

ESSAY

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SEXAHOLICS ANONYMOUS



AS WE UNDERSTAND HIM

FEBRUARY 2025 | 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 lusting and become sexually sober. There are no dues or fees for SA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. SA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sexually sober and help others to achieve sexual sobriety.

Adapted with permission from AA Grapevine Inc.

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 lusting 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

February 2025

Editor's Corner



The whole team at the ESSAY is again uplifted and humbled by your experience, strength, and hope on this month's theme of "God as We Understand Him." The other pieces about Practical Tools, Steps & Traditions, Worldwide News, etc. also continue to teach and inspire us.

Please start recording your thoughts about April's theme, "Rule 62." Not taking ourselves too seriously has popularly come to be called "Rule 62" because of a clever anecdote about Tradition Four in the *12&12*, pages 147-149. Please submit your personal experience with "don't take yourself too... seriously" before 3/1/2025 with the submission form at essay.sa.org/get-involved/submit-to-essay/ or via email to essay@sa.org.

The ESSAY also has several opportunities for service on its various teams. If you have interest and skill in any of the following areas, please contact us at essay@sa.org with the subject line, "ESSAY Service Opportunities."

Areas for Service on the ESSAY Team:

*Copy Editing - Proofreading - Language Translation -
Audio Transcription - Audio Recording (Voice Talent) -
Audio Editing - AI Image Creation - and much more!*

We always welcome your letters (and emails) about how YOU use the ESSAY! Let us know at essay@sa.org.

And finally, since the tragic loss of Luc D. in October 2024, the ESSAY is still operating without a senior editor. The Board of Trustees wants to consider everyone in SA with three years of sobriety and a desire to serve the Fellowship in this very special position. To that end, the Board wants you to consider submitting an applications up until **April 30, 2025**. If you know of someone who meets the qualifications outlined below, please encourage them to request an application from saico@sa.org.

JOB POSTING — PLEASE SHARE! ESSAY Magazine — Senior Editor

The SA Board of Trustees is seeking applicants from the Fellowship for the position of **Senior 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

essay@sa.org

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 (Purpose and Principle printed on the inside front cover of each issue of the ESSAY).

Applicants will demonstrate executive skills in project management, task management, people management (more about this below), and limited responsibilities in financial management. Applicants will possess the following skills or be familiar enough to find and manage volunteers who are skilled in

- Content Outreach / Contributor Engagement
- Content Selection and Review
- Information Management / Communication Tracking
- Copy Editing
- Proofreading
- Graphic Design
- Layout Design
- Art Direction
- Audio/Visual Production
- Interdepartmental Planning &

- Reporting
- Website Management
- Vendor Liaison

People management includes modeling, developing, and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships with volunteer team members, paid staff, and outside vendors that reflect a positive sobriety and conscious recovery.

The Senior Editor has final authority and responsibility for the content of each issue of the ESSAY. This position receives a stipend per Tradition Eight.

Other key responsibilities:

- Support, enhance, and further the vision and mission of the ESSAY
- Continue the international focus of the ESSAY
- Contribute a minimum of 40 hours per issue (6x/year) for preparation, editorial meetings, production, and article procurement
- Follow the *SA Service Manual*, especially Chapter 15 about the ESSAY
- Submit reports, budgets, and new proposals to the Board of Trustees

To receive an application form, compensation information, and more detailed information about this position, please email essay@sa.org with the subject line, “ESSAY Senior Editor Consideration.” Completed applications will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for careful consideration.

The application period has been extended to **April 30, 2025**.

February 2025

“...we [began] to develop a personal, working definition of the God of our understanding... We began to approach, and connect with, a...God to whom we could surrender...”

Step into Action, 43

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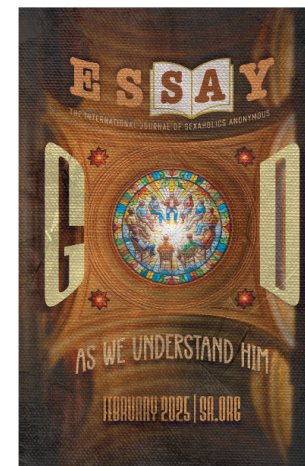
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Any resemblance to real persons is purely coincidental, as all images in ESSAY are handmade, bought from Shutterstock, or made by means of Midjourney AI.



On the cover: No matter what you call “Higher Power,” no matter how you understand Higher Power, the Twelve Steps unify us in humility and in surrender to God, however YOU presently understand God.

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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Dear ESSAY

HOW I USE THE ESSAY

Dear ESSAY,
I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the ESSAY team for continuing its vital work after Luc's passing. Your dedication keeps alive an invaluable resource for our Fellowship worldwide.

Although I'd occasionally read ESSAY articles since joining SA in 2008, it wasn't until late 2018 that I truly began appreciating its depth. The articles, especially those on same-sex lust and the tools of recovery, resonate deeply with me and have become indispensable to my journey. I've developed a practice of engaging with the ESSAY in three ways:

1. On first reading - I skim over it to see what catches my attention.
2. With second reading - I study it slowly and mark passages that resonate.
3. In third reading - I use the entire issue in meditation, one section at a time.


This method helps me connect more

profoundly with the content and apply it in my recovery. I have a forgetting disease and wish I could retain everything I ever read in the ESSAY (but maybe that would create a whole separate problem with humility).

I've reached out to the ESSAY several times to connect with authors whose stories have deeply moved me. These connections have enriched my recovery, just as the magazine itself has become a cornerstone of my daily meditation and quiet time.

I'm especially mindful of the ESSAY's importance to those in our fellowship who are isolated, including incarcerated members. For them, it serves as a "meeting-in-print" (just like it says in the *SA Service Manual*) offering hope, encouragement, and a lifeline to the greater Fellowship. I also appreciate the touches of humor that remind us not to take ourselves too seriously.

To the team behind the scenes, thank you for creating a resource that connects us across the globe. The ESSAY has been a powerful tool in my recovery, and I hope more members will explore and utilize it as I have. With gratitude and fellowship,

Hal C., Virginia, USA 

Practical Tools

MORE THAN JUST QUITTING

My name is Ana, and I live in Mexico. I thank God for the miracle of quitting my addictive behaviors, those patterns of lust that kept me enslaved for six years. I felt completely captive to the demands of lust, unable to resist even when I wanted to. In the last three months, however, I've realized that my recovery goes far beyond just quitting. God has granted me self-control, peace, temperance, discipline, and hope for the future. He has never denied me any of these gifts whenever I sincerely asked. God has given them to me generously and without reproach.

Surrender has become my favorite tool. Although I didn't fully understand it at first, I now see how it continuously yields results in my life. Staying in constant contact with my sponsor and others in the Fellowship has been essential to my recovery because God created me to be accompanied, never alone.


Over these last three months, only by God's grace, I have experienced

- improved focus at work and in everything I do
- a more organized life overall, adhering to schedules and replacing procrastination with action
- building friendships now that the barriers of envy and comparing myself with other women have faded

- replacing complaints with gratitude, seeing my life from a Divine perspective and recognizing blessings far greater than I ever imagined or deserved
- starting to exercise at the gym and eating healthier
- experiencing peace that surpasses all understanding no matter the circumstances or adversity

This is much more than just quitting; it's progressive victory over lust. Thank you for being in this wonderful fellowship and for being part of my recovery.

I am happy and sober for this 24 hours.

Ana, Mexico 



RELATING TO OPPOSITE-SEX FELLOWS

These are my experiences as a woman of lusting and interacting with male fellows in SA, both in person and virtually. I've been in SA for four years and am two years sober as of this writing. I'm a single widow in my 50s.

I have three points to share as I begin:

First, SA, the acceptance story (AA, 407-420), and my sponsor show that my experiences and thoughts might be totally wrong for someone else. So please receive it or forget it as seems appropriate for you.

Second, I'm over 15 years past menopause, so physical lust doesn't attack me anything like it did when I was younger.

Third, when I read that lust is a natural drive that's used for unnatural ends (purposes), it meant to me, objectification, fantasy, using people to fill my emptiness, and euphoric recall. Recently my sponsor blew my mind when she said that

arousal is not synonymous with lust. So I can get a sensation that my body is awake, and it's not lust if my heart is well! My sponsor wanted to free me from my fear, guilt, and shame by telling me that if my body wakes up when I notice someone who looks good or is dressed nicely, if I give it to God and move on without lingering to get a kick out of it, then it's not lust in her book.

I've heard some sisters in the Program say they're afraid to attend in-person meetings because of lust. I've been advised that it might be dangerous for me to make the nearest meeting my home group, because it's still all guys (except for me). The Big Book and the *Twelve and Twelve* make clear that avoiding temptation is bound to fail eventually, and the White Book says that a mixed meeting is ideal for learning to deal with lust in a safe environment (see "Mixed Meetings," SA, 178-179). So I attend this local meeting weekly plus

several Zoom meetings where I can be one of very few women. The Big Book says that we shouldn't isolate ourselves because our friends drink (AA, 102). Of course, my experience might not suit you, and I would never tell another sexaholic to go against Higher Power or sponsor. For me, my home group is my lifeline.

To be clear, rural England is not like the USA where they seem to hug each other all the time. I don't hug SA guys. In my home group, my boundary is no shaking hands or touching at all. My Step One revealed that if a guy touched me, I thought I was in lust or even in love. Four years ago I got an elbow bump when the pandemic precluded handshakes. I couldn't wait for the next meeting just to get another elbow bump! So, for me personally, I never touch SA men, and I suggest you set your own boundary with Higher Power and your sponsor.

I've stuck with my home group for four years now despite thousands of Zoom meetings being readily available. Because of the distance, each time I attend in person I incur considerable expense for lodging and meals. That's how much they mean to me. In-person meetings are worth five Zoom meetings to me. I love them very much in the same way that I love my cousins. They've given me life, happiness, sobriety, peace, and joy. (I can just hear my sponsor saying, "No, *God* has done that, *through* them!")

I asked in our group's private WhatsApp group who would be willing to take phone calls from me. Three men with longer sobriety agreed. One of them is now my accountability partner. They call me to surrender, and I call them. These guys are my brothers and mean everything to me. Lust hardly gets

a look in, but I'm always learning better to surrender it.

I'm from old-school recovery in another fellowship when the home group was everything; not surfing meetings, but a real, personal commitment to the group. That's what my home group is to me. It's my family. That's my antidote to objectification and lust. They're real people, with real feelings, real interests and families.

On WhatsApp, on the other hand, it can get awkward with strangers in its unique hothouse atmosphere. I've got at least 80 people blocked on WhatsApp. Most are guys it got out of hand with. Only a couple cases of outright harassment but far too much flirting and getting hit on. I keep my boundaries clear and updated. I'm happy to return an unknown guy's personal message asking if he can offer my number to another woman for example. But if a guy just texts, "Hello!" he gets blocked without an answer.

I've left very-chatty online groups several times because of my tendency to idolize imagined high-status fellows, welcoming emojis and comments from them and engaging with them in discussions. Of course, on Program matters, such interaction can be very helpful, but as with any means of interaction, it's my state of mind and focus of recovery that dictates whether I react well or badly. It's become something of a motto of mine: "It's Not Them!"

I do now have about 15 real friends on WhatsApp who are guys, and I do run them by my sponsor regularly. I'm very careful, and they are each guys whose sobriety I trust and whom I have known for years.

Then there are those I do service work with. With these guys, I have

open, deep discussions, but I'm still very careful of the language I use so as not to trigger either of us, and they are too.

At each meeting we read, "SA is a fellowship of men and women...," and so it is for me.

As AA literature mentions, if I am shaky, I had better work with another alcoholic/sexaholic. It's all down to my willingness and spiritual condition. I've missed my home meeting when I've felt burned out and exhausted, even emotionally vulnerable. If I put my physical and emotional sobriety first at all times, I get on with the brothers safely and happily. The same applies, interestingly, with my non-SA male family and friends. If I'm working my Program, we get along just fine.

Kathie S., Devon, UK 

WHAT'S GOING ON IN SA?

SA's February Financial Status

The fellowship is in a difficult position. We suffered a pullback of contributions during 2024. This has forced us to dip into prudent reserves, and we now face a shortfall of cash. Our prudent reserve target represents six months of expenses at the Central Office. We need your help to collect contributions, increase personal commitment, and get cash back to SAICO. SA saved our lives; let us commit to save SA's lifeblood. Thank you.

As of December 31, 2024

Revenue	\$ 422,395
Expenses	\$ 452,289
Net Income	\$ (29,894)
Reserves Balance	\$ 182,993
Prudent Reserve Target	\$ 249,131
Reserve Shortfall	\$ (66,138)

SA CFC

Reflections on a Year

This was submitted by an inmate as his "one year sober reflection"

My name is James D., and I have been sober since November 29, 2023. Since that day, I have had ups and downs. I've had several near-slips and a couple of regrets in the area of lustful thoughts.

Being sober for a year is not as easy as it seems, but on the other hand, it's not complicated. I worked the Program every day and didn't hide anything from my sponsor—or from myself, which I think is harder. That is one of my many defects: lying to myself. It's not even hard to lie to myself because if I say the same thing enough times, I seem to make it into "truth" no matter how absurd or unreal.

Working in the image of Higher Power is the best way I have found to stay close and connected to Higher Power. The more I pray, the more I will see Higher Power keeping me on the right path to sobriety.

I'm a sexaholic, and I always have been and will be. I'm grateful to have been sober for the past year.

James D., Virginia, USA 



A Sexaholic Pastor Changes How He Understands God

I was a Catholic, then a Protestant ... also a pastor, a missionary ... and a sexaholic. That was me in a not-so-neat nutshell. God was always a significant part of my life. I fully embraced my mother's devout religious practice and fully engaged in the church. I loved the fact that people accepted and admired me. Being "a good guy" fit my need for recognition perfectly. The more good you did, the more respect you earned. I embraced that culture wholeheartedly.

I became deeply involved, even to the point of engaging in some serious proselytizing. But with that came judgment—judgment of others who, in my eyes, couldn't see the light. I figured that people who truly embraced and loved God were transformed, full of grace and mercy. Yet, deep down, I also believed there was one area where God *couldn't* change me. In fact, I felt justified because I

told myself God had given me this obsession to sexually objectify nearly every woman who came into my field of awareness.

I experienced moments where I truly felt the presence of God, where I witnessed miracles in my life and in the lives of others. But I was painfully aware that God, who could do anything, seemed unwilling to take away this one thing, this overactive attraction to women. I prayed fervently, attended classes, read books about being a godly man—but I never achieved lasting relief from this compulsion. While God felt real to me, I also saw limitations to His power. And I couldn't bring this struggle to church because if I were truly following God (as I let everyone think), I wouldn't have such a strong sexual temptation. "Just pray about it," they'd say. "Stop doing it." Fearing too much judgment, I eventually stopped admitting I was "having

trouble with my thought life" (as if that was even any kind of admission at all).

Fast forward to 2016. My wife and I had taken in a young woman who was struggling in her situation at home. When she discovered I had set up a camera to voyeur her—something I had done to countless women—she blew the whistle.

My life flashed before my eyes.

We were living in another country, fully immersed in the culture, in their church, and I was their pastor (a career I loved). I knew I'd have to admit everything to my wife, to my kids, and even to my congregation. The church ended up publishing the incident to several thousand people locally.

I was devastated. "Where are you, God?" I confronted Him, "You wouldn't take this thing away from me, and now I'm being punished for it?? Do I really have to lose everything?"

Amid all the fear, shame, and resentment, there was also an unexpected sense of relief. I had carried this burden for over 25 years, constantly fearing that someone would discover the real me. Now it was all out in the open. As terrifying as it was, I was finally able to face it and talk about it. I had to! But what relief. I was no longer hiding. Through therapy and other resources, I was introduced to Sexaholics Anonymous and began working the Steps.

Step One truly overwhelmed me. I realized the reason God didn't take away my sexual addiction wasn't because He lacked power—it was because I kept trying to control it all myself. I held onto it, isolating myself, hiding the truth, and refusing to

let anyone in. The very way I thought I was protecting myself was, in fact, destroying me.

I had no real friends who understood what I was going through. I felt completely alone. "Where are you, God?" I asked again and again. But it wasn't until I let others in, surrendered, and acknowledged my powerlessness that my understanding of God began to change.

I often heard people say that God doesn't give you more than you can handle. But I've come to believe that to be nonsense. What I now believe is that God *did* give me more than I could handle—so that I'd learn to depend on *Him* instead of on myself.

Shame had held me back for so long. Letting go and surrendering changed everything. It freed me to be my authentic self. I lost my pastorship over eight years ago, and I like to say now that I'm a "cussing pastor"—someone who's raw, authentic, and unapologetically human. As never before, I now acknowledge my defects of character, I live as the person I believe God intended me to be, and I'm experiencing Him in ways I never thought possible.

The promises of recovery, faith, and healing are real. My life has radically changed. My marriage is stronger than ever. My relationship with my kids is thriving. I'm even embarking on a new career, and though we have little economic security, I feel more peace about money than I've ever had before.

My relationship with God has shifted, too. It's no longer about mere *belief*—I've always believed in Him. It's now about life-changing *faith*.

Bennie, California, USA 

Me, the Agnostic

I grew up in a religious home. My father was an ordained minister, and our family observed many religious practices. As much as my father preached the doctrine, he did not live the church principles at home, (at least, that's how I experienced it). My sexual acting out started at a very young age and included isolation, fantasy, secrets, hiding—a real double life.

After I graduated high school, my family moved to a different state while I stayed back to pursue a college education in science. My isolation and acting out continued and became increasingly out of control. I stepped away from my family's religion and away from any belief in God. Without consciously deciding to, I became what I thought was an atheist. For me, it wasn't that God existed and that I was unworthy of his love or his attention or that God existed but was no longer involved in my daily life. [This author chooses to capitalize "God," but he specifically leaves "power" and he/him/his uncapitalized.] I didn't question why bad things happened to good or innocent people. I didn't even resent the religious hypocrisy I had seen. For me, there was simply no compelling evidence of a God-entity that exists in time and space and interacts with his creation.

Years later, when my spouse discovered my acting out and I joined SA, I was as far from any connection to God as ever. Surprisingly, I didn't have a problem with the "God part" of the Program. As suggested by my sponsor and our literature, I started with my home group as my higher

power. Here was a group of people who had solved their sexaholism problem; they were certainly a power greater than me. I had faith in the group and in the SA program. This level of faith was enough for me.

SA taught me to take it easy, and that the hoop I had to jump through was a lot wider than I was expecting. I was glad to hear that SA did not demand that I believe anything, and that the Twelve Steps were "only suggestions." They told me that I didn't have to swallow Step Two "right now" and that I could take it piecemeal. I also learned that all I needed was a truly open mind, to resign from the debating society, and to quit bothering myself with deep religious questions (see 12&12, 26). Somehow, I was willing to do these things, though not perfectly, and sure enough, the God part began to very gradually infiltrate my life. To this day, I cannot say on what occasion I came to believe in a power greater than myself, but I certainly have that belief now. I only needed to stop fighting and to start practicing the SA program (i.e., work the Twelve Steps) as enthusiastically as I could.

An exercise my sponsor suggested for Step Two was to take a blank sheet of paper and write down what I wanted my higher power to be like. *What? That's sacrilege! What an order!* I ended up answering this question from another Step Two exercise, "What are the requisite qualities of an adequate Higher Power?" To this day, the "requisite qualities" question remains one of the most effective exercises in all of my Step work. It's had the same impact for many of my

sponsees.

At the Sunday morning "God as You Understand Him" meeting at a twice-yearly men's retreat, we would go around the circle with each man very briefly describing his understanding of God. I would always say, "God is the power that keeps me sober." That statement has been my clear and complete understanding of God for most of my 26 years of sobriety.

Step Two asks me to find "a Power greater than" myself; it does not require me to find the greatest power in the universe. Another sexaholic and I were having a conversation many years ago about our understanding of God, and I was having a hard time putting a certain thought into words. After a couple of attempts, he suggested, "So, you don't think God has to know everything or be omniscient"—we were discussing the "omni" attributes—"in order not to make a mistake." Yes, that's what I thought! Since then, I've also come to believe that God doesn't have to be everywhere (omnipresent) in order to be present with me, and that God doesn't have to be all-powerful (or omnipotent) in order to help me stay sober.

Step Three does not require me to work out a total theology, just to have enough understanding to work the rest of the Steps and keep working them.

I don't believe that God has a plan for my life, but I do believe that there is such a thing as "God's will for me" and that God's will for me is even better than my own will for me. As a starting point, I believe (in truth, I know) that God's will for me is to be sober. That alone informs a lot of what I need to do. I also believe that God's will for you, my fellow

sexaholic, is to be sober, and that also informs a lot of what I need to do. These two beliefs comprise, for me, the bulk of "God's plan" for my life.

Today, I know beyond doubt that I'm powerless over lust. I believe I always have been, and I always will be. And yet, I still encounter lust every day. So, given my powerlessness to handle lust, what do I do? I surrender. And in my surrender, the power of God becomes effective in me, and I stay sober. I may need to surrender again in two days, two hours, or two minutes, but when I do, God gives me the power—God is the power—to stay sober. It works for me every time. God does for me what I can't do for myself (i.e., keep myself sober), but God *does not* do for me what I can do for myself (and that is *surrender*).

I do my part, God does God's part. Quid pro quo.

Rick K., California, USA 



THE GOD

I Always Dreamed of

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

My family of origin was one of spirituality and firm belief in God. I was taught right from wrong but believed this meant God only loved me if I was doing right. As I grew older and became further trapped in my addiction, I began to live a two-faced life—one of joy on the outside but with a dark secret of shame-filled lust trapped on the inside.

I began to isolate myself and avoid facing my own reality, seeking lust

as a way to medicate any emotions but seeking to find power and worth. As the White Book puts it: “Please connect with me and make me whole!” we cried with outstretched arms” (SA, 203). Thus, my belief in God faded, as I never felt I could be loved, and lust became my higher power.

When I began college, I was depressed and considered suicide. I didn’t see meaning in life and felt like a burden to others. I was lonely and desperately desired to be loved. It wasn’t until after my first year that I encountered God in a loving way,

through spiritually-filled coworkers at a summer camp. This group of people showed me that I had value, and I began to see God as a God of love. In this, I wanted to be sober from lust and acting out, and I began to earnestly seek sobriety.


Even after this experience, I struggled with lust for four years trying time and time again to be free from it. I could go from weeks to months, but lust always got the best of me. It wasn’t until I heard about the SA program, joined the Fellowship, attended meetings, got a sponsor, and began working the Steps, that things started to change. I breezed through Steps One and Two but hit a roadblock at Step Three.

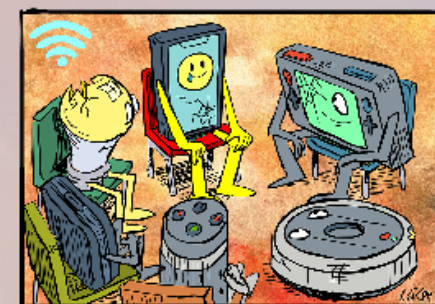
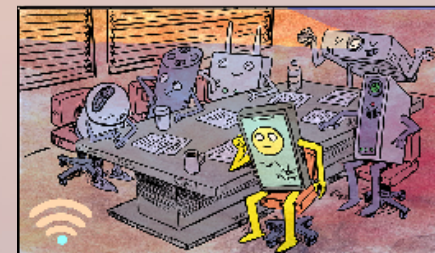
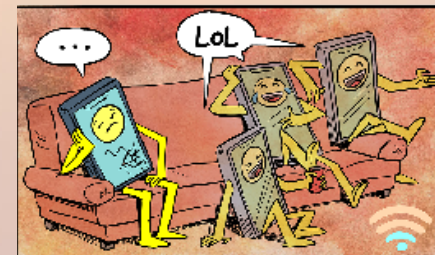
Step Three—a most difficult step for me. I realized, as I looked at my understanding of God, that I didn’t think He could ever love me. I thought I had to be perfect, and I didn’t want to get in His way. I was a people-pleaser and wanted to please God, so if I fell short, I felt unlovable. In writing a Step Three inventory, I began to dream of what I wished my Higher Power was—a being who was loving and caring for me at all times. Soon, I saw how I had misjudged my Higher Power for years. God is not an angry gatekeeper or record keeper. My Higher Power loves me and wishes the best for me. I simply need to pray for the knowledge of His will and the strength to carry it out.

Although it has taken time to understand Higher Power the way I do now, I’ve learned that I can keep learning more about Him every day. I can experience His love through being real with others in the Fellowship during meetings or phone calls, by receiving and giving sponsorship, and so much more. In working the Program, I went from

acting out monthly to having just two slips in the past three years. I’ve learned to take it day by day, moment by moment, and to not be afraid to make phone calls. I can now say that I experience joy in my life and am happy to share it with others.

“We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny. May God bless you and keep you—until then” (SA, 210).

Joshua H., Pennsylvania, USA 



MY HEART'S JOURNEY TO A HIGHER POWER

I have always been, like every other creature with a heartbeat, in need of love. I needed attention from others, connection with others, and the knowledge that I was accepted for who I was. I was often overly sweet to my mom as a little girl and then as a teenager in hopes of receiving her love. However, no matter how much my mom loved me and how hard she tried to give us everything, I didn't feel the love I so longed for. My father moved to the other side of the country when I was 10, so I couldn't find it there, either. How I longed for that love, though, for their love. I longed for a sense of being good enough, for feeling I mattered, that I was seen—for safety, acceptance, and recognition.

In retrospect, it's not surprising that I dove into relationships very quickly. I had my first steady relationship at 13 with someone who was 18. I was just a little girl who needed a big solid figure by her side. Someone who could hold me and love me and hopefully never let me go.

To get that love, though, I couldn't be

myself because my character defects weren't worth loving. So I adapted myself from a young age to ensure getting the kind of love I so desperately craved. I did this for years and years, from age 13 (actually, long before that with my parents) until I was 30. By age 30, I was empty. Totally spent. I had lost myself and was exhausted and drained. I couldn't continue to live, not even with the strongest will in the world.

Then I prayed sincerely for the first time in my life. It was the Serenity Prayer, which I knew from AA. One day later, I—the dependent love junkie—got the strength to leave my partner. What a miracle!

It took almost another year before I came to SA. In the meantime, I continued to seek attention, love, and safety in the very worst and most dangerous places you could ever imagine. When I was on the verge of suicide, I found SA. My craving for relationships, sex, and lust was destroying me, and I gave myself completely to the Program. I had no other option.

By working the Steps with my sponsor, I discovered a Power greater than myself. I first experienced Higher Power in meetings and then got to know Him better by writing the Step Two inventory as suggested in *Step Into Action*. That was a miraculous event for me as I discovered that Higher Power can and wants to be everything I once sought in my parents, relationships, and sex partners.

God, as I understand Him, loves me immeasurably. He understands and acknowledges my fears and insecurities and can even take them away from me. He never thinks I'm too much, redundant, nagging too much, talking too much, or being too

busy. He gives me nonstop attention and love. He accepts me for who I am today, not for who He thinks I should be. He is the One I always needed but could never find. Of course not! That which my heart desires cannot be given by any human being. I know now that that's impossible.

Higher Power loves me and guides me. He made it possible for me to find myself: who I am, what my interests and talents are, and what my true values are. What a gift! Thanks to that Higher Power, I continue to discover myself, take good care of myself, and love myself.

Maybe that's the greatest gift of all, that I love myself. I love myself enough to genuinely enjoy spending time with myself (read: with a blanket on the couch, a book, a few candles lit, and a cup of tea) and to love myself so much that I stay true to my newly-discovered values. The love I always sought in men, I find today in my Higher Power and in myself.

Does this mean that I'm now cured and no longer a relationship junkie? Absolutely not. But as long as I remain abstinent from relationships, from men, I can stay close to my own inner self. But even when I go astray, I have one certainty: God loves me unconditionally, no matter what I do. This unconditional love is exactly what I have always sought, and now have found through SA.

Nathalie V., Antwerp, Belgium 



GOD AS I UNDESTAND HIM



I really never considered the spiritual side of life until I was 22 years old. I was meeting consistently with a counselor who started to convince me slowly over many months that there is more to life than just logic, reasoning, science, and intellect. I started to agree that intuition and self-reflection could have value, too. I read books on spirituality and became interested in mystical matters. I found it very exciting, but unfortunately I was not sober. My obsession with lust was actually getting worse, and my dabbling in spiritual things was not helping things.

A friend introduced me to Twelve-Step recovery, but I didn't consistently surrender. I was still caught up in the idolatry of lust. My behavior indicated that women were my higher power. After a particularly dark bottom, I decided to surrender to the process of Twelve-Step recovery. My conception of God was limited at first. I often thought of any Higher Power as harsh, unforgiving, and seemingly random.

That started to change with time in recovery and the influence of SA. I started to think of God as loving me personally. I began to think that He is guiding everything that happens

to me. I remained sober for three and a half years and sponsored other addicts. Things looked a little bit okay, but then my life really fell apart. Ultimately, I lost my sobriety and sank to a dark place.

Looking back, I was relying too much on specific individuals and not enough on my Higher Power. I looked to other people to carry me through. After losing my sobriety, I'm sad to say I lost some faith in Higher Power and in SA as a whole. I tried even harder to be fixed by other human beings. I didn't get much sobriety for a long stretch.

Recently I reached seven months of sobriety again. I'm attempting to rely on my Higher Power through a vigorous effort to work the principles of the Program. Most important is to realize that I'm powerless over lust—that my life has become unmanageable. I cannot deal with my lust problem on my own! That's the problem. But what's the solution?

The Big Book says, "...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). So the problem is my attitude toward lust, and the solution is God.

But finding God is not easy. I must start by believing that God will restore me to sanity (Step Two), and then making a decision to turn my will and my life over to God's care (Step Three).

A member of the Fellowship whom I respect asks rhetorically, "Why would

I turn my life over to God's care if God is not trustworthy?" Clearly, my conception of God must include that He is trustworthy. The Big Book makes clear declarations about the nature of God and His characteristics in the Step Three section of chapter five, "How It Works." It tells us that God is the Principal and we are His agents, God is the Father and we are His children, God is the Director, and God is our Employer.

From these statements, I assume that God is loving, powerful, wise, in control, in a position of authority, a provider of guidance and security, attends to my material, emotional, and spiritual needs, and has a plan for everything. That is how I

**the problem
is my attitude
toward lust,
and the
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God**

understand God. The Big Book provides a starting point and a set of guardrails to keep me on a good track. With a constructive understanding of God in place, I can move forward to work the rest of the Program (Steps Four through Twelve). I make a point to learn from the people who

successfully implement the principles. It is important for me to have a group of solid, Program-oriented people who are friends. And then I try to transmit what I learn to others, remembering that I'm not the source of power for others—God is. I'm just an imperfect carrier of the message.

Being in recovery doesn't mean I'll be free of challenging times. It's nice when things are smooth and easy, but difficult stretches are a crucial way to develop my relationship with God. Ultimately it is God who lifts me above

obstacles. However, I'm sometimes afraid and not accustomed to asking Him for help. So I try to ask Him for help anyway!

If I feel doubtful, that motivates me to pray and meditate for conscious contact with God, and to call my sponsor. Then I can focus on service by calling newcomers and trying to carry the message. I can thus get out of my obsession with myself and focus on another person. Hopefully I can get to a meeting soon and be part of a group of people seeking God. There will be opportunities to be of service, whether it's leading a meeting, doing a reading, talking to a struggling member afterward, giving out chips, or something else.

When I focus on Program actions and helping others, I don't think about my problems as much. Maybe I imagined them with my addict mind. Or, maybe God has been addressing them the whole time while I've been focused on connecting with others. Then I can approach them with a clearer mind and take constructive action.

The Program is my direct line to God, although there's also value in resources outside the Fellowship. However, the deepest and supreme answer for me is God—through the practice of the principles of the Program in all my affairs. I am grateful to God, and the program of SA that He put into my life.

I think that God is looking out for me and is taking care of me. But He requires that I do everything in my power to pursue Him.

I must have the humility to know that the proper way to apply the principles will not always be clear. My Higher Power wants me to pray, meditate, talk to fellows, and work the Steps every day in order to learn His will and gain the power to carry it out, one day at a time.

Michael M., California, USA 



My Higher Power is No Different Than Yours

This member's understanding of God may be unique to him, but he still strives to live our common Twelve Step principles

When I first came into the Program, I had a problem with the italicized qualifier on God, “*as we understood Him*” (SA, 208). Now I see it as the best idea of the Twelve Steps.

My problem was, being very devout in the religion I was raised in, I was sure that God was God, He didn't change according to how someone understood Him, and my understanding happened to be the correct one. I had no concept of the Set Aside Prayer or the principle of *surrender* at that time.

I still believe in the same god, and nothing in the Twelve Steps required that I change my understanding of *the nature* of God. What I did have to change was my understanding of *humility* and *surrender*.

I learned early on that the Twelve Steps are a spiritual program and not a religious one. I've come to understand “spiritual program” this way: religion's role is to teach about the nature of God, while a spiritual program requires humility. Humility requires a power or entity greater than

me that I can defer to and surrender to. The concept of a Higher Power became foundational to the Twelve Steps, not to preach the nature of God, but so that I could see myself in juxtaposition with something greater than me. This makes humility possible.

Since the Program “is a plan for a lifetime of daily living” (AA, 317), it teaches qualities that are indispensable to a “happy, joyous, and free” life (AA, 133). I believe Steps Two and Three are at the beginning of the Program because nothing else can be learned until *humility* and *surrender* are in place. To me, *humility* also means being teachable. I cannot learn *humility* or *surrender* without a greater power to humble myself before or surrender my life to.

I used to bristle at the mention of “as you understand God” or “my Higher Power.” Why? Because I was taught (and still believe) that there's only one higher power for all human beings, so we can't all have our own. This is why I like to say “Higher Power” as

a proper noun and not “my Higher Power” as if there’s a different entity for each of us. But Higher Power is still teaching me humility, and as I learned in Rick K.’s article on page 14 of this issue, the Program doesn’t require that you surrender to “the greatest power,” just a power greater than you. I no longer bristle when I hear “my Higher Power”* because I want to also welcome the addict whose higher power is the group or the Fellowship. That would clearly be his higher power and not mine.

When I was new in the Program, I was so unwilling to see Higher Power’s perspective that I thought people were being disrespectful in saying “HP” instead of “God.” Hearing it would immediately have me mentally taking their inventory. *He’s being lazy and mocking with his abbreviation, and he’s intentionally demeaning my belief in “God.”* I was still totally self-absorbed at the time.


The Twelve-Step approach to surrender has helped me better appreciate that HP loves us so unequivocally that He wants everyone (even me!) to find the Solution that SA offers, regardless of whether I know or understand His actual nature yet. What good would it do to force my belief down someone’s throat if he dies in his addiction (dies physically, emotionally, or spiritually) before knowing the “right” God?

I now love the concepts of “as you understand God” and “Higher Power” as a proper noun because they feel unifying to me. This language reflects my understanding that Higher Power wants all of us to be unified as Hindus, Humanists, and Jews, as atheists, agnostics, and New Agers, as addicts who are fearful, angry, or devout. People are different by default. If I want to be unified with others, I must

be intentional about it.

Now, I love to hear personal shares that mention various names of deities, concepts, or powers. I still don’t keep it a secret that I worship Jesus Christ. But I usually say “Higher Power” or “HP” in recovery circles because I’m still referring to Him as I believe He is the higher power, and because I want the addict who is still sick to feel comfortable that although his understanding of God doesn’t match mine, we can still focus on our common insanity about lust as what unifies us.

May I continue to set aside what I think I know about God when I’m with other addicts so that we may become more unified in finding the Solution to our problem.

Anonymous, USA 

**I don’t capitalize “my higher power” because it’s not a proper noun. I acknowledge that “Higher Power” appears in the Big Book 51 times, and it’s capitalized in every instance but never used as a proper noun. Because I tend to hyper-focus on punctuation and grammar rules, I don’t always use the exact language of the Big Book, but I always try to adhere to its principles. I’m grateful the Program welcomes my personal experience, because I’d hate for anyone to think I’m suggesting that others should adopt my way of applying these principles.*

SA Stories

Finding the Solution

I am a 50-year-old man in Poland, sober since 2011. I came to the Fellowship in 2007. My first significant stretch of sobriety was for 2.5 years starting in April 2008. Then I ended up in a psychiatric hospital diagnosed with severe depression. I lost my sobriety there, but I immediately reached out to the Fellowship again and found a sponsor. I started the Program all over again. I have been sober ever since.

I was oblivious to how insidious my disease was before coming to SA. I didn’t even know I had a disease. It started with lust attacks when I was 4 or 5 years old, I don’t know what else to call them. They were pleasantly intense but also totally overwhelming, and I still don’t know where they came from. I wasn’t exposed to inappropriate material or language. I never acted out during these spells until I was 13. At that point, I experienced what I now call “undirected lust” because it wasn’t really connected to thoughts, images, fantasies, or memories. My early memories of “directed lust” were more passive (wanting to be lusted after). That’s when I sexualized the funeral of my grandfather, which I didn’t even attend. But once I physically acted out at 13, I was

hooked immediately on something I could “direct” my lust on.

I started to act out with myself on a daily basis, and soon I was actively searching for pictures of nudity and articles about sex. This included scientific books that surely weren’t intended to trigger anyone. They triggered me, though, immediately and totally. My first sexual experience was with a student of my own sex at 17. I knew him from back in primary school when, even at that age, he triggered my lust. It seems strange to me now, because I’ve never considered myself homosexual, and most of my later acting out was with women.

When I turned 18 and got some birthday money, I immediately spent it all on sex from a sex worker. I remember I couldn’t wait to turn 18 so I could legally buy sex and pornography. Once I became a legal adult, I spent all my money—both gift money and what I lived on—on sex services and porn. The first time I got access to a pornographic movie, I watched it until dawn, and then I was barely able to make it to school.

I quickly lost interest in what’s considered normal or acceptable sex. I switched to more and more

perverse material. I even started to act out what I saw with sex workers for money. The scenes became more and more degrading. At the time, it seemed pleasurable to me, though also overwhelming. In spite of this apparent pleasure, I started to feel shameful and guilty about all the time and money I was spending on it and also about the behavior itself. At this time, I began to pursue girls on a dating level. I didn't have enough courage to properly express my feelings for them. But the more I used pornography or bought sex, the more courage I seemed to have to flirt with and seduce women.

The level of lust and the frequency of sexual acting out increased over time. With the advent of faster Internet, I had everything I could think of at my disposal—at any time and in any quantity. Despite that, I could never get enough. Meeting my wife and getting married at 30 didn't even change things. I promised myself that I would not cheat on her and that I'd restrict my lust activities to the Internet only, and that I'd stop buying sex and engaging in such perversion. But no promises or firm resolve ever worked. The lust and the pursuit of sexual activities was indispensable to me—something I could rely on when the real world seemed unbearable. It became my only source of relief, but it also made me more tense, fearful, and shameful—something I realized much later in sobriety.

In 2005, I began spending even more time on lust and acting out. At one point I got so scared of what I was watching (and for how long) that I thought I was demon-possessed. I went into a church even though I've never been a church-goer.

In 2007, I finally realized I was addicted when preparing for an important professional exam. I spent more time on pornography than studying. In 2008 it got so bad that I didn't take time to work, sleep, or even eat properly. I was acting out

almost all the time. I now find the story of Bill W.'s and Dr. Bob's last drinking days to be very reflective of my situation. Having learned in my profession about the dismal prognosis for addicts, I realized I was doomed and sought out Sexaholics Anonymous.

Thankfully, I found the SA website, found some meetings and their locations, and started attending. I could only stay sober for a week at most when I didn't go to meetings, but when I kept attending meetings, I stayed sober for three weeks. Acting out stopped producing desirable effects and felt extremely degrading. Now I really wanted to stop, but I couldn't. This is when I asked someone to sponsor me, and I started to work the Steps. After working Step One the first time, I miraculously stopped acting out. This happened again when I reset my sobriety in 2011 in the hospital.

When I was without the Fellowship and the Program (especially the effects of Step One), I was powerless over lust, and I just had to act out. When I completed my Step One and had regular contact with new fellows, I was as powerless as before but didn't have to act out. I call it my "slight but revolutionary shift in consciousness." In SA, I discovered what became the foundations of my sobriety and recovery: meetings, service, sponsorship, working the Program, and reading literature. Since I'm so stubborn, I do all these things regularly, and it somehow keeps me sober. This has saved my life and, along with outside help, makes it less miserable and even enjoyable.

Wiktor P., Warsaw, Poland 

Steps & Traditions

Step One and the Grace of God


I've had several conversations over the last 24 hours about Step One. It seems that everything right down to the core of my being resisted admitting my powerlessness. This has been, quite possibly, the biggest hurdle in my recovery journey. Admitting complete defeat felt like dying, it felt like I'd be giving up, it felt like the end. And it was the end—the end of my old life and the only passageway through which I could be born into the new life. Freedom from the bondage of self is a free gift that can only be accessed by the grace

of God. As long as I was trying, wishing, willing, and working to make it happen, it eluded me. It was only when I entered into the despair and hopelessness—the "broken and contrite spirit" (SA, 88) of Step One—that the door swung open freely and God was there. My self-will had been blocking God all that time.

After my last relapse I said to my sponsor, "I don't know if I'm willing to do what it takes to stay sober." I had been sober for seven months and in the Program for three years, and I knew what hard work it took: the daily calls and meetings, the nearly constant prayer, and repeatedly surrendering lust. His response has stuck with me to this day. He said, "Well Luke, in my experience I can't make myself be willing. I just have to pray for willingness." I immediately felt like a weight was lifted off me, and I realized, Oh yeah, I don't have to churn this thing out on my own, I just need to ask God for help.

I can't. God can. He just asks for my cooperation. This experience became a large part of my morning prayer/contract:

God, I surrender my life and will to Your care today for the next 24 hours and commit myself to sobriety—no sex with myself or anyone other than my wife. Whatever I'm really looking for with lust, sex, and pornography and with my other character defects, I pray I would find it in You instead. God, I pray You would keep me sober from my lust today because I cannot, and I pray for the courage and willingness to do whatever You need me to do today to stay sober and maintain progressive victory over lust. Thank You God, for keeping me sober another day, and thank You for bringing me to the place I'm at today.

Luke H., Oregon, USA 

SURRENDER, DEEP IN THE



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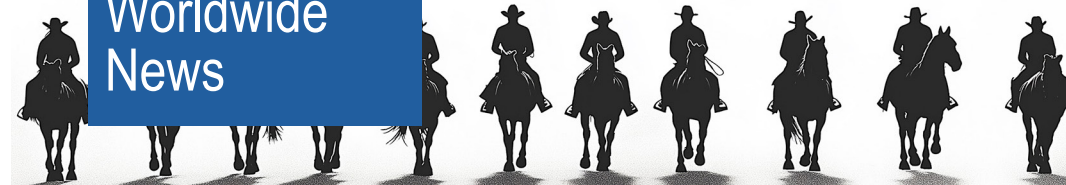
TEXAS

Time to
register,
Y'all!

International SA / S-Anon Conventions
Dallas, Texas July 25, 26 and 27, 2025
DallasHeart2025.org

February 2025

Worldwide News



I'm Gene T., and I am humbled and very grateful to be sober in SA since December 30, 2008. And by God's grace, I'm the committee chair for our International Convention in Dallas this summer (July 2025).

I don't remember how long ago some of our sober members in the South Midwest Region began dreaming of a convention in Dallas. But when I heard it mentioned, I said, "Oh boy, but oh no!" I had been to several International Conventions and saw how much work went into creating those experiences. I was afraid.

Sometime around 2016, we officially began planning a Texas convention for 2020. Long discussions, team building, hotel visits ... and then COVID. But we continued to plan: bylaws, tax reports, tax exempt status application. When we finally got our federal tax exemption approved as the North Dallas Intergroup Fellowship, we plowed ahead with applications to the SA Central Office in Tennessee (SAICO) and the International Convention Committee (ICC) and a lot of prayer.

With so many planning steps taken, the members around Dallas really began to organize. People in both SA and S-Anon began offering help. The South Midwest Region came alive

with a collective "Yes, we can help!" The Dallas Convention has become a true *International* Convention, too. People we communicate with from around the world are coming to Texas to help work on "Surrender, Deep in the Heart of Texas."

Chairing this convention has already been the most powerful spiritual experience of surrender and sanity and serenity of my 78 years on our earth!

Let us welcome you to our great state this summer for easy airport access (from DFW Airport), free covered parking, super air conditioning, an outstanding hotel (the Hyatt Regency), beautiful views, an awesome area of the planet, the most gorgeous sunrises and sunsets, Texas cuisine, and the first and only 2025 International Convention in Dallas, Texas, USA! God be with you in your plans and preparation. We welcome you, and we wish you a safe journey.

For all the information you'll need, visit DallasHeart2025.org.

Y'all come!

Gene T., Texas, USA 

The Fellowship We Crave

This personal experience at the EMER Convention was scheduled for publication in the December 2024 issue of the ESSAY but had to be saved for this issue. Be sure to listen to the author's interview on the December 2024 episode of, "ESSAY Conversations - Beyond the Page" at essay.sa.org/get-involved/essay-podcast.

I've been thinking about writing an article regarding service and fellowship because they've both impacted my sobriety and recovery over the last 20 months. As I begin writing this article, I'm sitting in the Vienna Airport, waiting to board a flight to London to spend a week vacationing with members of my extended sober family (fellows in recovery). I just attended the Europe and Middle East Region (EMER) Convention where the theme was "Rule 62: Don't Take Yourself Too Damn Seriously" (12&12, 149). [This is also the theme for the ESSAY April 2025 issue. Start submitting your own ESH now to essay@sa.org.]

Plans for my trip began to form several weeks ago when a recovery fellow from Armenia visited my home

group, and something told me to connect with him after the meeting. He told me the EMER Convention would be in the Czech Republic two months later, and I joked that I would pressure Gary (a local fellow) to go with me to the EMER Convention. I wasn't really serious, but when I mentioned it to Gary, he was clearly enthusiastic—the beginnings of a plan were set in motion.

Gary and I traveled separately to Mikulov, Czechia, the convention city, by way of Vienna, where we connected with many recovery fellows from all over Europe and the Middle East. It was Thursday, September 19, 2024, the day before the convention would start, when we began to filter into Mikulov. Even though Gary and I had traveled separately, we were staying with a group of guys in an apartment rented by a man from the Slovakian fellowship. While waiting at the apartment, I saw Gary come walking up with his new friends including another man from Slovakia whose infectious laugh came easily and was heard from great distances putting a smile on my own face throughout the weekend.

I was amazed at the camaraderie as every arriving group made sure to say hello to the groups who were already present—shaking hands or hugging. I saw from the outset that the EMER fellowship was very close and cared very much for each other.

After a dinner that went late into the evening on Thursday, eight or nine of us returned to the apartment. The Slovakian men talked and laughed boisterously into the night, and I quickly felt like part of their fellowship, like they cared about me and were happy I was there.

Before the convention started on Friday afternoon, various groups branched out into the city to sightsee and get to know each other. Our explorations took us to an ancient-looking chapel where Gary and I spent some time praying, meditating, chanting, and singing with two other new friends. One of them, a guy from Hungary, chanted as was his traditional custom, Gary and I sang, and we were all very spiritually moved by it. I'll never forget sharing in that chapel with those men.

Later that day while the EMER Regional Assembly met at Mikulov Castle, we went to a coffee shop with a terrace that overlooked the castle's gardens and provided sweeping views of the local countryside. The terrace also provided a nice opportunity to talk about Program principles, the Steps, and where we were with the Fellowship and our individual recovery programs.

Once the EMER Convention began, it proceeded like many conventions I've been to. Speakers shared their experience, strength, and hope in joint meetings of SA and S-Anon. I also enjoyed smaller, Program-specific meetings where individual members got to share. Our Slovakian hosts arranged for such topics as, "Acceptance into Serenity," "Living on a Spiritual Basis," "Helping Newcomers," "Tradition One," "Working with Prisoners," "12th

Step and 12th Tradition," "Zero Lust," "Under New Management," "Going to Any Lengths," "Faith that Works," "What is SA Sobriety?," "The Family Afterwards," "Boundaries in Recovery," "Progressive Victory Over Lust," "Emotional Sobriety," and "A Vision for You."

I was honored and privileged to speak about my experience with the topic of "Zero Lust" and to lead the meetings about "What is SA Sobriety?" and "Faith that Works." I was fortunate to meet and hear Luc D. share his experience, strength, and hope in a breakout meeting. I was saddened to hear of his sudden passing just one month later. Throughout the convention, I took many notes on things that impacted me from members' shares, messages that carried for me both depth and weight.

What impacted me most deeply were the meetings between the meetings: the fellowship that occurred over coffee, while exploring the city, before bedtime, and while sharing meals in large groups. I remember most sitting down with Gary and several others during dinner on Friday night. I learned about two fellows from England and heard three others discuss the relationship among four nearby countries (a topic that interested me given my prior studies in international relations and recent curiosity about the region).

At breakfast the next morning I spent time with a man from Scotland and got to learn about recent events in his life. At dinner Saturday night I sat down and consciously left space for anyone who needed somewhere to sit. I was soon surrounded by men from Ireland and Slovakia. We discussed the Steps and what it means to be a sober man.

The next day, I got to chat with a couple of men from the UK about Zoom meetings, relationships, sponsorship, and the necessity of having a new spiritual experience if we're still suffering in sobriety.



I enjoyed meeting all these men, but what was most special was realizing that we shared a common problem and that we were pursuing a common solution. It was truly an honor to be trusted by these men, to hear about their lives, and to share my own story and personal experiences. I also enjoyed meeting Program sisters who are good examples of sober women pursuing their own recovery.

We talked about how to express love, care, and affection for our families and for our fellows in recovery.

Why have I included all these convention details in an article called, “The Fellowship We Crave”? Because it reminds me of what Bill W. wrote to alcoholics who had just found the Big Book but worried they’d miss out on the benefit of meeting the people who had already recovered from alcoholism—who were at the time primarily located in Ohio and New York. Bill addressed the concern of these new fellows and reassured them by saying:

Some of you may be concerned that you won’t get to meet with the early pioneers of this program. “We cannot be sure. God will determine that, so you must remember that *your real reliance is always upon Him*. He will show you how to create the fellowship you crave” (AA, 164, emphasis added).

In the last few weeks, I’ve thought a lot about this passage and other pieces of advice from the Big Book. I’ve been in SA since January 2009 and claimed sobriety from January 2010 to January 2023 when I admitted I had not been living a sober life and that I was miserable and unhappy. I was at a point of despair where I couldn’t avoid looking at my drunkenness

and lack of recovery. Being driven to that point, and with the support and advice of my sponsor and other fellows in the Program, I went to Higher Power and felt convicted to restart my sobriety on January 28, 2023. When I took that step, I knew that I couldn’t, on my own, stay sober if it meant surrendering lust in all the forms I had indulged over the prior 13 years.

So I became a newcomer again—in both AA and SA.

I attended at least one meeting every day with the goal of completing “90 in 90” (a 12-Step practice of attending 90 meetings in 90 days). I already had an SA sponsor, but I got a new AA sponsor and called both of my sponsors every day. I also called many other alcoholics and sexaholics every day. I began working the Steps in both programs. I listened to sober speakers talk about working the Steps. Though these things were all working, I often thought of a principle Gary repeatedly emphasized from the Big Book, that “our very lives, as ex-problem drinkers [or ex-problem lusters], depend on our constant thought of others and how we may help meet their needs” (AA, 20). Consequently, I also threw myself into helping other people. If there was a newcomer at the meeting, I would get to know him and see how I could help him understand the meeting or identify with our sexaholic stories. I called people who appeared to be struggling. I tried to help men connect with potential sponsors. Part of this effort was to be as helpful as possible in order to maximize my chance at staying sober. Another reason was to make general amends for having sponsored men in SA thinking I had something to offer but was still in denial about the progression of my own disease as I acted out during that period of so-called sobriety.

In short, I spent as much of my waking time as possible actively recovering

and working all three aspects of our Program of recovery—unity, recovery, and service—beginning with a focus on my own recovery by thoroughly working the Steps.

I still strive to live this way today, guided by many concepts and suggestions in the Big Book. One of these suggestions is that my primary purpose as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and Sexaholics Anonymous is to stay sober and to help others achieve sobriety. I have been given the miracle of relief from the craving and mental obsessions of drugs, alcohol, lust, and sex, and I owe it to my Higher Power and to my fellows to be of service to anyone who seeks the same relief.

This is a continual theme in the Big Book. At the end of “Bill’s Story” (AA, Chapter 1), he writes that “In one western city and its environs there are one thousand of us [AAs] and our families” (AA, 15). For the alcoholics of the day, I’m sure that was an incredible number to contemplate. It probably seems similarly miraculous to the EMER fellowship to contemplate as many men and women as attended the Europe & Middle East Convention. Bill W. goes on to say that *they “meet frequently so that newcomers may find the fellowships they seek”* (AA, 15-16, emphasis added). Moving back to “A Vision for You” (AA, Chapter 11), Bill describes the growth of the fellowship in Akron and gives some clues about what it was like in those early days before they could count 1,000 members there. He wrote:

A year and six months later these three [men] had succeeded with seven more. Seeing much of each other, scarce an evening passed that someone’s home did not shelter a little gathering of men and women, happy in their release, *and constantly thinking how they might present their discovery to some newcomer*. In addition to these casual get-togethers, it became customary

to set apart one night a week for a meeting to be attended by anyone or everyone interested in a spiritual way of life. *Aside from fellowship and sociability, the price object was to provide a time and place where new people might bring their problems* (AA, 159-160, emphasis added).

Personally, I found a rich, rewarding, fulfilling, inclusive, loving, and compassionate fellowship at the EMER Convention in Czechia. Was it because they are such a giving group and saw me as a prospect to help? Perhaps. Was it because I’m Gary’s friend? Possibly. However, my belief is that the EMER Convention was a special experience because I practiced the suggestions that Bill W. and the early AAs offer to all of us—specifically,

I made an effort to spend time thinking “of others and how [I] may help meet their needs”

(AA, 20). I tried to get to know and understand people. I made an effort to sit and talk with people. I participated in conversations around me. I asked men about their personal lives, their programs, their struggles, where they were in their sobriety and recovery. I listened, and I was honored to have men share their lives with me.

As I leave EMER now, I really think I found the fellowship I had been craving before I even realized it. It dawned on me in the deep meaningful hugs with men I hadn’t previously known. If we lived closer to one another, I’m sure we’d regularly exchange easy expressions of love and care. I say that because that is what sober men like my SA sponsor, my AA sponsor, Gary, and other men have done for me and

what I do for the men I'm working with and fellowshiping with. I find deep satisfaction in sharing these expressions with men who are working toward sobriety and recovery.

If you had asked me two years or even two months ago whether I thought I'd find fellowship in a distant Czech town, I would have responded with doubt or disbelief. But I followed what felt like "an intuitive thought or impulse" (AA, 86) to connect with others by suggesting in half-jest that Gary and I attend the EMER Convention. As a result, I established new and deep connections with many fellows. Was it because I followed the Big Book's advice to be of service and focus on others who need my help? Yes, but that's not all.

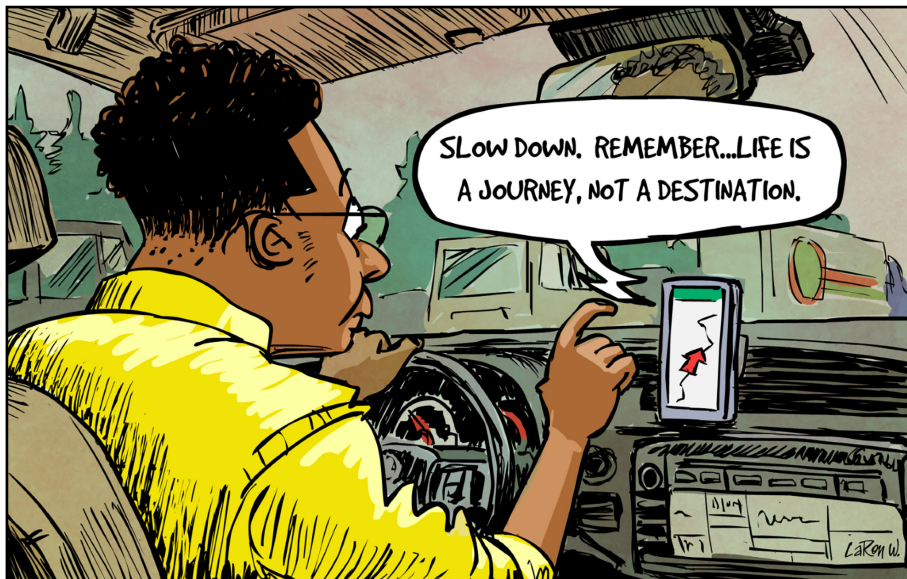
I ask Higher Power every day to keep me sober so I can help others in recovery, to give me the willingness to do whatever is in front of me, to allow me to be a channel of His love and care for the men and women He

would have me be of service to, and to place me where I can be most useful and effective in His service. It's this reliance on Higher Power combined with simple actions I take on a daily basis that helped me find the fellowship I craved. I hope the men and women I was privileged to meet felt as deeply loved, cared for, and fulfilled as I did.

I will close this essay the way a man I know in AA closes his shares: "I love every single one of you, and there isn't a single thing you can do about it, because each and every one of you brings new perspectives, new problems, and new solutions to this group. Now I get to learn from your perspectives and solutions." This is how I feel about the men and women of EMER.

Thank you for a wonderful weekend! I look forward to seeing you all again on the Road of Happy Destiny.

S.C., California, USA 



COMING IN APRIL



"Rule 62" has become shorthand for humor and lightening up. It's more than "we are not a glum lot," though (AA, 132). From page 149 of the *12&12*, "don't take yourself too damn seriously" includes humor, but it's also "relax and take it easy" (AA, 86). We'd love to read what Rule 62 means to you! Submit your article about this or some other aspect of the Program by March 1. Typed is preferred, handwritten can be transcribed for you, and we will even consider your ESH if you want to record your thoughts with your phone and submit the audio file to essay@sa.org.

Opinions expressed in the 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.

SUBMIT YOUR STORY

April 2025 edition: Rule 62 (Submissions 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 Free (Submissions due May 1) How has the Program brought you freedom or joy?

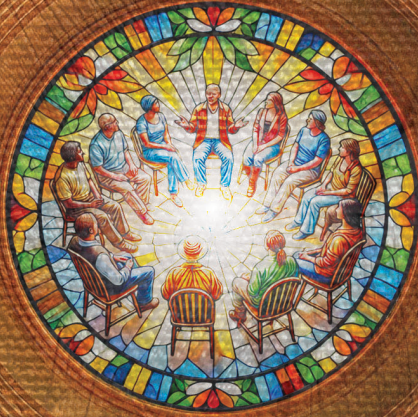
August 2025 edition: Surrendering Shame (Submissions due July 1) How has shame blocked your recovery? What helped you learn to let go of your shame and let HP handle it for you?

October 2025 edition: The Great Fact (Submissions due September 1) The Big Book mentions the great fact twice. It's best defined in "A Vision for You" (AA, 164). What is the Great Fact's impact on you?

December 2025 edition: Humility and Surrender (Submissions due November 1) Are you stuck on either principle? Or do they continue to sustain your recovery?

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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.