus Christi, TX
Wenatchee, WA

additional USA meeting:
Westmont, NJ

Philippines
Makati



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.

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

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**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.**

