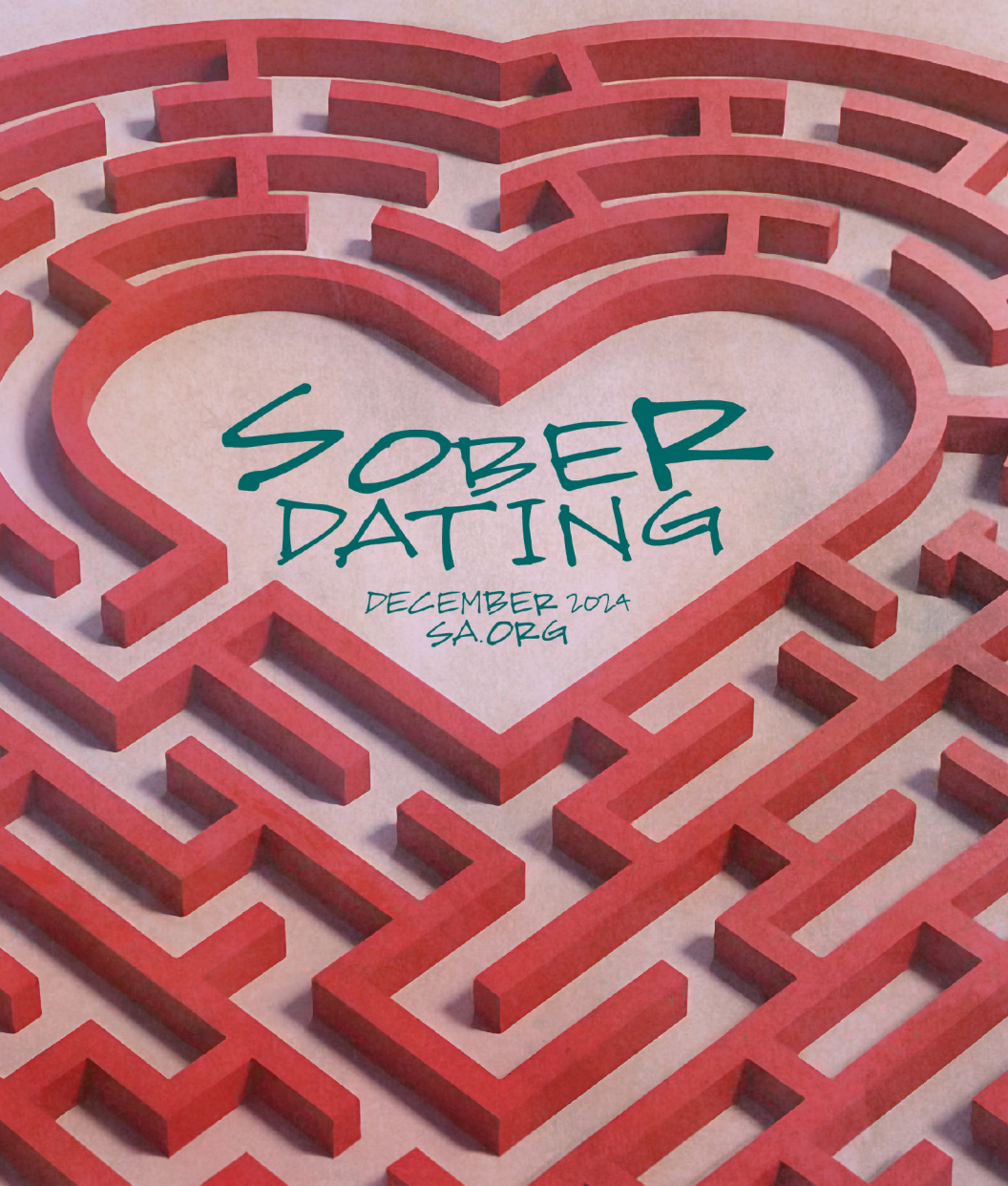


ESSAY

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SEXAHOLICS ANONYMOUS



SOBER DATING

DECEMBER 2014
SA.ORG

SA Purpose

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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RESPONSIBILITY DECLARATION

I am responsible. When anyone, anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of SA always to be there. And for that, I am responsible.

Sexaholics Anonymous STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLE

We have a solution. We don't claim it's for everybody, but for us, it works. If you identify with us and think you may share our problem, we'd like to share our solution with you (*Sexaholics Anonymous*, 2). In defining sobriety, we do not speak for those outside Sexaholics Anonymous.

We can only speak for ourselves. Thus, for the married sexaholic, sexual sobriety means having no form of sex with self or with persons other than the spouse. In SA's sobriety definition, the term "spouse" refers to one's partner in a marriage between a man and a woman. For the unmarried sexaholic, sexual sobriety means freedom from sex of any kind. And for all of us, single and married alike, sexual sobriety also includes progressive victory over lust (*Sexaholics Anonymous*, 191-192). (*Adopted 2010 by the General Delegate Assembly.*)

The only requirement for SA membership is a desire to stop lust and become sexually sober according to the SA sobriety definition. Any two or more sexaholics gathered together for SA sobriety according to the SA sobriety definition may call themselves an SA group.

Meetings that do not adhere to and follow Sexaholics Anonymous' sobriety statement as set forth in the foregoing Statement of Principle adopted by the General Delegate Assembly in 2010 are not SA meetings and shall not call themselves SA meetings. (*Addendum to the Statement of Principle passed by the General Delegate Assembly in July 2016.*)

ESSAY is a publication of Sexaholics Anonymous

essay@sa.org

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RESOLUTION: "Since each issue of ESSAY cannot go through the SA Literature approval process, the Trustees and General Delegate Assembly recognize ESSAY as the International Journal of Sexaholics Anonymous and support the use of ESSAY materials in SA meetings."

Adopted by the Trustees and General Delegate Assembly in May 2016

Editor's Corner

I have loved the ESSAY long before this December issue. I would include it in my morning studies and let HP nudge me about what to highlight and make notes on. Then Luc accepted me onto the editing team where I got to act out my ADD and OCD to my heart's content as I fix spelling, clarify passages for non-English writers, and fix punctuation problems.

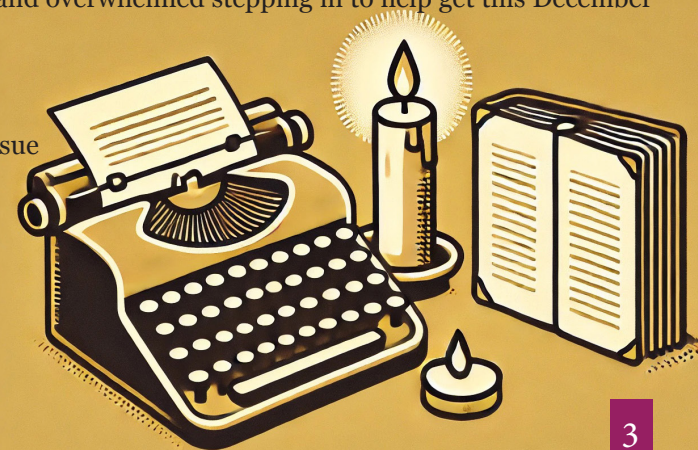
I was just sharing with a fellow how grateful I am for the ESSAY and how I still get insights and wisdom, which HP seems to communicate specifically for *my* recovery on *that* specific morning. This now happens quite often with articles I've already pored over in edit mode. When I'm in study mode, it's like the author and HP are speaking directly to me.

This month's issue is already special to me, though. Luc's sudden departure from this world "For Luc" (see p. 6), just six days after the October issue went live was jarring to many in the Fellowship because of the solid role he played for each of us, not only in his role as ESSAY editor, but also as a fellow member of SA. Even if it was a small role like kindly hearing a fellow introduce himself at a conference, that fellow could feel Luc's presence in that moment. Luc understood the principles the Program taught him. And everyone could feel that he was progressively incorporating these principles into his daily life, whether he was sharing in a meeting or accepting an article submission for the ESSAY.

To say Luc left a gaping hole here at the ESSAY would be a gross understatement. He not only transformed the newsletter into a polished, professional-level magazine, but HP used Luc to transform both the writing by members around the world and the publication process itself into what we now enjoy as a special spirit of ESSAY. Readers and writers around the world may not have exact words for it, but countless people know there's something special about this magazine that Luc built.

I am both honored and overwhelmed stepping in to help get this December 2024 issue out.

Kevin B,
Fill-in Coordinator
for the December Issue





Sylvia J. – The Passing of a Legend



It is with heavy heart that we announce the passing of Sylvia J. on October 10, 2024.

Sylvia, a most-beloved sponsor and friend to many, was sober 41 years and was still taking sponsee calls while on her deathbed. She was a pillar in the structure of SA alongside Roy K. and Jesse L.

The February 2025 edition of The ESSAY will remember Sylvia’s journey and the key roles she played in her never-tiring service. The Fellowship will surely be inspired by her ES&H and her contribution to SA history.

Sponsees and Friends of Sylvia J.



December 2024

There are “many single [sexaholics] who wish to marry and are in a position to do so...

“With clear understanding and right, grown-up attitudes, very happy results do follow.”

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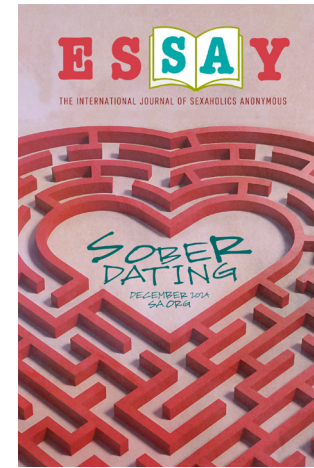
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Any resemblance to real persons is purely coincidental, as all images in ESSAY are handmade, bought from Shutterstock, or made by means of Midjourney AI.



On the cover: *Whether in dating or marriage, searching for sober connection with a partner can feel like being lost in a maze. The path of SA has led many to the Solution.*

ESSAY presents the experience, strength, and hope of SA members. ESSAY is aware that every SA member has an individual way of working the program. 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.

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Luc D.

January 6, 1968 – October 21, 2024
Ghent, Belgium

We are greatly saddened by the sudden passing of the ESSAY Editor, Luc D. As you can see by this issue, ESSAY will continue—although it won't be the same without Luc's magic.

I was on the Board of Trustees (BoT) in 2020 when we needed a new editor for the ESSAY. Luc D. stepped forward among other applicants for the position who all had extensive experience in graphic design and magazine layout. The BoT felt he was clearly sent by God to serve SA when we hired Luc. He served as Editor for four years.

Luc transformed the ESSAY. The Trustees struggled to keep up with his creative and visionary ideas. He changed the ESSAY from a mostly b/w text newsletter to professional full-bleed magazine, expanded its size, and convinced the Board to risk publishing six issues per year instead of five. As the first ESSAY Editor from outside the USA, Luc placed an emphasis on the magazine that reflects the international nature of our Fellowship. He spearheaded adding an online version of the ESSAY (essay.sa.org) with podcasts, videos, and translations into nine other languages.

The fellowship cannot fully express our gratitude for all Luc did for us. He will be missed greatly.

Eric H., Florida, USA

For Luc

I would like to share with you how it was at Luc's funeral and to write a few words about Luc himself—his influence on me as my sponsor and taking me through the Twelve Steps of SA.

His funeral was in Kiezegem where he grew up. It's a village out in the Belgian countryside, a loose collection of farmhouses really. His mother, brothers, and sisters stood in a line across from the entrance to the church and shook people's

hands as they entered. The church was small, every pew packed; people still arriving came to stand three deep around the walls. My back was to the wall and I'm a bit claustrophobic, so before the ceremony started and with people still coming in, I squeezed out to the entrance porch and stood at the doorway looking up toward Luc's casket at the altar, his photo portrait on top of it.

The ceremony was beautiful and dignified. It felt intimate, deep, and meaningful, more than simple ritual. The Belgian fellowship provided a translation pamphlet of the Mass, so I and other English speakers could follow. The two eulogies were moving; you didn't need to speak Flemish to hear and feel the grief but also the joy of Luc. As the Mass ended, a recording of Luc's favorite hymn came on: "Into the Night" from Taizé. I had never heard it before. It was beautiful—a slow, serene air that, more than anything, carried home the truth of this tragedy, penetrating the numbness of shock, dispelling any last lingering disbelief. There was no hiding place. Perhaps this is the purpose of ritual, to help us understand, accept, and cope with tragedy. For the first time in years, I cried.

Luc was more than a sponsor to me. His passion for God, for spiritual growth, for the Twelve Steps that open the way to the grace of a Higher Power, and for helping others to live a good life enthused me so much that I put aside my rebellious self-will, any questioning of his suggestions, and did whatever he said. I gladly kept coming back, phoning him on time, and doing the work he gave me so that, over time, my spirit healed too. And, as I took on healthier beliefs, ideas, and attitudes, I

became joyful like him, and of use to God and to those around me. In the course of time, as we got comfortable within our boundaries, I matured emotionally and learned to feel feelings without medicating, even those that I felt now.

I first met Luc in March of 2015. He had been invited to speak at a convention near Galway, Ireland. There, listening to this tall, young-looking stranger, I was moved hearing him share so openly about the intensity of his past acting out. I also discerned in him an almighty thirst for God, the Higher Power of his understanding. He shared how he had searched for Him everywhere, in everything, but did not recognize Him anywhere. He even described how he had swum the Ganges river in India, drinking in the waters of that hallowed river while dead cows floated past him. When I heard that, I wanted him to be my sponsor.

The first thing I learned from Luc was the most important thing: the Twelve Steps of SA equals the program of SA, and all other elements support Step work—meetings, service, literature, fellowship. These essentials are enabled and given meaning by the Steps. The Steps, he explained, are like cleaning the windows of your soul, windows that have long been dirty. Once they are clean, the Light comes in. It just happens. You can't stop it. And then the transformation takes place.

I'm sure my previous sponsors told me the same thing, maybe in different terms, different emphases here and there, different styles of sponsorship—but it all went over my head. As the saying goes, when the student is ready the master appears. Luc and I worked together very well.

A mutual friend advised me not to waste Luc's time. Luc was intense. He valued his time, so I made sure to call him on time, every time, and always with my Step work done; I did not want to be fired by this sponsor. I could see his value to my recovery.

And so we went along, Step by Step, until we had all twelve done. Step Four took more than two years to complete because he wanted me to forgive everyone on my resentment list. He included in this Step a way of praying for each resen-tee: three rounds of prayers adapted from the Big Book, each round increasing in intensity the blessing towards the resen-tee until finally I could pray the third, most ardent, personalized blessing without bursting into flames. It took years. But it worked. In time, I became free of those terrible resentments.

The thing I liked most about Luc and about the way he worked the Steps was how positive, how practical, and how pragmatic he always was. "Whatever you need to do to stay sober, do it," he would say. And so, he would recommend supporting a personal program of recovery with therapy or medication if they were warranted and provided by a good, qualified professional. Even when taking a holiday, I would hear, "Whatever you need to do to stay sober, do it."

For me, Luc's program was characterized by this principle: the purpose of the Program is to live comfortably, not to spend the entirety of your existence in meetings or reading literature. He translated that for me as, "People as sick as we are need to attend meetings, read literature, work the Twelve Steps, and do service so that we can live,

work, associate, watch TV, go to movies and dances, go on vacation, get married, have children—all while feeling comfortable."

I learned to be myself, to accept myself, and to trust again under his sponsorship. Luc was never cold or rigid or judgmental. Oftentimes, if I shared something I felt sensitive or ashamed about, he would say, "Thank you for sharing that. I did that too." I always felt at ease in his company. If there was one word I would use to characterize his influence, it was encouragement. No matter how bad I felt at any given time, he would draw me back to wisdom and gratitude. He was no sugar-sweet sponsor—he would crack the whip when the whip was needed, especially where my resentments and taking others' inventories were concerned. But always, always, always, he helped me toward the humor of a situation, a proper perspective, the proper proportion—toward wisdom and gratitude. He had an acute God-consciousness and encouraged me to pray for knowledge of His will in any situation. What an influence to have in my life—free, heartfelt, and available. Every time I came off the phone over all those years, I thought to myself, "I have just been talking to a good man."

He pushed me toward sober dating. I took his instructions too literally to begin with. My first day on a dating website (reputable), I met a fair prospect at 3 PM in daylight, plenty of people about, and kept the encounter to precisely one hour and left. This was back in 2016, and sober dating required a level of emotional maturity that I was only discovering. I was riddled with anxiety: "What if there's a second date with her? And a third date? What if the whole thing

works out and I have to marry her and change my whole life—all all because of her?!"

He would reassure me, "Just go for it. Enjoy it. On the first date, you're only looking to see if there's going to be a second date. And then after the second date, we can talk about the possibility of a third date. Stop living in the future. Stop overthinking things."

That was Luc. In spite of his own doubts and fears, in spite of his own problems, he always took time to help me see the best in any situation or person.

He never presented himself as a therapist or financier or relationship expert—he just applied the Steps, laid them over a situation like a template, then nipped and tucked until we could read the situation in terms of the Steps. "So, you're scared of selling up and moving down the country? Are you powerless over these fears? Are they making your life unmanageable? Have your fears become your Higher Power? Can you see your Higher Power on the other side of your fears? What's He saying to you, and are you willing to carry it out?" After hanging up with Luc on this particular occasion, I took some time for prayer and reflection. Then I came to hear Higher Power say, "Talk to a real estate agent and work out your figures. When you've finished that, look at the key factors involved in such a move—locality, meetings, connection, courses, sports—and see what you come up with. Then talk to Luc next week about it."

Luc's style of sponsorship changed my style. I try—and don't always succeed—to be as generous with my time as he was with his. I try

especially to listen carefully, and then make the suggestions that I think Higher Power would have me make. Luc walked the line between sponsorship and friendship carefully and responsibly—I didn't ask him to be my friend back in March 2015, I asked him to be my sponsor. Friendship just happened along the way. It was easy to like Luc—kind, wise, honest, funny, gentle in strength, intense, hardworking, full of love for his fellow sexaholics. Amongst his many contributions to SA, he transformed the ESSAY magazine, raising it from an amateur-looking newsletter to a beautiful, professional-looking booklet now published six times a year, full of inspiring and edifying articles from fellows around the world. I was blessed to work with Luc for many years as one of the assistant editors.

It must have been love that I felt for Luc. I only know that now by the pain I feel. I didn't know it at the time. I thought we were just friends. But all the time, hidden in the happy routine of phone calls over the years, love was growing. If someone would've asked me a couple weeks ago, "Brian, do you love Luc?" I would have been indignant and challenged the speaker to step outside. But now I know that I did love that man—my first real experience of love, and it was a man, which is funny yet somehow appropriate for my recovery. I'd heard about male intimacy before—non-sexual, non-lustful, non-seeking, non-romantic, non-hero-worshipping, non-starstruck. I'd heard about it on the radio and read about it in magazines—and mocked it, of course. But there you go. Somewhere along the line, the ice melted inside of me—in no small measure by Luc, by the way he carried and shared the Light.

When the Mass was over, we (the Belgian fellowship, members from the Dutch and German fellowship, and I) walked about a mile up the road to a community center where, among villagers, we had coffee and sandwiches and cake. It was good to breathe, to talk. We then went our separate ways. I was shepherded by those traveling back to the city of Ghent. That evening, there was a lovely prayer service at the center where he worked, with readings, hymns, and reflections.

The following day, Sunday, at the same center, the Belgian fellowship organized a fellowship session at which people could share their memories of Luc. There were about thirty of us in the room, which was set up for members from around the world to listen in and share. I was glad to be asked to speak about my experience working the Steps with Luc. It was a privilege. I wrote it all out first. It wrote itself really—the pen racing ahead of me. I broke down during my talk—my voice went, my tears flowed—the second time in 24 hours. Something must have been thawing alright, and it was all Luc’s fault—and Higher Power Who had been acting through him. When the session was over, we all went downstairs and had more coffee and buns and sat around fellowshiping, which was helpful in my grief.


Later that evening as I sat on my own across from the railway station, I was sad. But the sadness was mixed with joy and gratitude. I feel deeply privileged to have had someone like Luc walk with me through so many significant years of my life, showing me how to step the way better. He stuck with me for almost ten years, helping me to come alive and live in the realm of Spirit. A particular thought came to me then and filled

me with hope and joy: if God’s Light could shine so beautifully through the cracks, flaws, and shadows, and through the doubts and defects that Luc struggled with, what then must God Himself be like? And it gave me great joy to think that Luc is now with Him, the One Whom he sought all his life. It was also a joy to think that I am now among those human beings who were afforded the opportunity to love Luc. Joy again to think that this program of recovery really does work, that the recovering sexaholic can heal to the point of giving and receiving love freely. And joy, too, to think that, in the course of recovery, we meet really great people like Luc D.

Luc was not a solitary beacon of light. He existed within the Belgian fellowship, was supported by them, and was deeply fond of them. He was supported, too, by a good sponsor in the U.S. and by good friends from across the SA world. He was particularly shaped by a formative SA experience in Nashville, Tennessee, where he learned the value of good humor, proper proportion, honest sharing no matter what, and strong fellowship before and after meetings. He loved his time there.

The Fellowship will carry on after Luc. Of course it will. The worldwide Fellowship will continue to carry the message to the sexaholic who is still suffering. But it will do so all the better for having known Luc D., for having witnessed how he lived and carried the message. Someone put it very well over the weekend: “He was a beautiful soul, wasn’t he?” That says it all for me.

Goodbye Luc, and thanks.

Brian C., Dublin, Ireland 

Dear ESSAY

Giving the Program Literature Authority in My Life

Dear ESSAY,

Recently my sponsor encouraged me to give program literature more authority in my life. He meant, take the literature as my personal truth and don’t divert from it—this is how I will get maximum benefit from this Program of recovery.

Lack of power, that was our dilemma. We had to find a power by which we could live, and it had to be a Power greater than ourselves. Obviously. But where and how were we to find this Power?

Well, that’s exactly what this book is about. Its main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than yourself which will solve your problem.
(AA, 45)

Restated, the purpose of the Big Book is to find a Power greater than ourselves through Whom we can solve our problem. Clear and simple.

The book has had 85 years of prodigious results across many countries in the world.

My present resolve is not only to read and accept the ideas contained in our SA Fellowship-approved literature, but to go a step further and give these ideas *authority* to guide my thinking, choices, and perspective on life.

Dan K., Nairobi, Kenya





Battling the Ants: My Personal Journey Through the 12 Steps to Overcome Auto- matic Negative Thoughts

In my home, a quiet battle has been waging—a battle that parallels an even more personal struggle within my mind. On one hand, I face an invasion of tiny ants that seem to materialize out of nowhere, marching across my kitchen counter. On the other, I wrestle with automatic negative thoughts (ANTs) that creep into my mind, disrupting my peace and self-esteem.

The Ants in My Kitchen

It all started with a few solitary ants. At first, I brushed them off as a minor nuisance. But soon, they multiplied, marching in a seemingly endless line. I began to realize that the source of their invasion was a crumb I had overlooked—a small, easy-to-ignore detail that had turned into a major problem.

Much like these ants, my automatic negative thoughts often start small. A fleeting worry about a work presentation, or a self-critical thought about my appearance, can quickly spiral into an overwhelming cascade of negativity. Just as I had to confront the ant problem head-on, I knew I needed to tackle my thoughts before they took over.

Step One:

Acknowledging the Problem

As I began my journey through the 12 Steps, I realized I had to acknowledge my struggle with these ANTs. Just like those pesky ants in my kitchen, I recognized that my negative thoughts were invading my mind and disrupting my life. I took a deep breath and accepted that I needed help.

Step Two:

Believing Change is Possible

In Step Two, I came to believe that change was possible. I had to trust that I could combat my negative thoughts. Just as I would gather supplies to tackle the ant problem, I armed myself with strategies to confront my ANTs. I realized that believing in my ability to change was the first crucial step.

Step Three:

Committing to Action

As I moved into Step Three, I committed to taking action. One day, in my battle against the ants, I grabbed a bottle of Windex. I was amazed at how a quick spray could wipe them out, making my kitchen feel clean and safe again. But I couldn't help but laugh at the absurdity of it all—if only I could spray myself with Windex to eliminate my automatic negative thoughts! Alas, I needed a different approach.

Step Four:

Self-Reflection

In Step Four, I conducted a fearless inventory of my thoughts and behaviors. I began to identify what was attracting my negative thoughts—much like I had to identify the crumbs that lured the ants into my kitchen. Each time a negative thought crept in, I asked myself: Is this thought based on fact? What evidence do I have? This self-reflection helped me uncover the mental clutter feeding my insecurities.

Unfortunately, there's no quick fix for those persistent ANTs. I learned that combating them required proactive measures. I began journaling my thoughts, challenging their validity, and replacing them with affirmations. For instance, when a thought like "I always mess up" emerged, I countered it with "I am capable, and I have succeeded in the past." This practice helped to create a mental barrier against the onslaught of negativity.

Step Five:

Sharing My Truth

With Step Five, I admitted to myself and a trusted friend the nature of my struggles. Sharing my journey was liberating, akin to finally admitting I had a real ant problem. Voicing my negative thoughts allowed me to see them for what they were—temporary and often irrational.

Steps Six & Seven:

Letting Go of Negativity

As I moved to Steps Six and Seven, I focused on letting go of the negativity that had held me back. I learned to release my need for perfection and embrace the messiness of life, just as I had to accept that my kitchen might never be completely ant-free. Instead, I focused on progress, not perfection.

Steps Eight & Nine:

Making Amends

Steps Eight and Nine guided me to make amends with those I might have affected by my negative thinking, including myself. I began practicing self-compassion, forgiving myself for past mistakes, and treating my mind as I would a dear friend.

Steps Ten & Eleven:

Ongoing Maintenance

In Steps Ten and Eleven, I adopted a daily practice of mindfulness and reflection. I learned to recognize when negativity begins to creep in and address it before it spirals out of con-

trol. Journaling my thoughts became a crucial tool, helping me maintain a clear mental space.

Step Twelve: Helping Others

Finally, in Step Twelve, I sought to share my journey with others facing similar battles. Just as I had learned to manage my ant problem, I wanted to help others find their own strategies for overcoming ANTs. By sharing my experiences, I hoped to create a community of support and understanding.

Finding Peace

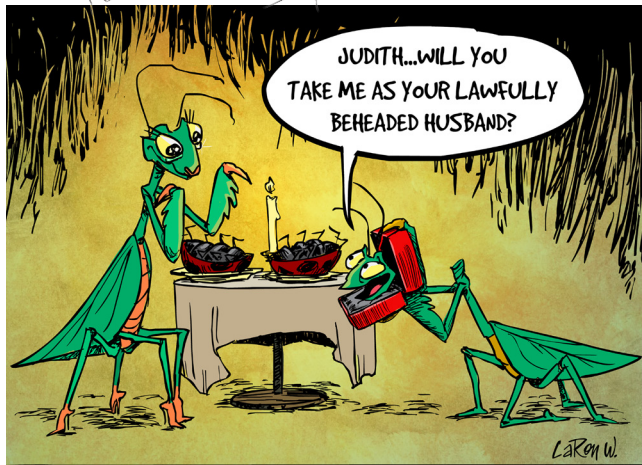
Over time, my kitchen has become a more welcoming space, free of ants. The sense of accomplishment from this small victory mirrors the progress I've made in managing my thoughts. I'm learning to recognize when negativity begins to creep in and to address it before it spirals out of control.

As I sit in my ant-free kitchen, I realize that both battles—the one with the physical ants and the one with my automatic negative thoughts—have taught me valuable lessons.

They remind me that I have the power to change my environment, both physically and mentally.

Battling automatic negative thoughts is an ongoing journey, much like maintaining a clean and inviting kitchen. Through my personal experience with the 12 Steps, I've learned to embrace positivity and take control of my mental landscape. If you find yourself facing your own army of ANTs, remember: while there may not be a spray to get rid of them instantly, the 12 Steps provide a structured path to clear them out and create a space where positivity can thrive. Step by step, you too can reclaim your mental space and find peace.

Rick B., Illinois, USA 



December 2024

Sober Dating

Ending Things Well



I recently dated someone for three months. The first month was great, but by the second month, I felt like he was pulling back emotionally. By the third month, we said our goodbyes.

Earlier in the third month, I broached the topic to him that I had been feeling a change in our communications for a few weeks. He thought about it, then it dawned on him why he was pulling back. As we discussed it, we both realized it was something that neither of us could overcome: for us to continue forward, one person would have to sacrifice themselves for the other. That didn't feel right. We had hit an impasse.

In one conversation, I unexpectedly went from being in a relationship to being single again.

Towards the end of that conversation,

I asked if he was open to doing a postmortem of the relationship with me. I had briefly mentioned to him during our relationship that this is something I do if things don't work out, and this time he asked me to describe the postmortem in more detail. After I did so, he agreed to do it, and we decided on a time and place to have a final meeting.

Two days before the meeting, I sent him a letter to share with him the things that I've learned about myself whilst in the relationship, what I appreciate about him, my feedback for him (always ask permission to give feedback), and finally, my best wishes for him. The next day, he sent me the same, and even added to it our special moments together.

On the day of the meeting, we had an honest discussion of what we wrote and of the things we hadn't written. We were able to apologize and forgive

each other for the ways we may have harmed the other. It was obvious that we still had feelings for each other, yet we also knew that this decision was for the best. We wanted different things, and that's okay. What he is looking for is out there, and what I am looking for is out there, too.

I was also able to explain to him in more depth why, after this meeting, I would have to block him and clear out our conversations. I have a funny kind of luck with exes. Sometimes, years and years after parting ways, I would get random calls or text messages indicating that they miss me. If God so wishes to grant me a husband, I don't want Him to ever have to think why my exes would want to—and are able to—reach out to a sexaholic like me.

I explained that when I block him, it doesn't mean that I hate him, nor is it a restraining order. If we saw each other on the street, why wouldn't we smile or wave? But we don't need to be up close or in each other's personal lives. We can each have our space to prepare beautifully for the next chapter ahead of us.

I had planned an early dinner with a friend, and this luckily became the bookend to our meeting, because we didn't really want it to end. Minutes before we parted ways, we found a quiet place to sing to each other and say our goodbyes. We even joked that we highly recommended this breakup experience to others. After saying our goodbyes in person, I waited a few minutes to say goodbye to him over text, and we both knew what would come next.

It was the best and most wholesome breakup I've had to date, and I've also had equally fulfilling and meaningful


experiences in the last two breakups I had where we did a postmortem.

While dating sober, I learned to have meaningful conversations about each person's respective needs in a relationship, and to honor those needs, without causing undue harm to the other person.

I learned that if I continue to focus on my recovery, I don't need to be in fear that there is no one out there for me. Instead, I can learn to trust in God's love, abundance, provision, and perfect timing, because He's always had me meet someone who was a better fit than the last.

I learned that I am able to get feedback on my thoughts and plans on sober dating from my sponsor, fellows in the program, marriage mentors, family, and friends, so that I don't have to rely on my own thinking.

Whether God wills for me to get married or not, just for today it is enough that I have hopes for a better future, the courage to change, and the willingness to take the next right step.

Ann R., Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 

Sex and the Single Sexaholic

An article published in this year's October issue titled, "The ESSAY Enhances Our Meetings," was quite encouraging for single SA members. In that article, an SA sister recounted a frantic search which ensued after a fellow member referred her to an older ESSAY article that had a great impact on his recovery. Regrettably, he lost his only copy and couldn't remember the title. The author of October's piece, along with other sleuths in that meeting, did find the older article, which proved very valuable for those in their meeting.

Some of us on the ESSAY editing team were also profoundly affected by the recovered article from December 2012, so we decided to reprint it here. It couldn't be a better match for our "Sober Dating" theme this month, its message is clear, practical, and timeless.



"I'm in a serious, monogamous relationship. I love him, and I'm certain that we're going to get married. Why doesn't SA support sex in this type of committed relationship? I'm able to stay present during sex, and it's about connection, not escape. I don't have religious convictions about waiting until marriage. Plus, it's not as if I'm a virgin! Yet sex outside of marriage is not allowed within our sobriety definition. While everyone is free to do exactly as he or she wishes, we are not considered sober if we have sex with anyone other than a spouse. This seems unfair to the single sexaholic!"

As a single sexaholic woman with other single friends in recovery, I've heard arguments like the ones above more than once. Early in recovery, before I began to experience lasting sobriety and progressive victory over lust, I would say things like that myself, but my sponsor would always tell me to take a year off from dating to concentrate on sobriety and Step work. A year ago, I finally took her advice.

Today, I'm experiencing a new freedom as a single woman in sobriety. Now, I can embrace in its entirety SA's sobriety definition: "Any form of sex with one's self or with partners other than the spouse is progressively addictive and destructive" (SA, 202). This means that married sexaholics can have sex with a husband or wife, but for the single sexaholic, it means "freedom from sex of any kind" (SA, 192). That is, no sex until marriage. Having fully accepted this definition now, I think it applies just as much to married SAs as to single sexaholics, and here are my nine reasons why:

1. Sex while dating threatens my objectivity.

As I get to know a potential spouse, it's very hard (impossible for me!) to be honest and objective when I'm sexual with someone I'm still getting to know. Sex while dating clouds my thinking. While I date, I want to be able to see my partner for who he truly is and make clear-headed decisions about our future.

2. Sex does a great job of communicating an intimate bond, it's terrible at creating one.

Sex introduced too early in a relationship can create a false sense of intimacy, rather than reflect the

real intimacy cultivated through emotional (not sexual) connection. My sponsor told me to ensure that my emotional intimacy is more developed than my physical intimacy — always! — even after I'm married.

3. By saving sex until I'm married, I demonstrate to myself (and remind my partner) that sex is truly optional.

The best way I can remind myself that I don't have to have sex is by not having sex!

4. Accepting SA's sobriety definition removes my need to decide when I'm ready to be sexual with my partner.

I've often heard in the Program: "My own best thinking got me here!" Looking at the track record of my best thinking (actually, my self-will), it makes sense for me to accept the wisdom of those who have gone before me rather than think it'll be different for me. Even if I think I'm entering into a sexual relationship in a healthy way, I know that my disease is cunning and baffling; I can deceive myself just as easily as I could deceive others.

5. Accepting SA's sobriety definition allows me to surrender my self-will and let go of old ideas.

The Big Book says, "Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas, and the result was nil until we let go absolutely" (AA, 58). My old ideas about sex included the following: (a) I could control it (but actually, sexaholism was having its way with me!), (b) it indicated that I was loved and important, (c) my sexual behaviors did not affect anyone but me, (d) intensity meant intimacy, (e) I was different from other people

and just had a higher sex drive, and (f) waiting to have sex until I married my partner was unrealistic and downright impossible. Choosing to embrace SA's sobriety definition challenges all of these old ideas and frees me to discover more practical ideas about sex and sexuality.

6. When I ignore SA's sobriety definition, I affect other people.

In the past I thought that my sexual behaviors only affected me. But now that I have a sponsor, a home group, sponsees, friends in recovery, and improved relationships with family, friends, and especially Higher Power, I know that if I jeopardize my sobriety, I risk harming all of these other relationships. Freedom from lust keeps me emotionally, mentally, and spiritually available for a healthy connection, and it gives me experience, strength, and hope to offer to others.

7. Accepting SA's sobriety definition reminds me that I have no guarantees about my future so I can live in the present.

I'm not married now, so accepting where I am in life means living as a single person, not married. If I justify having sex with any partner by thinking, "We're getting married anyway," then I'm living in the future, not the present. In fact, I justified sex in my last relationship because I was so sure we were getting married ... yet we're no longer together. And the same before that! Two separate men told me they would love me forever, and both relationships fell apart.

8. Many negative outcomes from sex arise before marriage, but I can't think of any from abstinence.

Negative consequences of sex outside of marriage might include unnecessarily awakening lust, unplanned pregnancy, or feeding dependency, secrecy, shame, or fear. On the other hand, abstinence can preserve self-respect, freedom from guilt and fear, and more opportunities to work my program as I surrender lust.

9. Saving sex for marriage helps me focus better on working the Steps with my sponsor.

It also gives me time to learn what healthy sex looks like as I soak in the experience, strength, and hope of married SAs. I can also develop clearer plans, with HP, my sponsor, and others, for reintroducing sex into my life when and if I get married.

I once heard sex described as the natural culmination of sharing, commitment, trust, and cooperation. That sounded to me like emotional intimacy. I don't think sex ever culminates in emotional intimacy. The best way I can ensure that my sexual relationship is unselfish is to first develop a foundation of sharing, trust, and cooperation and to guard sex in safekeeping for that most-intimate of commitments. Marriage is no guarantee of lust-free sex (my married SA friends bear witness of that), but I believe I will have a greater chance of sexual health—before and after marriage—if I trust the wisdom of SA literature and the experience of those who have gone before me.

Shannyn H., Tennessee, USA 
First printed in the December 2012 ESSAY



Progress in Dating

December 2024

After finishing my Step Four harms inventory, I was very grateful to notice that each consecutive person that I dated after I got sober had fewer harms. There are still things left to work on, but my ability to have healthy relationships has improved since joining SA. I'd like to describe some of the progress that I saw in my inventory.

My first relationship while sober was a mess—many of my character defects came out in full force—but I was honest with my sponsor about lust and my physical behaviors. I bookended my dates, making calls or texts to other sober members before and after the date. I held myself accountable as to what I was actually doing and any fantasies I had about the person (sexual or otherwise) in a timely manner. I stayed sober! In my disease, I hid my behavior from others, lying, rationalizing, and minimizing whenever I was confronted. In recovery, I keep what I am doing out in the open, especially when it seems like lust may be starting to be a part of my actions. It is extremely important for me to be rigorously honest here and to not put off telling someone.

In my next relationship while sober, I was able to be open and honest with the person I was dating about how I felt about the relationship. This was hard because first I had to be honest with myself. I am extremely grateful to have dated someone at this point who was very honest with me and gave me an example of what that looked like. One occurrence worth noting; we had a discussion about whether to date or remain just friends, and he said something like, “When we first met I had a lot of concerns, but I

think I have finally overcome all my reservations about being interested in you.” Not the protestations of undying love my ego was looking for, but a good instance of honestly stating where he was. Another time he asked if we could hold hands, and I told him I wasn't ready. Later, we had a discussion about being exclusive, and he said he needed to think it over. We had an open dialogue about our relationship. It wasn't furtive or full of the intrigue, secret signs, and uncertainty that characterized many of my prior relationships. It was simple, peaceful, and low-energy—a wonderfully clean feeling.

Another part of being honest with how I felt is that I was able to end things in a timely manner. In my disease, it took months to break things off after I knew it wasn't going to work. I got caught up in people-pleasing and control, trying to find the perfect moment to minimize the hurt to them. I manipulated them to see if I could get them to end things with me, so that I wouldn't have to take responsibility. I was dishonest when spending time with them, pretending to like them while analyzing if this was the opportune moment to end things.

In recovery, I surrender my fear to God (and for me there is a lot of fear). I have the freedom to tell them things won't s as soon as I know. I don't have to live a lie when spending time with them. Now I can have integrity in my relationships.

Anonymous

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Letting Go of Expectations

I was unmarried when I entered SA at the age of 26. I got sober and stayed sober through several dates and relationships. I met my wife after 16 years of sobriety. I remained sober through our courtship and 12 years of marriage (so far).

Before recovery, I had several short-lived relationships. They were more like sex-ships, because there wasn't much relating involved. They were like one-night stands that lasted a few months too long. Some were driven by lust from the beginning. Others started out more emotional and romantic, but quickly became all about sex after our first night together. I only stayed in the relationship for sex, or because I did not want to be alone again. It was always up to the girlfriend to sense my emotional distance and initiate the breakup. Even before that point, though, I was looking around to see who could be next.

I joined AA when I was 22. I thought that quitting drinking would solve my relationship problems. It didn't. In fact, my acting out increased since I had one less drug in my life.

When I joined SA, I didn't like that SA's bottom line included no sex before marriage. I had no desire to get married at the time, but I wanted to have a healthy sexual relationship... eventually. I realized at that time I

was too sick to be dating. So, I was okay with the sobriety definition for the time being. I later grew to appreciate the merits of celibacy in recovery.

The White Book says, "For the unmarried sexaholic, sexual sobriety means freedom from sex of any kind" (SA, 191). Freedom! To me, it meant freedom from all the foolishness and confusion that goes along with premarital sex. Beforehand, there are the games, the teasing, and trying to read her mind. Afterward, there is the wondering if there's a chance of pregnancy or an STD, if my feelings are genuine or had been "manufactured" by the sex act, and if this is the beginning of a relationship or just a one-night stand. When I started dating in sobriety, I didn't have to deal with *any* of that because I was committed to sobriety. Free from that intrigue, it was much easier to determine whether or not someone was right for me. My judgment was not clouded by lust and sex. I avoided women who were immodest in their dress and behavior. And, of course, if she did not respect my desire for sexual sobriety, the relationship would be over.

Many SA sponsors recommend that single members stay away from dating until they have at least a year of sobriety and have worked through the Steps (that includes making as many of one's Ninth

Step amends as presently possible). That's my recommendation as well. I believe we attract people who are at the same emotional maturity level as us. That means the healthier we get, the healthier our dates get. When I was still in my disease, my relationships were unhealthy. Some were codependent, some were superficial, and some were unfaithful. In fact, I didn't have what I would call a healthy, honest, loving relationship until I had six years of sobriety, which was long after completing Step Nine. It only lasted a year, but it gave me hope that I could one day have a long-term partner.

Looking back, I find that all the time and energy I spent "looking for that special someone to love" in my early recovery was wasted. Later, I redirected that energy toward trying to become *worthy* of that special someone. I worked the Steps, sponsored others, and did service, all with a goal of becoming a man of integrity, honesty, and compassion. Eventually, that special someone appeared when I wasn't looking!

When I was ready to start dating, I looked for opportunities to meet new people, but they centered around activities that I like. I went on group hikes. I joined a group that plays board games. I started folk dancing. These are all activities I enjoyed thoroughly even when I didn't meet anyone new. But when I attended an event with an expectation (a.k.a., a premeditated resentment) of meeting the woman of my dreams, I got upset when that didn't happen. I learned to let it go and just enjoy the moment. Every now and then I would meet a woman I was interested in, get her number, and ask her out. Some women I only had one date with. With others I had a series of dates.

The irony is that I couldn't have a healthy relationship with any woman until I got to the point in my recovery where I didn't *need* a woman in my life to feel fulfilled! When I believed I

had to have a girlfriend or wife to be complete, I was needy and demanding with women. I had to surrender the expectation (there's that word again) of ever getting married, or even having sex again! *There are no guarantees in life.* I concluded that even if I were to stay single, I would still have a satisfying life. My job, home, family, neighbors, friends, religious community, recovery community, and hobbies all added up to the rich and full life of a single, celibate sexaholic.

Many years after that surrender, I met the woman who would become my wife at our place of worship. We started out as friends. We would chat after our Sunday worship meetings. That evolved into walks, coffee, evening dates, then whole days together. After about a month of dating, I told her I was in SA and I will not be having sex until I am married. I was scared. I didn't know if she could accept this. To my surprise, she said she was relieved! She wasn't ready for sex yet either. I have discovered that, contrary to what is depicted in TV and film, there are a lot of women that are perfectly fine with waiting until marriage to have sex. During our courtship, we agreed on a set of rules to reduce our sexual temptations. We avoided touching certain body parts, undressing in front of each other, and lying down together.

We have a happy marriage today. It is built on a foundation of mutual respect, honesty, and love. We don't criticize each other's programs. We support each other. I believe this process happened in God's time. We both had to go through everything we experienced before meeting each other, in order to be prepared for what we have now.

In the end, I have learned to be more patient. God's plan is revealed to us one day at a time.

Jeff S., Maryland, USA 



Progressing through Relationship Stages in Sober Dating

My name is Dave, I'm a recovering sexaholic, and I've been sexually sober since August 1, 1985 by the grace of God and this wonderful Fellowship. I came into the Fellowship when I separated from my first wife hoping to save my marriage. After two years of sobriety, we still divorced, and by the grace of God, I knew absolutely that I had no business being in any kind of romantic relationship, much less a committed one. That clarity came while attending meetings at a facility that counseled people from alcoholic families. I was a year and a half sober at the time. I realized that my own family had been alcoholic, so I began to see a therapist there. I also heard a cassette tape about codependency and dating; the talk outlined a healthy approach to dating in recovery.

I didn't have a clue about healthy relationships. I have never even thought about it. I learned on this tape that healthy relationships progress from *acquaintanceship* to *companionship* and then to *love*. The shocker to me was that romantic touch is only appropriate after a relationship has progressed through the first two stages. What a concept! All I knew was to sample the physical part as quickly as possible.

The speaker went on to describe each stage separately. In *acquaintanceship*, an activity is more important than the person I share it with. When I started dating at four and a half years of sobriety, this looked like me asking someone to take a walk in the local park. In *companionship*, the person becomes more important than the activity. Once we found that we shared common interests and began to share deeper information about ourselves, *companionship* tended to develop.

I also learned about the speaker's 10-date rule: don't discuss your addiction or recovery until after 10 dates. I've come to modify this rule such that I shared about my recovery only when a casual *acquaintanceship* looked like it was turning into a *companionship* and then ONLY in regular consultation with HP and my sponsor. I only ever shared my recovery with two women over my six years of sober dating. And I only shared my complete story with the woman I wanted to marry. My sponsor was on board that I would share my story and answer all her questions before holding her hand. I continued to enjoy this *companionship* for a few months before I said I loved her, and I kissed her for the first time.

Knowing me so well after helping me through the Steps, my sponsor would push me, and he also reined me in when I needed it. A good example was whenever I met someone I thought was interesting, he'd remind me that I was just beginning the first stage by saying, "Okay, you're asking her to take a walk, not get married!" I maintained a number of boundaries during my dating years:

- I didn't date people from work or recovery so I could stay focused in both arenas.
- I didn't date people that triggered my lust.
- I dated several people at the same time since most never progressed out of the *acquaintanceship* stage.
- I limited the frequency of dates with each woman because one of my character defects was to overwhelm people by depending on them to meet too many of my needs.

A key moment of clarity occurred four years into my dating when I was 42. Having had no relationships that progressed beyond the *acquaintanceship* stage, I realized that I really did have a very good life! I was approaching nine years of sobriety, I was doing service work in the Fellowship, I had a good job and

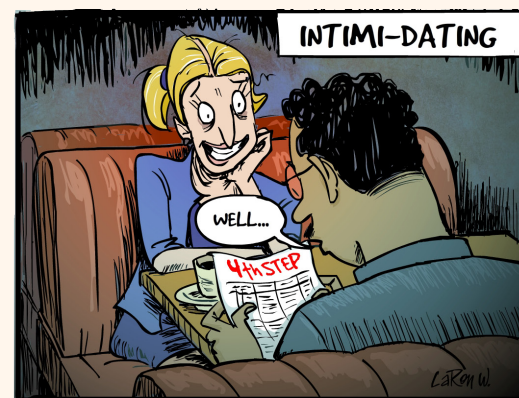
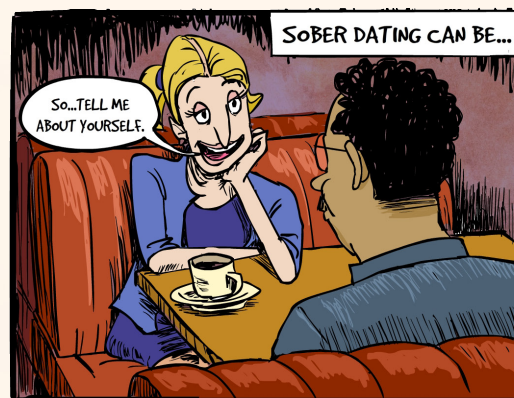
good friends (mostly in recovery), and I was active in my church. Even if I didn't get married, I could remain happy and be at peace. Only after I accepted the joy the Program had brought me and surrendered my desire for yet more did I meet my wife. We dated for a year and a half, and we've now been married for 28 years and have two wonderful sons.

This is my advice to any single member in the Fellowship:

- Focus completely on getting sober and working the Steps with your sponsor.
- After some sobriety, consult with your sponsor (and HP) about working with a therapist on family relationship issues that may have gotten distorted.
- When that has yielded some confidence, discuss the idea of dating in order to develop a *companionship*.

I found successful relationships only after years of healthy sober dating, and only after I worked my recovery, worked on myself, and committed to work the Program for the rest of my life.

Dave H., Tennessee, USA 



Love and the Real Connection

There's a great talk by Roy K. called "Sponsorship and Group Sobriety." (If you are new to the Program, Roy K. was the founder of our Fellowship). In his talk, Roy K. shares about the highest purpose of sponsorship. It's not to keep people coming to the Program, and it's not to keep people sober, because only a Higher Power can do that. According to Roy, the highest purpose of sponsorship is not even working the Steps, although that is an integral part of it. He says that the highest purpose of sponsorship is introducing other men to the real Connection and bringing them into a way of living where the sponsee can experience having that real Connection.

Finding the real Connection is how I got sober fourteen months ago. This was after eight years of being in the Program with no sobriety. When I first joined SA eight years ago, I planned to come to a meeting once a week. That's all I needed to get sober.

Then I heard more about the Steps. And after I read the Steps, I was even more determined not to do them. My resentments and my fears had nothing to do with my internet use or masturbation.

Even worse than the Steps, I saw a few people in the Program who turned it into a lifestyle. These men were very extreme in letting the Twelve Steps

be a part of their regular life. I was determined not to do that. And so I lived in the problem for the next eight years.

I remember the first time I got a call from one such man who has made the Program a deep part of his life. Today he is my sponsor, and he was the first person in the Program to ever call me. When I saw his name on my caller ID, I thought, "Why on earth is he calling?"

I picked up the phone, and to my surprise he didn't talk about acting out. He was calling to say hello and see how I was. He encouraged me to practice calling others.

Although I did eventually get more comfortable calling fellows, I spent the next eight years acting out. I only ever had a week or two of sobriety, and it was pretty poor quality sobriety. I worked through a few of the Steps with different sponsors, but never got very far. I thought it was because of sponsors moving away or being lousy sponsors.

One time my previous sponsor totally forgot he was sponsoring me. Then he relapsed, and I asked my Higher Power to guide me to a new sponsor. And that is how I started working with my current sponsor.

But the real reason I didn't advance

in the Steps was because I didn't take accountability for my own program and do the work. I did eventually take the Steps seriously—and now I'm actively working them. The thing that gave me the willingness to work the Steps was experiencing the real Connection. And I thank my Higher Power for that.

During those first eight years I went through a lot of difficult circumstances. I'm not going to list them because ultimately they have nothing to do with my acting out. I act out because I'm an addict, and even if none of these terrible things had happened, I would still have been a sexaholic and acted out.

I have no control over lust, so several years ago I got rid of my laptop. After that, if I wanted to act out online I had to go to the store and buy a new laptop. I probably bought 15 to 20 laptops because I was desperate to act out. Now that I'm sober, I realize I was trying to find the real Connection on the Internet that would ease my anxiety and pain.

I did make amends to the electronics store this year for all the laptops I had bought and then returned when I was feeling foolish after relapsing.

Around the time of my last relapse in 2023, a sober man asked me two important questions:

"Who in the Program loves you?" and "Are you willing to pass on what you've been given to the next man?"

To answer the first question—I wasn't sure if anyone in the Program loved me.

And to answer the second question—well, you cannot transmit something you haven't got, so I wasn't going to be passing on anything because I wasn't sober.

But then I experienced what it meant to be loved in the Program. For each

of us, that may look different. For me, it was this man calling to check in on me when he knew I wasn't doing well. He was willing to pick up when I called, and if he couldn't pick up then, he called me back. He always called me back. Every single time. He was willing to listen to my foolishness and then share his "experience, strength, and hope" (SA, 201). He didn't do anything very complicated, but he did it very consistently.

I felt pretty hopeless last year and a few times wanted to kill myself. The Twelve-Step approach is not therapy, and SA is not a suicide hotline. I only share this to communicate a sense of my mindset. And to explain why it was so important for me to experience the consistency of caring that this man gives to me and to others in the Program.

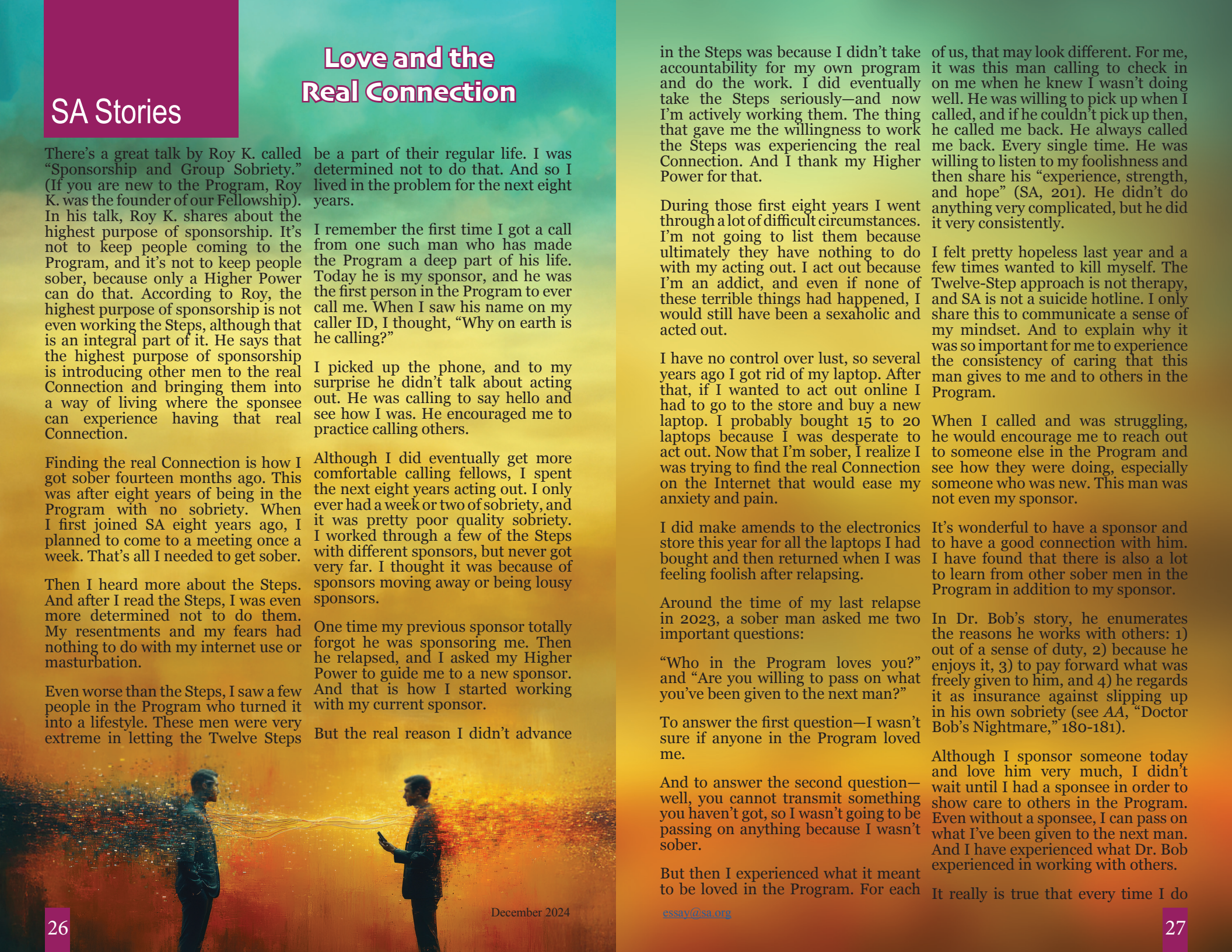
When I called and was struggling, he would encourage me to reach out to someone else in the Program and see how they were doing, especially someone who was new. This man was not even my sponsor.

It's wonderful to have a sponsor and to have a good connection with him. I have found that there is also a lot to learn from other sober men in the Program in addition to my sponsor.

In Dr. Bob's story, he enumerates the reasons he works with others: 1) out of a sense of duty, 2) because he enjoys it, 3) to pay forward what was freely given to him, and 4) he regards it as insurance against slipping up in his own sobriety (see AA, "Doctor Bob's Nightmare," 180-181).

Although I sponsor someone today and love him very much, I didn't wait until I had a sponsee in order to show care to others in the Program. Even without a sponsee, I can pass on what I've been given to the next man. And I have experienced what Dr. Bob experienced in working with others.

It really is true that every time I do



something to pass on the message to others and care for them, that's a little bit of insurance against a relapse. Dr. Bob used the "S" word (slip) but I've never had a slip—I only have big relapses. So I only ever think in terms of a relapse. For me, each insurance policy is good for no more than 24 hours. To date, I have taken out about 425 insurance policies.

Recently, I found myself with a bad annual review at the office, financial difficulties, and looking for a new place to move.

In the past, these were each on their own great excuses to act out. Altogether at one time, they would have been too much for me to handle.

But at the same time I was dealing with all of that, I was working the Steps and practicing love and care for others in the Program.

A week after my bad performance review, I got a text from a man in the Program saying that he completed his first full week of real sobriety ever. What an amazing thing. I got to share in the joy of this not because I was this guy's sponsor but because I was a fellow in the Program who loved and cared for him. And then in turn, I could also go back to my sponsor and share the news about this man having the first sober week of his adult life. And so my sponsor also got to share in this joy because we have a real Connection.

But being a friend to others and having the real Connection requires a lot more than celebrating good things. It means calling this same guy when he's down. And when he answers the phone and cries and I have nothing smart or comforting to say, I simply stay on the phone with him and listen to his tears. (And when I've had to cry, others have done the same thing for me.)

I want more of these moments, both the celebrations and the times when

there's deep sadness and I have nothing to offer except listening quietly. When I'm willing to follow the principles laid out in the Big Book, I can have a spiritual experience together with other men.

One of my favorite speaker recordings is from a member in New Jersey who got sober in 2010. He had an experience similar to me of being in the Program a long time and never having sobriety. Even some oldtimers didn't want to talk to him because he was such a mess. But he eventually found the real Connection. And in the recording, he had two things to say about working with others that I've always remembered:

First, he talked about Tradition Five, which says: "Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers." The speaker says I can't go door to door in my neighborhood asking, "Hi, is there a sexaholic living here who is still sick?" Enough men who are still suffering are already at meetings. So if I want to carry the message of the Program and help someone, I can start with those at a meeting I already go to.

The other thing he pointed out is that carrying the message is going to look different for each of us. Our "experience, strength, and hope" won't be identical. The important thing he said here is: "Whether you're a tough love guy or a love love guy, make sure your love is more important than your tough."

Today I can say that what keeps me sober is, first, doing the Steps. And second, it's knowing the answer to these two questions: "Who in the Program loves me?" and "Am I willing to pass on what I've been given to the next man?"

John H., California, USA 

Steps & Traditions

Taking the First Step

For me, the most important Step is the First Step. Taking the First Step is the motivator for all of the other Steps. I am fully convinced that I have a fatal malady beyond my ability to fix, so I move forward on the other Steps. Step One is a process of surrendering pride. It's not the end of pride, but hopefully, God willing, it can help create a daily reprieve.

I hated acting out, both as a behavior and as a way of life. Lust is evil. The problem with lust is that it destroys everything legitimately good in my life, especially my spiritual and emotional balance and my relationships. The Big Book says that with God we will "lose our fear of today, tomorrow, or the hereafter" (AA, 63). With lust, I will gain fear of today, tomorrow, and the hereafter.

In this moment, I have no doubt of my total powerlessness over lust and also the utter unmanageability it brings. Yet, I must consistently remind myself of these facts every day—and I cannot do that myself. I need God. Without God, "*We are unable, at certain times, 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). Without God, my mental obsession (driven by the bondage of self), will always push me back to ruin. So, I take the Steps.

Being a sexaholic in recovery is not an easy life, but it is much easier than the alternative. Life in recovery can be enjoyable, rewarding, connecting, valuable, and even fun. I have great friends and fellows. We support each other. We walk the Road of Happy Destiny, laugh, and try to help the newcomer. And it all starts with the First Step.

Michael M., California, USA 



Walking and Working the Steps in Prison

My name is Raphael. I am a grateful, recovering sexaholic. I have been sober by the grace of God and with the help of all you in this program of SA since April 7, 2019. I am also currently serving a 50-month sentence for actions I took as a result of my addiction to lust.

My recovery journey began with a knock on my front door. They say when opportunity comes knocking, open the door. Well, the police were the ones knocking, but if I had known

I was being given the opportunity to live a life full of joy, connection, and meaning, I might have opened the door with a bit more enthusiasm.

Over the last five years of recovery in the Program, I have been the beneficiary of some incredible wisdom, much of which has come from my sponsor. However, as much as I have learned from working with a sponsor, I have learned even more by working with others by sponsoring other men in this program.

Before I came to prison, I spent two years and two months out on bond, awaiting the result of my criminal case. During that time, I soaked up as much of that Program wisdom as possible. I attended hundreds of meetings and experienced the Steps as both a sponsee and a sponsor. When the judge announced my sentence of 50 months, I had already decided that God was giving me an opportunity to carry the message of my recovery and to practice the principles of the Program in all my affairs.

Now, nearly three years later, I can definitively declare that God has delivered. I am not only sponsoring two people over the phone and the online messaging platform, but I've been sponsoring another person who lives here with me for the last seven months. I 12-stepped him into the Program after I learned of the nature of his charges and gauged his interest in living a life free from the obsession of lust.

But it hasn't been easy. When is the right thing ever easy? Simple, maybe. But easy? Sponsoring a sexaholic can be difficult work anywhere. Sponsoring a sexaholic while in prison is exceptionally hard. It presents a set of challenges that makes abundantly clear that it's really not me making the difference. It's God.


Over the past couple of years, I've tried sponsoring a couple of other guys, both who admitted to unwanted sexual behaviors. I don't know if it was me, but they both ended up punching me. I don't like firing a sponsee, but physical violence is a deal breaker. But I was undeterred. I kept working my program, and God kept offering me opportunities.

My current sponsee and I meet twice a week. Once for a literature meeting (we're reading through the Big Book), and once for Step work (we're on Step Four). Finding a private space in a prison dorm environment is virtually impossible, so we try to keep our voices low when we share, and we avoid sexually explicit language.

One of my biggest personal challenges in sponsoring someone who lives in the same room as me (albeit a big room with 62 other people) is not micromanaging when I see him doing something I identify as problematic. I have learned with the help of my sponsor that just because I notice something, it's not my job to say something. My role is to be a fair representation of the Program, and to help guide him through the Steps. Otherwise, I can quickly revert to being the actor who's trying to run the whole show. Surrender to God is key to finding acceptance in this area.

I try to live my life without fear, but I won't sugarcoat it: Working with others in this environment can be scary at times. But to me, there's nothing scarier than living my life without this program of SA. To paraphrase the words of "A Vision for You," God has shown me how to create the fellowship I so desperately crave. It hasn't been easy. It hasn't been comfortable. But He keeps showing me the way, and I keep walking (and working) the Steps.

Thanks for letting me share.

Raphael S., Virginia State Prison,
USA 



Experiencing a Spiritual Awakening

Without a doubt, a spiritual awakening is a common phrase in SA. It is mentioned in Step Twelve: “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps...” (SA, 6). If a spiritual awakening is essential to my program, why haven’t I set out to discover more about it?

Our SA members in Ghana committed themselves to do just that. For many months we had been planning a retreat for the end of September. We chose as a theme, “A Spiritual Awakening.” As a resource, we used a talk given by Roy K. in Adelphi, Maryland in July of 2007. It was at one of Roy’s last International Conventions. The talk was called, “Mission Impossible: The Essential Role of God in Lust Recovery.” In the talk, Roy acknowledges how important it was to hear the words in Steps Three and Eleven, “*God as we understood Him.*” Roy describes how he grew in his experience and appreciation of how God disclosed Himself to him. This was an awakening for him. Roy states:

The words “God as we understood Him” (Steps Three and Eleven) for me became ‘God as I have come to need and actually experience Him.’ So, the self-disclosure of God in my life has been a progressive thing based on my need and my response to that need...

Our SA members in Ghana are of different ages, different tribes, different religions and denominations,

and varied length of experience in SA. Nonetheless, all of us who gathered at the retreat agreed that SA is a spiritual program. The way to find the spiritual awakening that Roy talks about is clear. He worked the Steps, attended meetings regularly, and continued to be in contact with his sponsor and his Higher Power. He was humble and ready when his disease drove him to his knees.

We could do no less. All of us at the retreat took time to rework Steps One, Two, and Three as suggested in *Step into Action*. This exercise prepared our spirits for change. After listening to the talk, we shared our journey with each other. Although none of us had a dramatic spiritual awakening, we did grow spiritually from this retreat. It was a humbling experience.

I believe a spiritual awakening is a progressive thing. Not because my Higher Power is hesitant to disclose Himself to me, but rather because I am not entirely ready. My surrender starts weakly, and then grows stronger in me until it becomes a desperate cry. Roy shared that God’s self-disclosure was progressive in his life. I believe my spiritual awakening will grow, too, as I ask Higher Power to meet my growing need for help.

Kwaku B., Ghana



December 2024

Hope in Morocco

My name is Abdelbarie, and I’m a sexaholic. Friends in America would pronounce my name Ab-del-BAH-ree, but to be honest, it’s the word “sexaholic” I’m still not used to. I never knew exactly what was wrong with me. I thought I was just a normal guy with a nasty porn and masturbation habit. As it turns out, I’m not normal at all.

Last year, someone I knew sent me a link to an online SA meeting. Nothing made sense to me at first, but I thank God I was desperate enough to give it a try. I had nothing to lose, so I looked for a sponsor and started working the Steps. Then the Steps worked on me.

SA’s first gift to me was a diagnosis of my problem, and I learned my problem wasn’t porn and masturbation as I had assumed for so long. My actual problem was lust! I had tried to quit many times, but nothing ever worked. It only got worse. I was like a cigarette chain smoker who says he wants to stop but spends all of his time in an unventilated room full of cigarette smoke. Every time I stopped watching porn and masturbating, lust only intensified inside me.

SA showed me my problem, but it also introduced me to the Solution, which

for me started with the overall Twelve-Step program of Sexaholics Anonymous. This Program taught me to build a personal relationship with a Higher Power who will keep me sober one day at a time for the rest of my life as long as I stay in the Solution. I don’t have to submit to the temptations anymore because, instead, I can ask a Higher Power for help as I surrender my lust to Him and to my new fellows.

Because of SA, there is finally hope for the sexaholic who still suffers in Morocco. With two online meetings, we decided to start in-person meetings as well. By the grace of God, there are now two weekly in-person meetings in Morocco, and we try our best to work our programs with the assurance that a Higher Power will send the newcomer to us when we are ready to help him (or her—only Higher Power knows for now).

I remember going to my first in-person meeting and talking with someone about my struggle with addiction. A realization came to me after we spoke: For the first time in my life, my inside finally matched my outside. I could be my authentic self without fear of him judging or humiliating me. And I didn’t have to worry about my inside matching anyone else’s outside.

Being a part of this fellowship of men and women who are honest with themselves gave me the opportunity to be myself for the first time. I could share my darkest secrets without fear of being judged or humiliated. It provides me with a safe place to grow, which is something I will be forever grateful for.

Abdelbarie E., Tetouen, Morocco



essay@sa.org

**JOB POSTING
PLEASE SHARE!**

Editor — ESSAY Magazine

The SA Board of Trustees is seeking applicants from the Fellowship for the position of **Editor of the ESSAY magazine**. The Editor has managerial oversight and responsibility for the ESSAY magazine and will report directly to SA's Board of Trustees (BoT).

The ESSAY is to Sexaholics Anonymous as *The Grapevine* is to Alcoholics Anonymous and is guided by the principles of the SA Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts. The ESSAY serves as a source of information, strength, and hope to sexaholics, inside and outside the rooms of SA. The ESSAY provides a high-quality "meeting in print" (and now, multimedia) written by and for members of SA worldwide. The ESSAY also serves as an outreach tool to carry the message to those who have not yet found SA. (Have you ever considered leaving your already-read copy in a waiting room?) For a further description of the mission, vision, roles, and guidelines see Chapter 15 of the *SA Service Manual* (download at www.sa.org > RESOURCES > LITERATURE > THE SA SERVICE MANUAL).

ESSAY Editor Qualifications and Expectations

Application is open to all members of Sexaholics Anonymous who have a minimum of three (3) years of sobriety, who agree with and fully support the SA sobriety definition, the SA Purpose, and the SA Statement of Principle.

Ideal applicants will have three-to-five years of experience as a Senior Editor with a proven record of accomplishment, a record of completing projects on time, and at least three years of corporate publications management (or comparable experience), with the ability to communicate with multiple volunteer authors, editors, artists, team coordinators, outside printer personnel, etc., and ability to effectively balance the

various schedules and priorities of all parties.

The ESSAY Editor will have sole authority in deciding the theme and final content of each issue of the ESSAY.

Other key skills and responsibilities:

- Support, enhance, and further the current mission and vision of the ESSAY
- Continue the international context of the ESSAY
- Manage the editorial and art departments of the ESSAY
- Select and manage members from the Fellowship to serve on teams: editing, artistic, proofreading, voice talent (for recording articles), language translation, podcast, video production, and other teams as needed
- Time Requirement: A minimum of 40 hours per issue (6x/year) spent on preparation, editorial meetings, editing, formatting, proofing, and actively soliciting articles/artwork between issues
- Expert knowledge of editorial software such as MSWord, Adobe InDesign, or other publishing software currently in use at SAICO and the ESSAY
- Familiarity (or willingness to become familiar) with the SA Service Manual, especially Chapter 15 on the ESSAY
- Submit annual reports, budgets, and update proposals to the Board of Trustees and other committees

To receive an Application Form, compensation information, and more detailed Information regarding Editorial Guidelines for The ESSAY, please send emails to saico@sa.org or essay@sa.org. Completed application forms will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees, ESSAY team members, and the Editor Search Team.

COMING IN FEBRUARY



We're anticipating more wonderful articles in the February 2025 issue on the theme, "God As We Understand Him." **WE NEED YOUR SUBMISSIONS, though!** If you already submitted something, it was lost when we tried to recover data and files after we suddenly lost Luc, our previous editor. Please submit (or re-submit) your ESH about "God As We Understand Him" to essay@sa.org.

SUBMIT YOUR STORY

February 2025 edition: God As We Understand Him (Stories due Jan 1) This phrase is perhaps the most important expression in the AA vocabulary as it frames an open door to recovery for everyone.

April 2025 edition: Rule 62 (Stories due March 1) Humorous anecdotes and stories from members about the iconic AA slogan "Don't Take Yourself Too Damn Seriously."

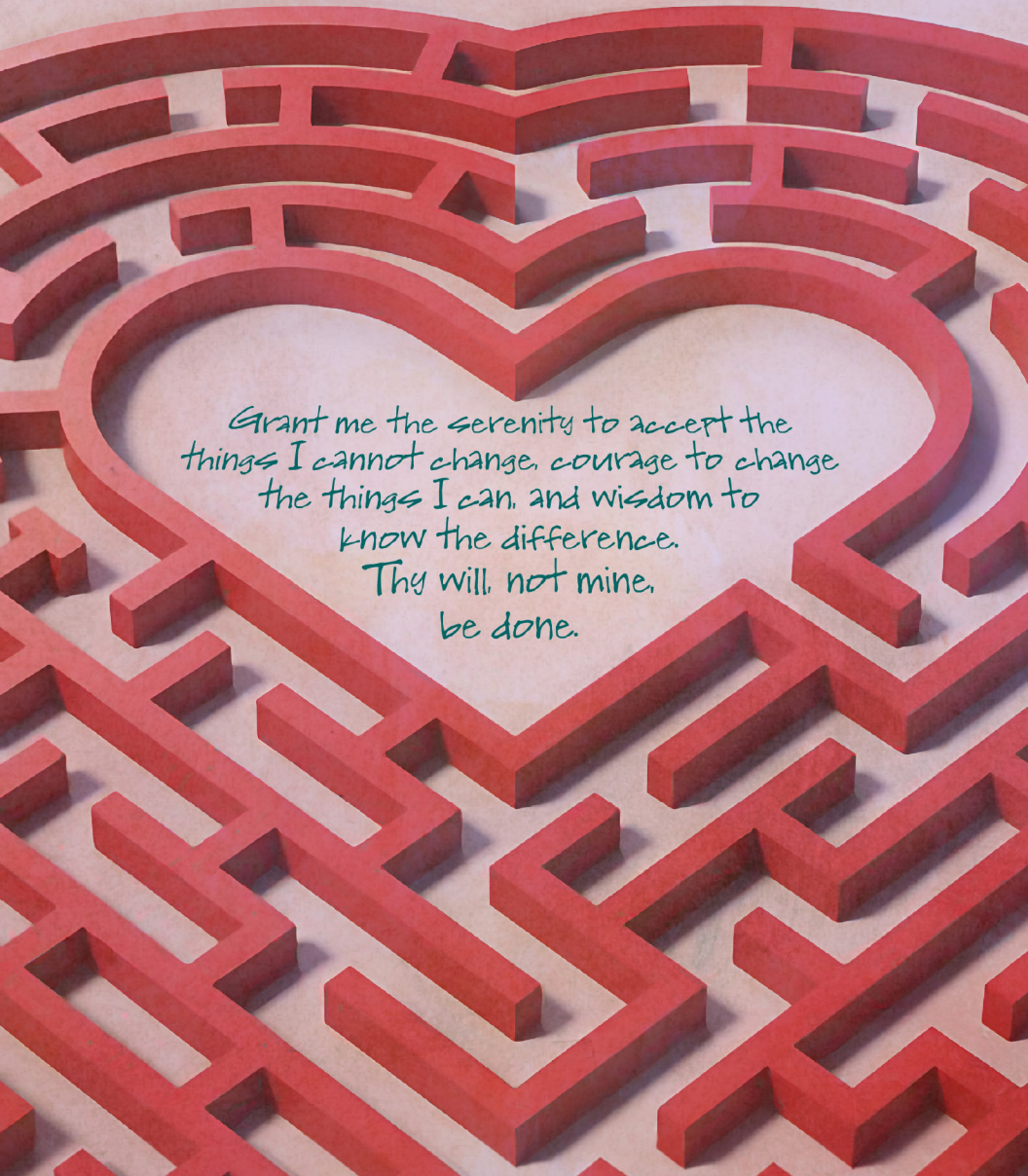
June 2025 edition: Happy, Joyous, and ... Single (Stories due May 1) Single members share how they enjoy a happy and fulfilling life in sobriety beyond their wildest dreams.

August 2025 edition: Surrendering Shame (Stories due July 1) How has shame blocked your recovery? What helped you learn to let go of your shame and let HP handle it for you?

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 the ESSAY.

While we provide each magazine on PDF, as well as six selected articles in 10 different languages on our website at no charge, ESSAY is not free to produce. To support the ESSAY magazine in carrying the SA message worldwide, please make a contribution at the bottom of essay.sa.org.

GOD



*Grant me the serenity to accept the
things I cannot change, courage to change
the things I can, and wisdom to
know the difference.
Thy will, not mine,
be done.*