

ESSAY

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SEXAHOLICS ANONYMOUS

OVERCOMING Fear Guilt & Shame



October 2025

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.

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 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

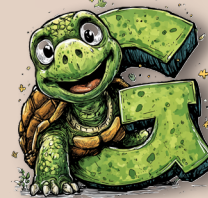
essay@sa.org

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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

Congratulations to Gary L. for winning first place and to Gene T. for winning second place in the Best Caption Contest. Both captions are featured in this edition.

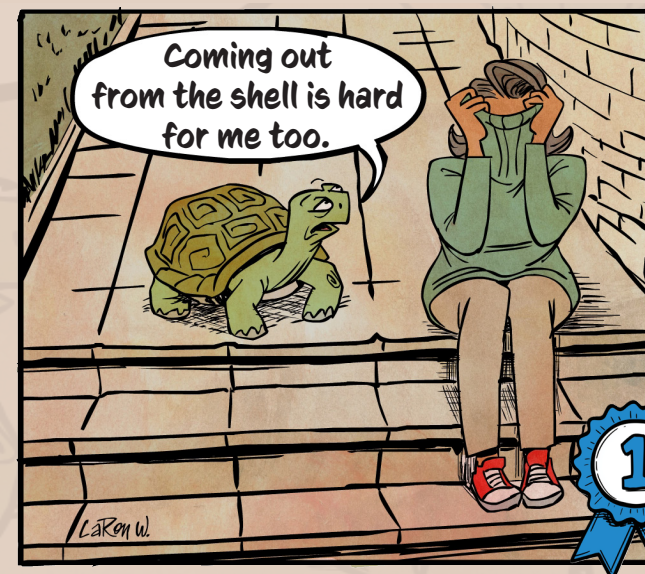


od showed me that fear prevented me from experiencing healthy guilt. Guilt tells me I have done wrong. Fear also prevented me from feeling healthy shame. Shame is a slight embarrassment that others may see my wrongs. But fear primarily tried to stop me from experiencing toxic guilt and toxic shame. Toxic guilt tells me that because I have done wrong, I am less than. Toxic shame is the overwhelming feeling that tells me my very being is less than human, whether I do right or wrong. By taking the Steps, God removed my fear, toxic guilt, and toxic shame. The Steps allow me to experience healthy guilt and shame, and open me up to the reality of who I am and Whose I am.

Laura W. Florida, USA 

In this edition, members share their understanding of fear, guilt, and shame and how God removed them. One member shares how shame is a form of pride. Another member describes perfectionism as the defect used to cover up shame. Doing a fear-to-faith inventory helps this member outgrow fear. We will explore how the solution, sometimes accompanied by professional help, moves us out of hiding and into the healing light of Recovery, Unity, and Service.

In Fellowship,
The Editorial Team
essay@sa.org



October 2025

The Fourth Step inventory and Fifth Step sharing gave us tools to use any time we were emotionally disturbed and assailed by resentment, fear, shame, guilt, remorse, self-loathing, self-pity, or pride.

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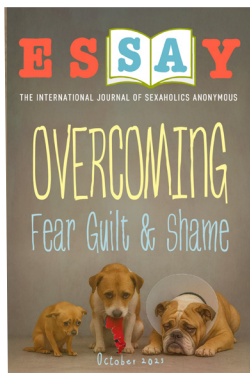
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ESSAY presents the experience, strength, and hope of SA members. Opinions expressed in ESSAY are not to be attributed to SA as a whole, nor does publication of any article imply endorsement by SA or by ESSAY.

Regarding graphics, 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:
Fear and shame
over our guilt
can leave us
with our heads
hanging down.
The Program
connects us to
a Power that
enables us to
face our fear,
acknowledge
our guilt, and
move out of
shame.*

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Dear ESSAY

UPLIFTED



DEAR ESSAY,

I am an incarcerated person in California. In the past, several of my fellow incarcerated persons and I have held SA meetings on a regular basis, and I've actually had a sponsor before.

However, over the years, things have kind of fizzled out, and we no longer have our meetings, mainly due to members being dispersed throughout

the system and some of the participants having been paroled.

We all still enjoy receiving ESSAY. An article in the June 2025 edition has rekindled my interest in requesting that I be connected with an SA sponsor. The article, on page 33, entitled "Sponsorship in Prison," reminded me of the important benefits that come from having a sponsor. As the author of that article expressed so eloquently, "I consider myself blessed to have found the man who is my sponsor. I never thought that I would ever have a sponsor to whom I could talk openly and honestly about my most shameful thoughts and behaviors. I know that without his help, support, and guidance, I would never be where I am today, living my life for the first time with joy and purpose."

I would like to have such a person in my life. For this reason, I have asked to be connected with an SA sponsor so that I may continue my journey of recovery and take that journey to the

next level.

Anonymous, USA



DEAR ESSAY,

Just a quick note to tell you HOW MUCH I love the new ESSAY! What a wonderful job you have done there! I just love it because there are so many different articles about the topic, so many from women, the layout of the magazine, everything. Thank you for your service.

Nathalie V., Belgium



READING BETWEEN THE LINES



OUTREACH TO PROFESSIONALS

"He will show you how to create the Fellowship you crave."

My name is Levi and I'm a recovering sexaholic in central Nebraska in the USA. I have been sexually sober since July 20, 2017.

I am a sexaholic of the hopeless variety. Prior to SA, I tried all sorts of religious exercises, accountability, internet filters and therapy. These helped me stop many times, but I could never stay stopped. I attended my first meeting in late July 2017. The closest meeting was in a community around an hour away. The meetings in a city two hours away use a telephone conference line so that people can participate remotely. I started calling into those as well. I was making connections outside of the meeting by calling sober members in both of these fellowships.

I got a sponsor at my first retreat when I was about 30 days sober. He suggested I get a Big Book, so I went to the local 12-Step meeting house. I started attending open AA

meetings to supplement my phone meetings. I remember my hair standing up on the back of my neck, sitting in those in-person meetings, listening to their miracles of recovery.

Around the time I gave away my first step in my sponsor's home group, I asked him how long I had to be sober to start a meeting where I live. He said I could start any time. I knew from the example of the sober members and from the literature that a way to get that started was to reach out to clergy and help professionals. I want to share the steps I took.

First, I gave my religious leader and my therapist permission to refer folks to me.

Next, I started outreach to local clergy. There is a medium-sized university in my community, so I included campus ministries in this. I used the local newspaper and internet searches to make a list of churches and clergy. I called each church, asking for the clergy by name, if possible. I

would ask if there were people in their community who struggled with sexual addiction. Sometimes they would be a little shocked at the directness of this question. While they were gasping, I would give my first name and tell them that I was a member of a 12-Step Fellowship for people with sexual addiction and I was looking for others to help. The response I got was generally very supportive. Frequent questions would include SA's approach to spirituality. (The recent SA pamphlet "Members of the Clergy Ask About Sexaholics Anonymous" would be helpful to answer their questions.) If they were interested in receiving more information, I would follow up with an email from an anonymous email I set up for the group. In the email, I would include the international and intergroup website address, information on local meetings, my personal cell phone number and permission to share this information with anyone who needs it. I always emphasize that helping others was an important part of my recovery.

Interspersed with the area clergy, I did the same thing with therapists in my community. I found these through internet searches. I found that therapists with "addiction" in their descriptions have been the most supportive. I did my best to answer their questions. Oftentimes, they are familiar with AA, and explaining that SA is closely based on AA will be helpful for them. (The pamphlet "SA as a Resource for the Health & Helping Professional" would

be a good resource for this.) If they were interested in receiving more information, I followed up with an email similar to the one I would send clergy, emphasizing that helping others was an important part of my recovery.

At first, I was simply carrying the message to professionals and asking them to refer individuals to me with the goal of starting a local meeting. By this time, I had 12th-stepped my next-door neighbor and was meeting with him on my front porch. Within a month or two of starting outreach work with professionals, a pastor offered us a space to start a meeting. Our first meeting was the first Thursday evening of November 2017.

"The mission of the Support for Institutions and Professionals Committee is to carry the message of recovery from sexaholism to hospitals, treatment centers, and helping professionals. We facilitate meetings, distribute SA-approved multimedia materials, and serve as a hub to connect local SA groups with the professional community."

Levi H. Nebraska, USA 



QR code to access an informational panel for professionals and other letters to professionals

Meetings Can Be Held Just About Anywhere...

Traditions & Cookies:

SA Mortsel Kicks Off First Tradition Workshop with a Smile.



In Mortsel, we recently launched our very first tradition workshop, which, of course, called for a celebration. Nathalie surprised us with cookies shaped like the number 1.



This workshop focused on Tradition One, which reminds us that our personal recovery depends on group unity.



At times, it was challenging to look at ourselves so honestly and critically, but that's exactly what made it powerful.

Nicky, Mortsel, Belgium 

The Miracle Group:

A Year of Fellowship and Sobriety in Chennai, India



Based in a beautiful coastal South Indian city, this group recently celebrated its first anniversary—a milestone that carries both gratitude and inspiration.



The journey of The Miracle Group began with the late Luc D, from Belgium, whose visit to India in August 2024 left a lasting impact.



It was a day that strengthened fellowship, inspired continued sobriety, and reaffirmed that the SA movement in India is alive and growing, one meeting at a time.

Chennai, South India



La Liberacion



On the last Friday of every month, the SA group "La Liberación" in Bogotá joyfully celebrates the gift of sobriety.



Each member is honored with a sobriety coin and a certificate—a powerful reminder of the journey we share.

For us, it's more than a celebration; it's a way to strengthen our culture of sobriety and encourage unity within our beloved group.

Grupo La liberación, Colombia 

New meeting in Washington



My home group meets in a little side classroom at a local church. I'm grateful to have a safe place where I can show up exactly as I am with people who understand me!

Annika R, Tri-Cities, WA 

WHAT KEEPS me SOBER

A letter of experience, strength, and hope to encourage the Fellowship.

Oear friends,
There is a strong message that was recently shared in our West African SA fellowship. It comes from Tradition Five in the White Book, page 209: "Each group (SA meeting) has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers." There is a deep meaning in this Tradition.

The main work of becoming sober and keeping sober is not through the meetings.

The main work of becoming sober and keeping sober is not through the meetings. The purpose of the meetings, as stated above, is to attract and inform newcomers. Meetings help me, but the main work I do in staying sober is working the 12 Steps with my sponsor, and relying on my Higher Power to immediately help me

let go of a lust temptation. If I am disappointed because the meetings aren't keeping me sober, it means that I am not doing enough program work outside of the meetings.

Am I surrendering every lustful thought as soon as it occurs?

Am I making progress working on a Step?

Am I calling my sponsor regularly and getting current with my sponsor?

Am I reading literature daily or doing something daily, like making a phone call or attending a meeting?

Am I carrying the message and inviting suffering people to the meetings?

Am I praying for the willingness to be sober and expecting my Higher Power to help me immediately?

I need to think about these things. I will keep coming to meetings and doing all the work outside of the meetings that is necessary to produce the sobriety that I desire.

Kwaku, Ghana & USA



October 2025

Meditation At The Heart

A powerful practice that prevents him from reverting to his past ways.



Today everything felt serendipitous.

I met a couple who were splendiferous.

Ladyewell, near Preston, a Holy Shrine.

I met a couple who gladdened my mind.

We held so much in common, places and jobs.

All we said, we never sobbed.

A monk and meditation were at the heart.

Something I've missed from the very start.

My first practice, I loved to do!

But something stopped me, I'm sure you knew!!

Delusion and fear were at the root.

But meditation, I missed, such a precious fruit.

I nearly converted back to my old practice.

But something prevented me, the fact is.

Now, I meditate twice daily.

Rising and retiring for 30 minutes, gaily.

I practice without failing.

It is an antidote for my ailing.

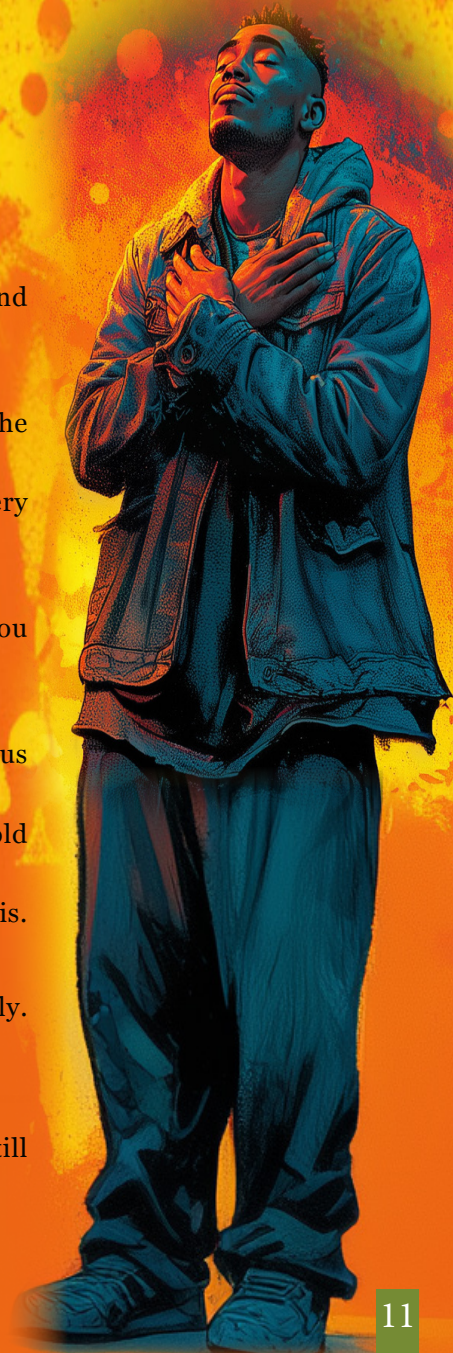
The highlight of my day, to sit in still and quiet.

Wishing it would affect my diet!

Andrew B., Salford, England



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A MIRAGE OF WATER



Stepping out of self allows him to follow the will of God.

I would like to define these terms because I believe that when we accurately define a problem, we arrive at the solution. I understand guilt to be the healthy and appropriate feeling of discomfort I get when I have caused harm to myself or someone else. This is a built-in reminder for me to take action to correct my behavior and make amends (if I have harmed another and can do so without causing further harm). Guilt also helps me to refrain from acting in the future.

Shame is the experience I have when I fight the reality of my own limitations. I think I am more powerful or capable than I actually am (pride). When I make a mistake, I beat myself up for it because I have fallen short of what I believe I was capable of at that moment. Shame is what my sponsor describes as the biggest hit of self we can get. It is me playing God, judging myself, fighting the reality of my powerlessness, beating myself up, and trying to whip myself into changing my behavior. Me, me, me, I, I, I, self, self, self. No one else is involved in this process; it helps no one, cripples my usefulness and ability to be present, and, most importantly, it blocks

me from God. Shame is the ego's last stronghold against powerlessness. Fear is the experience I have when I am once again a practicing agnostic. When I am indulging fear, I am living as though God is not present or not powerful enough to take care of me.

**Me, me, me,
I, I, I,
self, self, self.**

The solution to shame is to accept the reality of my own limitations and gain humility to see myself right-sized. I must accept that there is ONE who has ALL power and that ONE is not Luke. In Step One in the White Book, Roy makes this profound statement on page 88:

It's okay to be absolutely powerless over self. This is where we join the human race. And best of all, just as the admission of powerlessness over lust is the key to our sexual sobriety, so the admission of powerlessness over our defects is the key to our emotional sobriety. Victory through powerlessness by the grace of God.

What a glorious liberating discovery!

This same sentiment can be found in the Big Book in the section on selfishness and self-centeredness being the root of our (humanity's) troubles (AA 62):

Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid. Many of us had moral and philosophical convictions galore, but we could not live up to them even if we would have liked to. Neither could we reduce our self-centeredness much by wishing or trying on our own power. We had to have God's help.

So, the solution to shame is taking and living in Step Three—first becoming convinced that any life run on self can hardly be a success, quitting playing God and going on to make God my director and employer. My admission of powerlessness is the key to the jail cell of self.

The solution to fear is extremely simple but scary. I must begin practicing trusting infinite God rather than finite self. I do this quite practically by focusing on God rather than my fear

thoughts when they come up. I ask God to remove my fear and direct my attention to what he would have me be. What is my role here, God? What are you doing here, God?

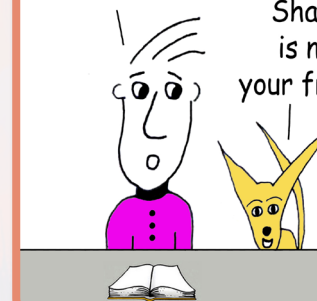
My fears die rather quickly when they are not fed and watered—as all manifestations of self do. In addition, if I can directly face my fear, then it will evaporate instantly. I may have additional things to do or address, but the fear will be gone, which is really the only problem. I can always deal with reality. Fear is not real. Fear is like a mirage of water on the road miles ahead in the desert.

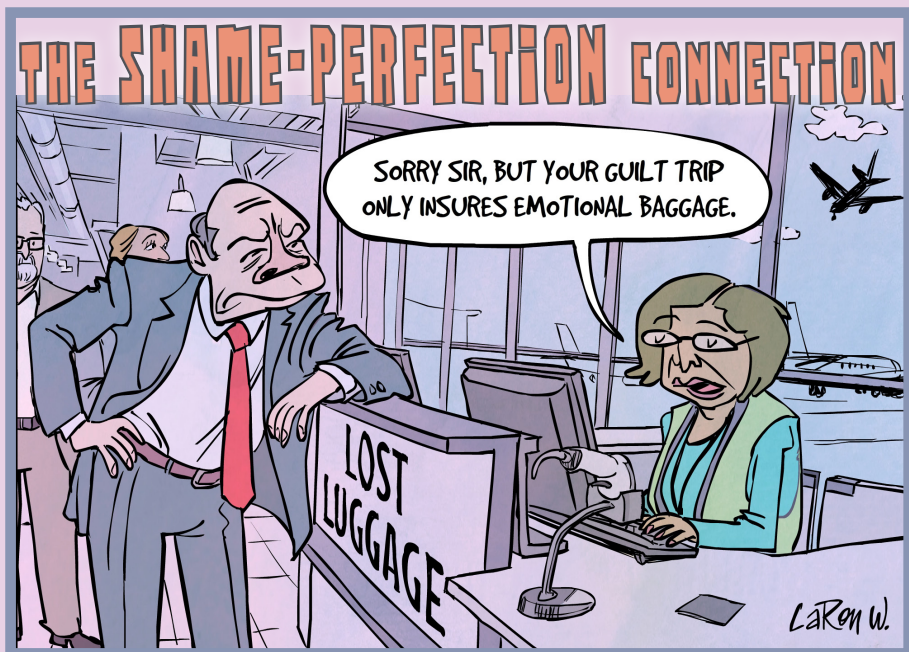
Luke H. Oregon, USA 

Maxey
By Jimmy M.

My sponsor says I
like shame...

Shame
is not
your friend!





Shame and perfectionism blocked her from being vulnerable.

When I feel shame, I feel vulnerable. The definition of vulnerability is “the inability to protect oneself from being wounded, attacked, or ridiculed.” The dictionary also mentions “a person in need of special care, support, or protection.”

When I am shamed by others or myself, I tend to look down, to blush, to want to cover my face, crawl into a hole, or run away. Shame blocked me from entering the door of the Program. I couldn’t work beyond the First Step. Shame can cause relapse at the First Step, the Fourth Step, or the Ninth Step. For years, I had sobriety, but shame blocked my recovery. I was not happy, joyous, or free. Shame is learned in childhood, as early as birth to age three.

Guilt is learned beginning from the age of reason, around seven. Guilt is about what I do or say that is a mistake, e.g., acting out thoughts and be-

haviors.

Shame says I am a mistake. It destroys how I feel about myself, affecting my self-esteem and identity. Words, looks, and gestures can say I am not good enough. I came to believe them and tell them to myself into adulthood! The consequences of these shame messages or beliefs are as follows:

- I’m uncomfortable being with myself or being myself.
- I am uncomfortable with compliments.
- I use words like “should, ought to, have to, must.”
- I fear not doing it perfectly, so I procrastinate because I tell myself it is overwhelming.
- I think in terms of what is right or wrong, black or white, no gray areas allowed.
- Even when I do well at something, it is not good enough; I’m never good

enough.

- If I make a mistake, I think I’m a bad person, and I feel worthless.
- I desperately need to be right.
- I am very sensitive to criticism and negative feedback.

Shame attacks four basic beliefs about myself. Shame says I am unlovable, unworthy, not safe, and not to be trusted. I am not whole, but empty. The acronym for SHAME is Should Have Already Mastered Everything. Shame is the feeling, and perfectionism is the character defect that compensates for my feeling of worthlessness!

The acronym for SHAME is Should Have Already Mastered Everything.

I was addicted to perfectionism or that it was part of my obsessive-compulsive personality. I needed others to affirm my self-worth. I needed to people-please, be the best, know the most, give or work until it hurt. All this built resentments. I put my resentments on others by judging them, just as I judged myself. I blamed others, and I found fault with others to blind myself to my own faulty thinking and behavior. This process created feelings of self-hatred, guilt, and shame, which fed my addictions.

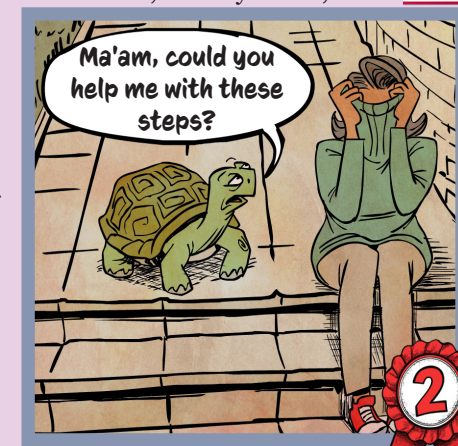
I needed the courage to be vulnerable, and shame is a major block to vulnerability for me in both my Program and life. When I am in shame, I seek to people-please, guess what others want to win their approval, or

try to manipulate others or circumstances for what I want. I feel like a victim, and those behaviors and the resulting feelings feed my addictions.

On the other hand, when I have the courage to be vulnerable, I let others see who I really am. It is about being myself instead of projecting an image or mask to gain acceptance or avoid rejection. I ask for what I want and I take responsibility for my thoughts, words, and actions. I learn from my mistakes instead of playing the victim or trying to play God. I gain integrity, self-respect, and self-esteem.

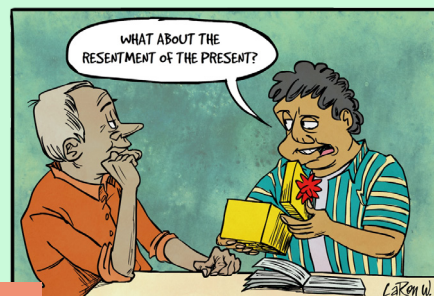
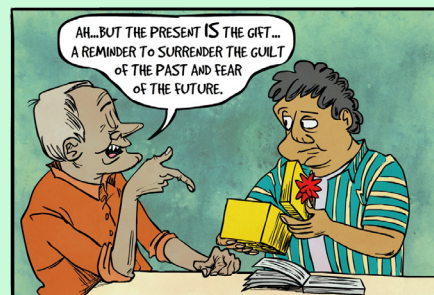
Vulnerability is about the appropriate openness with those people who have earned my trust. In other words, I can draw appropriate boundaries. As I work the Steps within the safety of our Program, I learn appropriate boundaries, and as I share my mistakes and defects, the guilt and shame gradually lose their power to feed my addictions. My disease and defects only tarnish my beautiful real self. I remove the tarnish by working to reveal my real self. I can feel and believe that I am a worthy child of God.

Tricia S., Pennsylvania, USA



2

Guilty As Charged



The Problem is not the problem!

When I came to SA in 1999 due to personal, family and relational crises, my feelings were all over the place. I really did not have feelings except anger. I knew exactly what to do and how to quickly solve all the issues in my life and quickly get back to “normal” again, playing the game of Happy Family.

Talk about delusion...

Fortunately for me, I had a very powerful sponsor who was strong yet unforgiving and who understood people like me, because, as you know, I was special, talented, and unique, and knew exactly what to do in every circumstance.

Be not afraid

This saying is easy to say and difficult to do. I was born into a fear-based family three years after WWII, and times were tough. Food was short, commodities were short, and there was a constant fear in my family of origin of running out of food despite my father having good and continuous work. I initially handled fears of my own by withdrawing into imagination when I was sick or on my own. But after puberty, sex with self became pronounced despite the harmful effects and knowing it to be wrong. I made numerous attempts to stop acting out and also to overcome fear.

Guilty as charged!

Throughout my life, I had concentrated on self-talk with the aid of motivational speakers and guides, which did work to an extent. However, I knew deep inside that I was shy of the mark—I was not good enough to make the grade. Acting out for 40 years left a deep

furrow of guilt, which would take a long time to remedy by working the Steps of SA. My motto for life was to never admit wrong, never admit defeat, and never allow others to contradict or correct me or my work. My life followed these strategies for 40 to 50 years of aggression and emotional dependence. Fortunately, I never saw all this as I was spiritually blind. If I had seen this condition back then, I probably would not be here today to tell the tale. Suicide was a definite option back then.

Shame, shame, shame!

I came from a lower working-class family, and whilst I had a “normal” childhood, with one mother, one father, and one sister, things were not always good or smooth or happy. My mother had low self-worth, and her family of origin came from a poor gold miner’s background where money was not plentiful. I was brainwashed by the world since day one. The world said, “If you want to be successful, you will—”

Have money. The more the better.
Drive a nice modern car.
Live in a house with a white picket fence in the suburbs.
Have a position of power and influence in industry.
Have a model wife and children who dote on you as a hero.

“The final page has not been written.”

The finality of life is not yet upon me. An enormous transformation has taken place in me and my family over the past 26 years since discovering SA through a counsellor. The main milestones for me have been:

Step One – Realising my powerlessness and that “self-reliance had

failed me.”

Step Three – Handing my life over to a new Higher Power (I call Him “God of SA”) rather than the god of religion.

Step Four – Gradually looking at my life responsibilities, taking action to fix past wrongdoings in Step Nine. **Steps Ten through Twelve** – Starting to live a purer moral and spiritual life as directed by God. Serving within SA in meetings, Intergroup, and the region.

I have learned that God’s ways are not my ways and that the first will be last and the last will be first. I learned to give up what I cannot keep to gain what I cannot lose. I also learned that family, people, and relationships must come before work, tasks, and achievements. God has changed me slowly and continues to change me just as long as I allow Him to work in my life. My God is kind and gentlemanly and never forces me to do anything. I now know who I am and where I am going. I have an identity, and a peace beyond all understanding. I thank God daily for His presence and for the SA Program.

Steve P., Australia 

Maxey
By Jimmy M.



Working the Steps on fear allowed her to take action under God's guidance.

I've been married for almost 50 years. My husband has been unbelievably cruel, but I've been afraid to leave. My biggest fear has been that I wouldn't be able to support myself, that I'd be homeless.

My husband laughs at me, telling people, "My wife thinks she'll be a bag lady! Haha! (A bag lady means a

homeless woman.) But I believe in a Power bigger than my fear.

A year ago, I told my husband that I couldn't endure living with him any longer. It took me nine months before I was brave enough to move out. I was so afraid. But I believe in a Power bigger than my fear, a Power that can relieve me of my insanity.

I've had so much fear around money. I'm not promised economic security. However, I am promised that the fear of economic insecurity will leave.

When I'm afraid, I ask Him to remove my fear from me and direct my attention to what He would have me be, and at once I commence to outgrow fear. It's not instantaneous, but if I ask, it will begin to happen. God is replacing calamity (my circumstances) with serenity (my feelings).

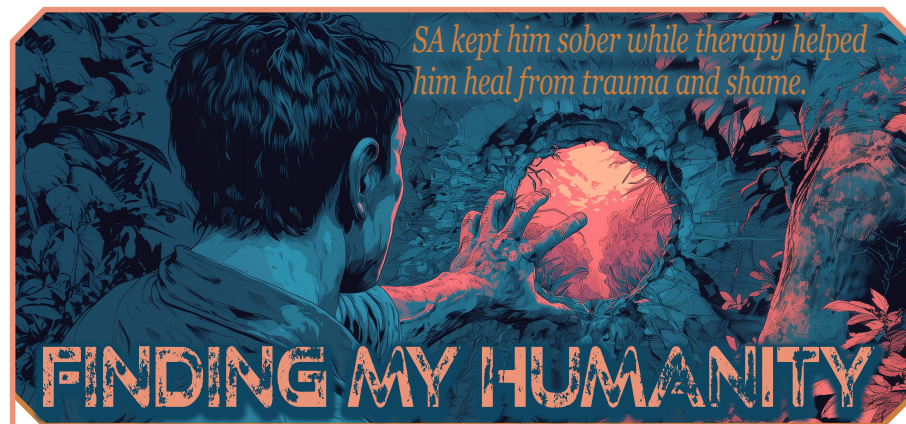
God is replacing calamity (my circumstances) with serenity (my feelings).

I might have a job. I live right in front of a golf course. They asked me to help plant flowers. God is providing in amazing ways.

It wasn't a quick decision to live apart from my husband. I'm doing the best that I can. I humbly pray, and then I move. That's when He can redirect a moving object, and that object is me!

Nancy S., Ohio, USA 

DIRECTING A MOVING OBJECT



My wife discovered my addiction for the first time before we were married. I promised if she gave me another chance, I would spend the rest of my life making it up to her. That turned out to be a lie. She discovered my addiction for the second time after I got myself into a legal situation. I sought professional help. Unfortunately, the professional treated my addiction only as a compulsion, and he never recommended a Twelve-Step program. Within months of finishing therapy, I began acting out again.

In January 2020, my wife found email exchanges between me and another woman. I had to acknowledge that there really was something wrong with me and that I needed help. I sought professional help yet again. The professional told me about SA, and I reached out to them. I heard back from someone in short order.

Over two years, I sought help from three different professionals. I learned about family-of-origin issues and consulted with a professional who specialized in enmeshment. I had experienced sexual abuse, and I went to special therapy to help with feelings of

shame I had carried for decades due to my sexual abuse.

I did not rely solely on professional help. I also attended two SA meetings per week during this time. I got a sponsor and worked the Steps. I became a sponsor and a hotline coordinator. I got myself a Daily Sobriety Renewal (DSR) partner, and have done a DSR every day for the past five years without missing a day.

My wife decided to stay in the marriage. We both agree that the last few years have been our best. I also improved my relationships with my kids and my boss. I now generally relate better to others than I ever did. I learned how to draw boundaries with others, including some members of my family of origin.

Therapy alone would never have kept me sober. Following the SA Program rigorously keeps me sober and in recovery. But the professionals helped me understand my life's story and change its direction. They helped me find my humanity. There is a role for both SA and professionals in learning how to live in recovery.

John D., Rhode Island, USA 

God removed her fear and replaced it with faith and works.

My whole life, I'd been so bound by fear, I'd lost hope for freedom. Through working the Steps, a brilliant light at the end of a long, cold, and dark tunnel suddenly shone forth with a comforting warmth. At each step, however, fears continued to loom. Picking up the simple tool of a Fear-to-Faith inventory helped point me back toward God and the Step Two and Three solution.

I start by writing down a particular fear. Next, I write about why I have it. Usually, there was a difficult situation in my past, and I concluded that God is not present for me in a particular area of my life. I also write how the fear has led me to behave in irrational ways. I end the reflective part of the exercise by praying the fear prayer from the AA Big Book, page 68: "God, please remove my fear and direct my attention to what you would have me be."

Next, I write the "faith" part by prayerfully journaling a response to my fear and my reasons for having

it. I explore how God is actually present and working in my life. I speak hope into the situation from a position of trusting that my God is loving. Even if I feel I'm lacking in faith, I write the faith anyway. That is the magic of this inventory—I don't have to make it work for it to work. I respond to the irrational behaviors by identifying new healthy behaviors. I can ask myself, "What would God have me be?" It is integral to share these Fear-to-Faith writings with others. I can use this exercise verbally as well, and I often work it into outreach calls as part of a Step Ten share or by itself. I find that the more I share my faith with others, the more the faith grows and comes alive. Through facing my fears and affirming my faith with the support of others who share a common problem and solution, the light of hope and gratitude within grows and spreads.

Anonymous

FEAR TO FAITH



FLOODED WITH VALUE AND WORTH

She discovered the two things that make up her self-esteem.

I learned very early that life was all about being a good girl, pleasing, being obedient and nice. I was being raised to be a good wife in the style of those days. My parents, of course, were blameless, giving me everything they knew to shape me as they had been.

The subsequent 40 years of my life were defined by fear, shame, and guilt. I was an easy target for sexaholic men; I married one. I thought I was doing God's will by serving and pleasing all around. My own sexaholism exacerbated the scene. I was suicidal the whole time, under psychiatrists. Self-esteem was a sick joke to me.

In my 50s, I found SA. Steadily, I worked through the Steps. As promised, scales fell from my eyes. I have had hundreds, maybe thousands, of personal conversations with lots of sisters all over the world, and with some sober brothers too.

I derive my self-esteem from two things: God's love for me, which I found in Step Two, and my personal integrity. Today, I say what I am and am what I say. I live a life of rigorous honesty, warts and all, as the saying goes. One of my shares in a meeting ended with "I may be mad, but I'm happy, joyous, and

free!!"

Each morning, I surrender my whole day and my whole self to God. This is my personal way of escaping the heavy cloud of dense fear, shame, and guilt. I had to accept the difficult lesson that life is a grey area. In my Step Six studies, I learned that I make Step One 100%. The other Steps are about "progress, not perfection". I am a human being today among fallible humans in SA, all doing our utmost to live sober, not perfectly, of equal dignity and worth.

I may be mad, but I'm happy, joyous, and free!!

When I stopped trying to be "good enough" and gave it all over to God, I was flooded with the value and worth I sought my whole life. Today, I am good enough for God and for myself, and that is all that really matters.

Kathie S., Devon, UK. 



BRINGING THE INSIDE OUT

With his sponsor's help, he learned to deal with shame and guilt.

As we persist, a brand-new kind of confidence is born, and the sense of relief at finally facing ourselves is indescribable (12 & 12 50).

For me, Step Four of the SA program, "A Searching and Fearless Moral Inventory," was a crucial, challenging Step in recovery. However, while recognizing errors and making amends are important, dwelling on guilt and shame could hinder progress and lead to self-sabotage.

Admitting my faults, taking responsibility, and striving for transformation helped me dispel negative self-perceptions. I came to understand, with the help of my sponsor, that persistent guilt and shame were incompatible with a new life in recovery.

Memories resurface, often bringing regret and guilt for harm caused. As I listen and learn in these SA rooms, initial guilt is healthy, but prolonged guilt, even after apologies and amends, becomes self-punishing and prevents moving forward.

Memories resurface, often bringing regret and guilt for harm caused.

Shame was even more detrimental. While a natural consequence of guilt, allowing shame to become part of my identity was dangerous. Guilt

says, "I did something bad," but shame says, "I am bad." Internalizing shame led to feelings of unworthiness, self-loathing, and the belief that I didn't deserve happiness, significantly increasing the relapse risk to numb shame with old behaviors.

Dealing with guilt and shame takes real effort and self-compassion. Here are some steps I can take:

- Recognize how bad guilt and shame are: It's incredibly important to see how guilt and shame can negatively affect me. Guilt and shame are significant obstacles to living a healthy, addiction-free life.
- Learn to forgive myself: Own up to my past mistakes, feel regret, and then let myself off the hook so I can stop beating myself up.
- Change how I see myself: Instead of dwelling on past mistakes, focus on growing and realizing my worthi-

ness of love and happiness.

• Find supportive people: Spend time with folks who lift you up (like sponsors, therapists, other men and women in your SA Fellowship, or trusted friends and family). Steer clear of anyone who makes you feel guilty or ashamed.

When I began to break free from guilt and shame, I could truly be present, begin to rebuild my life, and believe I deserved forgiveness and affection.

"This feeling of being at one with God and man, this emerging from isolation through the open and honest sharing of our terrible burden of guilt, brings us to a resting place where we may prepare ourselves for the following Steps toward a full and meaningful sobriety" (12 & 12 62).

Peter M., Rochester, NY 

DISCUSSION TOPIC

Have I experienced guilt or shame when completing a Fourth-Step inventory?

Peter shares in his article that initial guilt is a healthy response for him. However, shame and lingering guilt were very detrimental to his long-term recovery. He needed to understand how these harmed his recovery and what he could do to move out of guilt and shame as soon as possible—so that he could continue on his journey.

Have I sought experience, strength, and hope from my sponsor and many

members in the Program on how to deal with the guilt and shame? Why or why not? In what ways have I strived for transformation? How has that striving helped dispel any negative self-perceptions? Is it clear to me that handing over persistent guilt and shame is vital for my long-term recovery?

When memories resurface, does any initial guilt or shame linger, causing unnecessary pain? Would I be willing to begin looking

for guilt and shame and identifying it when it pops up? Am I willing to stop beating myself up and acknowledge all the good that I strive to do and accomplish by giving my life to God in this Program? Am I willing to acknowledge my great worth and value, just as I am?

Will you use this article for a discussion topic at your home group? Send a story of your own recovery journey to essay@sa.org.

SA Stories

A JOURNEY CALLED RECOVERY

A reflection on 30 years of working the Program reveals a life worth living.

Thirty years ago today, August 8th, 1995, I walked into a church, sat down in a room full of strangers, and said: “My name is Bill and I’m...” Thirty years ago today, I started on a journey called Recovery.

Since that Tuesday night in 1995, there have been hundreds of such meetings. There have been phone calls, emails, and face-to-face conversations. I’ve done the readings, labored through the writing, acknowledged my darkest secrets to others, and knocked on doors. I decided and continue to decide to turn my will and life over to the care of a Power greater than myself. And the trajectory of my life has changed in ways beyond what I could have imagined.

I am grateful for sponsors and sponsees, for daily renewal partners, for everyone I’ve heard speak at meetings, for a great therapist, for the love and support of my parents whose hearts I broke, for my kids, and for friends. Most of all, for my wife who endured the unspeakable pain I caused her and yet chose to stay with me—forgiving but never enabling.

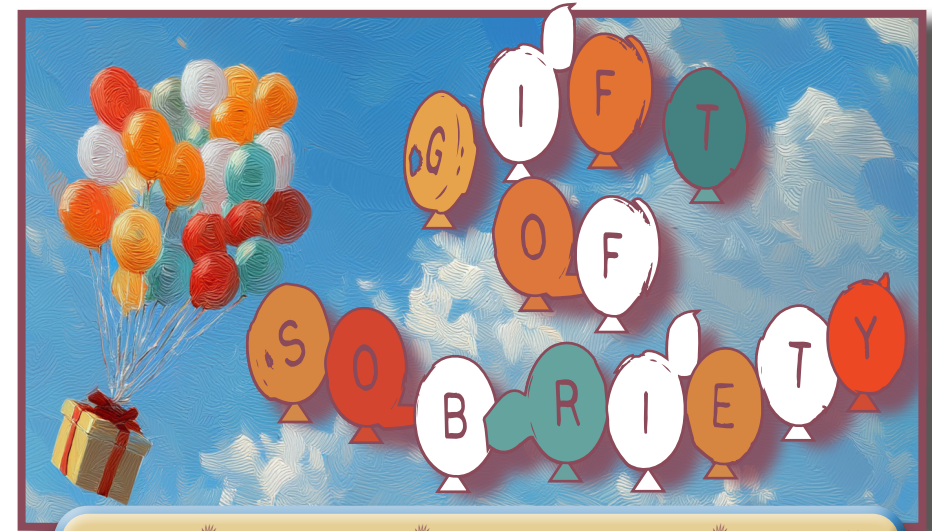
In college, our gospel choir sang a song that said, “Just look where I’ve come from; I’ve come a long ways.” My God, that is SO true for me. When I walked into church that evening 30 years ago, I was a broken man with little hope. I’d been brought up to believe that God’s grace and mercy were

for everyone, but I wondered if I was His exception clause. I wasn’t. I’m not, and I have seen great events come to pass for me and through God’s work in me. I’ve had the honor of sharing my strength, hope, and experience with countless others. They said, “God could and would if He were sought.” I sought. He did.

Yet, that song continues, “I still have a long way to go.” True again. I’m committed to a lifestyle of rigorous honesty, yet often fall short. I struggle to truly trust and rely on God. Resentment, fear, and selfishness have yet to be fully evicted from my life. Recovery is a journey, not a destination. I’ve had triumphs and I’ve had setbacks.

My name is still Bill, and I’m still in recovery, but today, I’m overcome with gratitude, wonder, and joy. Soli Deo Gloria!

Bill M., Boston, USA 



Freedom to choose in sobriety

Sobriety is a gift that your wise decisions give you. Sobriety is not limited to stopping sexual relations with another person or with yourself—that is only the beginning. Sobriety is having sanity in the face of life. It is exercising the self-control that already resides within you, that was given to you by your Higher Power to choose between what is good for you and what harms you.

Living in sobriety is much more than a phase, period, or endurance test. It is surrendering to God's will. It is the freedom of being released from your own prisons and opening your arms to that lasting sense of freedom. It is freeing your emotions from the little tormentors that had turned into strongholds and paralyzed your being.

Living in sobriety is living in the freedom to choose. It means placing

yourself above circumstances, not beneath them. It is saying goodbye to letting someone else decide for you.

It is walking hand in hand with your Higher Power and together choosing what is best. Sobriety is forever.

It is walking hand in hand with your Higher Power and together choosing what is best. Sobriety is forever. Sobriety is clarity, wholeness, and freedom. When I desire and reclaim the will that I had once given over to lust, emotions and circumstances no longer dominate me.

That is why sobriety is the first step toward recovery—the other gifts follow in due course.

Cristy, Mexico 

She sees how she was holding herself back from healing fully.

I haven't taken much time as of late to consider the role that trauma plays in my consistent relapses. I was abused sexually by my father at 13, and I had sexually abusive relationships from ages 19-22. I entered SA in July of 2021 without realizing my last relationship had ended with me being sexually assaulted. The brain is a funny organ like that. Through the fog of addiction to porn and my brain trying to protect me, the pieces didn't fall into place until a friend showed me an article that described my ex perfectly, and that final puzzle piece of sexual abuse clicked.

When I was 14 and 15, I self-mutilated by cutting myself in an attempt to be relieved of the pain that I felt internally from abuse not yet realized, bullying, same sex porn use, and other trauma that was going on at the time.

Today, August 8, 2025, at the age of 26 I had a eureka moment. I was self-abusing not to cover up trauma, or suicidal ideation or action, but because I didn't want to fully heal from my past, and I wanted to hold myself back from truly living a happy, joyous, and free life. Oth-

ers can write much more eloquently and longer articles than I, but I believe in getting to the root of the problem and being matter-of-fact. Maybe that's a result of the stubborn Irish in me.

Today, August 8, 2025, at the age of 26 I had a eureka moment.

Now, what do I do with this undeserved gift from God? I believe the first step is to take action and to discuss it fully with my sponsor, and a few trusted members in the Program whom I consider to be some of my best friends. SA is amazing like that, that I can have best friends from Europe or the UK and have never physically met them. I haven't always taken the time to appreciate the true beauty of SA, perhaps due to personal character defects and focusing on the supposed defects of others within the Program. I truly can never be grateful enough for the gift of recovery and SA.

Adria K., Washington, USA 



Steps & Traditions

RECOVERY: MY WAY OUT OF SHAME

Step Nine showed him how to proceed without putting himself down.



I am Tim, from Brussels. I discovered I am a sexaholic about two years ago. After a summer of destructive acting out, a painful rock bottom, and therapy, it became clear that I needed help from a 12-Step program. This was a great relief. I have been addicted to lust since my teenage years without knowing it. I was fascinated by images of the opposite sex and discovered the power of masturbation. I also learned I had to hide and lie about it.

In silence, I loaded up my brain with images and fantasies. I had a dark side that I was very ashamed of. Gradually, I sought out places I should never have gone to, and the lust in my mind started to cross dangerous boundaries, which, more than all else, brought more shame in my life. I started seeing sex workers to get rid of the shame. That didn't work, of course. I persisted in my madness, went too far, and got caught. Only then did I acknowledge the addiction and began to recover. I found SA, found a sponsor, and started working the Steps.

I have now been working on my Ninth Step for several months. At

home, I already learned that admitting mistakes and asking for forgiveness worked. In my religion, forgiveness is important. Still, there were some people I had to explicitly ask for forgiveness, especially for my last foolish summer—the risks I took, not only for myself, but for the religious movement I belonged to. In its name, I had done a lot of good, but my madness also risked tarnishing the name of the movement.

During Step Nine, I relapsed because shame crept back in. I remained stuck in a judgment about my own past, how I had fallen short of my own dreams and the expectations of people who trusted me. I was ashamed of who I was—never good enough. Today, I understand that a very important Ninth Step is towards myself. I will have to put aside the shame, stop blaming myself for failing, let go of my expectations about my past and my future, and move on, one day at a time. Recovery gives me a new way to be proud of myself, knowing that my Higher Power does love me as I am today.

Tim D., Brussels, Belgium



Keep The Curtains Open

DETACHMENT WAS THE PATH THAT LED HIM TO SEEK WHAT WAS REAL.

An unknown SA member said, “If you want light, keep the curtains open. The curtains are made of selfishness.”

I was not only driven by a hundred forms of fear, as the Big Book says, but also by a thou-

sand forms of guilt and shame. Fear was my default mechanism. I got some things done in my life because of fear—and I did not do most things because of fear. Fear of missing out drove me into places and situations. Fear of not having enough money stopped me from enjoying the things I already had and left me re-

morseful about what I did not have.

Shame was not far behind. I was ashamed that my parents separated and later divorced. I was ashamed of the fights in my family. If shame was not far behind, guilt was right there too.

If shame was not far behind, guilt was right there too.

But now, I just turned 49, and I am free of shame, fear, and guilt. Today, I am free of it—contingent on maintaining fit spiritual condition and aligning with God’s will.

I had to accept in my innermost self that I am a sexaholic. I had to correct the cornerstone by believing that a Power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. I had to stop fighting God’s will and quit playing God to have this keystone firmly in place. I made a moral inventory and shared it. I asked for my shortcomings to be removed in God’s time. I became willing—and reluctantly, made amends. I con-

tinued to make amends. I turned every opportunity of selfishness into a chance to help others—first reluctantly, then naturally, and now happily. I continued to align with God every moment, passing on what I freely received to other sexaholics, and to everyone around me.

Of course, I do it imperfectly. But I do it with the humility that I am not God and cannot do it perfectly. That is what it means to be human.

So how did the shame, guilt, and fear fall away?

The shame of relapse, of being a sexaholic, and of my past actions—all fell away once I accepted that I have a disease. Absolute trust that only God can remove it, and action, more helpful action over selfish action—that is the cure.

Anonymous from India



Maxey
By Jimmy M.

Why am I not making progress?

You need to go to that place you don’t want to go!



MY VALLEY OF DRY BONES

How the semicolon etched into his skin saved him from ending his life.

B

ang! Bang!
Bang! "Police!
We have
a search
warrant!" It
happened
when I was 52,
in the third
decade of my
marriage and

teaching career. I carried with me lies and a lust-filled lens on life. Throughout my life, I had crossed so many lines that I had fried my moral compass, which led to a continuation of my sick habits. However, the moment I

heard the banging on my door at 6:00 a.m., and an officer announcing "search warrant," I knew that my fried moral compass had just exploded in my face. I wasn't surprised, but I was devastated and relieved.

I was contemplating my new reality and planning ways I could end it all. I looked down at my wrists and saw two small indentations in the shape of a semicolon where handcuffs had dug into my skin. Almost immediately, I felt a lightness overcome me as I realized that a semicolon is not a period; my life was not over, and somehow, I could write the ending of my story.

My recovery journey began at my first SA meeting three days after my arrest. I was dumbstruck by the honesty, vulnerability, and hospitality I witnessed from

total strangers. That night, I shared things with these total strangers that I had never shared with another person in my life. I found my tribe. In one of the first entries of my diary, I wrote, "Went to first SA meeting, life-changing, not alone." I attended nearly 150 meetings in the 10 months leading up to my prison sentence. During that time, I found a sponsor, diligently worked the Steps, and developed relationships with fellow sexaholics. I also began a relationship with my Higher Power and have learned about how to surrender my will to my Higher Power's will each day.

My redemption is based on changing my habits and life focus from doing my own will to surrendering to my Higher Power's will. Throughout my incarceration, I continued my focus on what I learned from working the Steps and strengthened my relationship with my Higher Power. My nine-month sentence was my 40 weeks in the desert. Prison was my valley of dry bones, my eating with the pigs, my crucible. It tested me in ways that only prison can by stripping away my dignity, possessions, and freedom, and leaving me a more patient, humble, and appreciative person. By not being in control, I learned to be patient. From strip searches to communal toilets, I learned the value of humility. From being caged like an animal, I learned about the sanctity of freedom. I left prison not broken, but strengthened with a hope of personal rebirth and a compassion for those that society deems irredeemable.

Two hours after being released from County prison, I walked back into an SA meeting and into the arms of my family of recovering sexaholics. There was no other place I wanted to be. I was home.

My nine-month sentence was my 40 weeks in the desert.

In the year since I walked out of my desert, I have become a sponsor to someone who is preparing to walk into that same desert. I have also become a sponsor-by-mail through SA's Correctional Facilities Committee (SACFC) to a person currently incarcerated who requested the opportunity to work the 12 Steps. To engage more with my 12th Step, I have facilitated meetings from time to time and spent hours talking on the phone and in person with my fellow sexaholics. I hope that by focusing my life on my Higher Power and service to others, I not only continue my recovery and rebirth, but also promote the message that sexaholism is not a period at the end of a person's story; through SA, sexaholism is but a semicolon that allows one to write the ending of their story into a rebirth of hope, healing, and recovery, a life of renewed purpose.

Art T., Pennsylvania, USA



A MEETING OF SOULS

The 13th National Convention of SA Colombia where hope blossomed, and unity became real.



There, I discovered that there are no broken people—only valuable human beings fighting against this painful disease. I felt the presence of our Higher Power everywhere. Every day, I fall more in love with SA.

Jaime M, Colombia 

Watching my fellows on talent night express themselves through music, art, poetry, theatre, and folk songs was a reminder that behind every story of struggle, there is a person full of gifts that, for a long time, were overshadowed by the darkness of addiction.

Hugo M, USA/Colombia 

A convention is a true connection with Higher Power, where we seek the path toward a happy destiny. Sobriety is what truly matters—not how many 24 hours we have or what service we perform, but the connection that we can offer through a look, a smile, a word, or a hug.

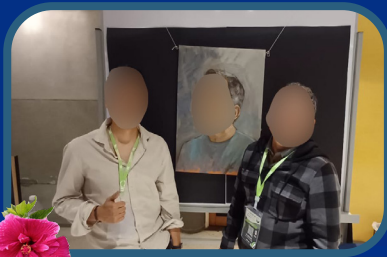
Lucía, Colombia 

Besides the hope I received from the testimonies of my fellows, this convention left me with powerful messages such as “What can I do for the one who is still suffering?” and “My greatest strength is God.”

Luis R, Colombia 

The hospitality, love, hugs, laughter, vulnerability, and tears I have experienced live on in my heart. I found people who accepted me as I am—the good and the bad, where I could let myself be me and share my experience.

Martin C, USA/México 



One day in 2024, I had an appointment with my eye doctor in Ontario, Canada. Parked right outside the office building was this motorcycle. I stood stock still for a moment, looking at the license plate—ODAAT—and the yellow bumper sticker above it—ONE DAY AT A TIME.

I stood there and thought to myself: “There’s no doubt in my mind that the owner of this motorcycle is in a 12-Step program.” I took this picture, and for a long while, this picture became the wallpaper on my phone.

Every time I opened my phone, this picture would remind me that the Program is one day at a time, and always will be. Every day, when I talk to my daily sobriety renewal partner, I remind myself that tomorrow I could choose to follow another path, but just for today, I give over the will and care of my life to God, who kept me sober yesterday and has protected me from the consequences of my lust and acting out in the past.

At the SA International

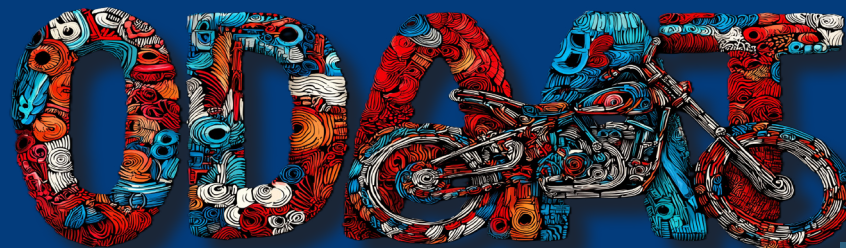
Convention in July, in Dallas, the very first breakout session I attended was called “One Day at a Time.” The facilitator shared his story, stating that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but if we keep taking one step at a time, making one phone call at a time, making one meeting at a time, then guess what? ONE DAY AT A TIME, we might reach that 1,000 miles.

During the sharing time, I shared this motorcycle story with the group and showed this picture on my phone. I was encouraged to submit this story to the ESSAY Magazine.

I wish I had the opportunity to meet the owner of that motorcycle that day in 2024. I would have told him (or her) that those letters ODAAT have a deep, profound meaning to me as well because, as long as any of us in 12-Step programs continue to surrender the will and care of our lives over to God—ONE DAY AT A TIME—recovery continues to happen.

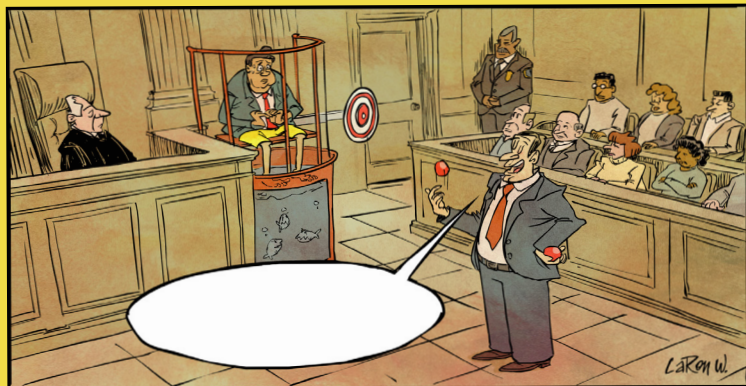
Joseph B., Ontario, Canada 

A license plate reminds him that recovery is one day at a time.



**JOIN OUR CONTEST AND CRAFT
THE BEST CAPTION**

**ARE YOU
READY
FOR
ANOTHER
CAPTION
CHALLENGE?**



We invite you to craft the perfect recovery caption for the above cartoon centered on December's theme, "Rigorous Honesty". If your caption wins, you will receive a print copy of the December edition. Don't miss out—the submission deadline is November 15. Send your entry to essay@sa.org. Unleash your creativity, and may the cleverest caption win!

NEW SA MEETINGS

NORTH, CENTRAL, AND SOUTH AMERICA

Springfield, Massachusetts USA

Mission, Texas USA

Brooklyn, New York (Additional meeting)

Athens, Georgia USA (Additional meeting)

SA INDIA'S 1ST NATIONAL CONVENTION
MUMBAI 2025

THE THREE LEGACIES OF SA: RECOVERY, UNITY, SERVICE

November 14-16, 2025

Come for Recovery, Stepwork, Chip Celebrations, Literature Stall, More Connections, and ...Fellowshipping Dinner, Dance and Dhamaal!

Visit www.sa.org/events/ for contact information to register!



COMING IN DECEMBER



NEXT EDITION

Our next edition's theme is "Rigorous Honesty." The first words in Chapter Five of the Big Book tell us that recovery is not possible without the capacity to be rigorously honest. What a wonderful gift to know that we can choose honesty for today and if we are powerless over our dishonesty, we can seek help from our sponsor and other members in the Fellowship. The Steps teach us the process by which I can learn to become aware of the truth and to share that truth with others.

ESSAY is your magazine and it is your experience, strength, and hope that carries the message of recovery to the still-suffering sexaholic. Please consider sharing your experience with the Fellowship by submitting an article to essay@sa.org.

While we provide all articles in English, as well as six selected articles in 9 other 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 on essay.sa.org.

SUBMIT YOUR STORY

December 2025 edition: Rigorous Honesty (Stories due November 1)
What role has honesty played in your recovery journey?

February 2026 edition: A Great Caution is Advised (Stories due January 1) How has considering the White Book's caution on disclosure helped those we love inside and outside SA?

April 2026 edition: The Positive Sobriety (Stories due March 1) How has taking the actions of love changed the way you see service in your program?

June 2026 edition: The Three Legacies: Recovery, Unity, Service (Stories due March 1) What were the promises you have received by practicing the principles in one, two, or all three of the legacies

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.

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.