

The SCAnner

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Years of Sobriety: *One Day at a Time*

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From the Editor...

Here's the first issue of the SCAnner that I've edited. Reading the submissions and selecting which ones to print has been quite a challenging task. Each one has given something to my program of recovery and amazed me at the gifts we all share.

With this issue, I hoped to paint the picture of a recovery 'countdown.' Earlier this year I was at a huge conference of addicts and was truly amazed to see people span the years of recovery. Early on, the newcomers sat down – staring shyly at the ground and then looking up to smile when someone with more time patted them on the shoulder, knowing they were loved and supported. Then there were fewer people standing, but the bonds were obvious – from across the room, addicts who had come into recovery together were still standing together. Finally, the old-timers were left standing. Excitement was palpable. This was our history, the men and women who started the program. And as each person sat down, from 24 hours of sobriety to the oldest old-timer, the applause was rock-star loud. Why do we applaud one another? Because we know that from old-timers to newcomers, we all had experience that could benefit others, we all had strength to help each other stand and we all had hope that God will stay in our lives through recovery. It blew me away.

And then, just last week, I had a realization slip into my mind during meditation. I had lost an extended period of sobriety through a relapse and desperately wanted that time back again. But then I felt it, that feeling I had felt prior to relapsing. Calm, hopeful, serene. And my higher power sent me the message – “Serenity truly comes one day at a time. The most important day of your sobriety is *today*.” Serenity has everything to do with a conscious contact with a Higher Power. That conscious contact gives us serenity and that gives us enduring sobriety.

Drew C.

In The Next Issue:

SCA members from around the country share their Experience, Strength and Hope on a challenging issue. How do we disclose our addiction, and to whom? When do we tell our partners, husbands, and wives? Do we tell our children? And how do we do it? Please send your submissions to: SCAnnereditor@sca-recovery.org

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A Newcomer Shares...

The beginning of the new year again brought me the realization that my sexual compulsivity was creating substantial costs in all facets of my life. Facing that reality, I went looking for a community where I could find support and do recovery work. And, since I am a technophile, I went looking online. What I finally found was SCA, the feedback for recovery website, recovery partners, and many tools that have helped me to make progress over the year.

I am grateful that I have found a place where I can find support and strive towards recovery. I recently went looking back through my journal entries over the past ten years. Much of what I read was straight of the "Characteristics Most of Us Seem to Have in Common." It is so sad for me to read all of the desperate insecurity, dependency, anxiety, and need for validation. I was trying to feel God's love throughout that period of time, but somehow, I just wasn't getting it.

I think that the slogans have been one of the most important tools that I have found with SCA. Hearing them again and again from recovery partners and on the feedback for recovery board, using them in the feedback I am giving others, reciting them to myself, and contemplating their profound and elegant truth has helped to replace many of the older messages rumbling through my head. "One day at a time" contradicts my addict desire to figure it all out now, to change everything instantly, to control time and space. "Progress not perfection" challenges the standards that others have placed upon me and that I have internalized. "Keep coming back" pushes against my inconsistency, distraction, and despair.

The last SCAnner was also a great tool for me. Reading through so many different recovery plans and seeing the diverse ways that people are struggling with our common addiction was very instructive. When I was initially drafting my own recovery plan, one of my first goals was to read one recovery plan each day.

Being a technophile, I found that using a computer program was a helpful way for me to do some daily accountability work. I came across a program called "Life Balance" around the same time I found SCA and in working on my recovery plan, I have entered reminders for each of the things I want to do in my plan. The software constantly updates my "To Do" list and draws items from my recovery plan. So, I get a daily reminder to "Check in on the SCA Feedback site", "Give Feedback to Others", and "Answer a Question from the Hope and Recovery Workbook." I also get a reminder to brainstorm about my recovery plan every week or two and reminders to email my recovery partners every few days. For me, this software has helped me with daily accountability and with

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daily mindfulness of the progress I am making. It is a gentle reminder of my top line behaviors and helps me to do them, even when I don't feel like it.

I am making progress. So many of the things I read in those journal entries from years ago were strangely foreign. I am still struggling with compulsivity, but the struggle I have faced this year is very different from the struggle I was facing a year ago. I am doing it one day at a time and it is happening on God's schedule, not mine. But, I am learning to live with that, and even to be excited about what else is in His plan for me.

Darren

“My First Time”

During a recent meeting, I listened to a newcomer voice how jittery he felt upon entering the rooms of SCA for the first time. Visibly nervous, he eyed each of us as we took turns offering our take on those first frightening steps through the doors of SCA. While each member's response echoed in my ears, I recalled how paralyzed I felt the first time I walked through the door. I wasn't in denial about my own sex addiction. Indeed, I felt quite defeated by it, yet my preconceived beliefs about other sex addicts conveniently fueled my procrastination about attending my first meeting. I cycled through my catalogues of defenses to rationalize why I really didn't need to take that first step. “I'm not one of those sick freaks who can't stay out of the woods or the bars.” “I don't need a recovery group: I have a psychiatrist!” “I take medicine for my ‘condition.’” And the list grew; I was sure I didn't belong there, because ultimately, I felt that “I was not like those people.” My attitude betrayed the typical arrogance we addicts are known for.

Armed with a sufficient artillery of defenses, I felt justified rejecting the idea that a 12-step group could help me handle what I believed was a private issue. No, not for me. I decided I would tackle this “problem” in isolation, at home or in the confidential room of a therapist's office, the only safe havens for me to reveal my guarded thoughts and feelings of shame. I was not prepared to trust anybody else with my secrets. The idea of a room full of strangers, themselves too sick to understand my special problems, left me feeling scared, queasy. I was, after all, “terminally unique.”

My increasing dependence upon compulsive sexual activities – namely surfing the internet for pornography -- to numb my soul made it clear that I could not trust myself to give up acting out on my own. While my doctor helped me to uncover the origins of my acting out behavior, therapy did not remedy my

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obsession entirely. Ironically enough, my own doctor is the one who encouraged me to try SCA. In response to my expressed desire for privacy, he reminded me that I did not have to speak at all if I decided to remain silent. I was perfectly free to merely sit and listen to other people's stories. Having been in AA for several years, I had already experienced the value of listening to others' stories while at the same time guarding my own anonymity. Finally, my defenses weakened, I became willing to dip into this new 12-step group.

After months of poking around on the Internet for information about the sex recovery community, I managed to find a meeting close to where I lived, and it happened to be convening that very evening. As I started my car, I heard voices trying to talk me out of going. "Those people are sick." "You're not like them." "They'll never understand you." Eventually, the voices turned into images playing out in my head – I saw a room full of hostile addicts, sweaty trolls, and lusty old men. Was I sure I wanted to hear what these people had to say? I was ambivalent at best. Yet my awareness of being unable to face another year of acting out encouraged me to face my fears. "I don't have to say anything," I kept reminding myself. "And I can leave anytime I want."

I arrived at the building and walked into the meeting, where I was greeted by a gentleman who himself had just started attending sexual recovery meetings several weeks earlier. An attractive younger man who had been attending for several years appeared next, and after watching him take some notebooks out of a cabinet, I decided he was some kind of group leader. A few more people showed up, and the meeting began with the Serenity Prayer. So far, no one had shone a spotlight on me. And soon the introductions started; I managed to state my name out loud with my voice cracking only just a bit. Why did I feel so nervous? I acted like a young kid attending a new school for the first time, staring at everyone, wondering who was going to laugh at me first.

The group leader then announced it was time for a feelings check in. "A feelings check in?" I gasped silently. "What were they running here, a 12-step meeting or a group therapy session?" I silently fumed while raising serious objections in my mind. I was not keen on the idea of telling strange new people how I was feeling. And so I resolved to fake my way through this uncomfortable ritual. I said I was feeling nervous but hopeful. And it was okay. Nobody knew the deeper feelings I was covering up. After we finished reading the AA Big Book and SCA pamphlets, our sharing time began. I listened as others told their stories.

The people who shared didn't sound sick, or perverted, or self-righteous, or overly disturbed. And they didn't sound like freaks either. The only thing they seemed to have in common was their distress. Instead of being repulsed, I felt a

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sense of compassion toward them. I started to grow conscious of a feeling that had lingered inside of me my whole life, an emptiness that I was now able to identify as lack of compassion for my own feelings. I had gone round in circles for years beating myself up about my shameful sexual compulsion and then escaping from the shame into long periods of denial. Now these people were helping set the stage for me to unlock a door that could release me from a lifetime of shame and isolation.

Surprisingly, the words came easily as I recounted my years of suffering and how this disease seemed to have robbed me of the better part of three decades of my life. I shared openly about my arrest for public indecency, about all of the time I had lost surfing the Internet for hundreds of thousands of images, the risks I had taken with my sexual behavior, and the all-consuming power of my urges and inclinations. To my surprise, not one single person flinched. No one judged. No one left the room in disgust. Everyone around me listened knowingly as I briefly told my story, and their faces all held the same look of acceptance when I was through. Their eyes seemed to say, "Yes. We know. We've been there, and we're glad you're here." "Thank you for sharing," they chimed in unison, as I finished and the next person introduced himself in preparation for his own story.

And for the first time in my life, I felt part of a very meaningful chain of events. My fear slowly vanished, and I was pleased with the outcome. I stood in a circle and held hands with the members while we all re-affirmed the Serenity Prayer in closing the meeting. Afraid? Not anymore, but every time a newcomer walks into the room, I remember how scared I was that first time. And more vividly I remember how good I felt afterward, how accepted I felt, and how self-accepting I had become in the space of one hour. Now I reach my hand out to newcomers, not to still their fears, but to welcome them to a new and rewarding way of life.

Ron K.

Keep Coming Back... No Matter What

Born in 1946, I am the youngest of 13 children - 7 girls, 6 boys. Both parents are deceased. I grew up in a home with lots of violence and abuse, physical, verbal, sexual. I myself was sexually abused by my alcoholic father. Early on I learned to isolate to find a safe quiet place. Masturbation began at a young age.

I struggled with my sexual identity through my teens and early 20's. I was attending a Catholic seminary college and when I told a priest I thought I was gay, he told me I wasn't! ...End of discussion. I tried hard not to be, and that

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was crazy! But finally accepted it (after being suicidal) when I was 25. During that time I had gone from masturbation and pornography to sex in public places, hours of cruising, voyeurism, exhibitionism, lots of tricking and one night stands, sex in bath houses and backroom bars, you name it. I placed myself in harm's way on innumerable times.

I entered my relationship with my current (and only real) partner in 1976. Sex with him was incredibly hot, so in some ways I think that part of the attraction was my addiction. From the first day of our relationship, I acted out. At that time I just thought that I was liberated and was going to have an open relationship (though that is NOT what my partner wanted), so I was always leading this double life. My self esteem got worse and worse. I would pledge fidelity, and then act out. Pledge fidelity, act out. Over and over. Finally we quit talking about it, and I established a pattern of acting out with others only when out of town... usually every six weeks or so.

During my 30's and 40's my drinking started getting to be a problem. I got into fine wines and the best of scotches, along with beer. By 1983 I was already suspecting that I was an alcoholic, but I tried to control my drinking, or hide it is a better word. I remember going to one or two AA meetings, feeling frightened when I was told I needed to get a sponsor, bought the Big Book and decided to work the program on my own. I actually thought that I had done exactly that. In one month I worked all 12 steps, I was sober, and I wasn't acting out (though I still didn't have that language). The AA Big Book says if you think you aren't an alcoholic, then go back out and experiment.... Regrettably, I did, and the disease really heightened before I got back into the program some years later.

In 1990 my partner's mother who was only 60 years old, died from complications due to her alcoholism. It was a horrible death. I left town for a convention with my boss and a coworker (both of them are Catholic nuns). We were in Baltimore. I was drinking something fierce, staying out late into the morning hours, bringing people to my room and going home with others. It was awful! I didn't attend any of the conference, but pretended I did, and kept prowling around through back entrances to avoid my colleagues.

I came home and went to Mass that Sunday. The Bible reading was about Love of God, Neighbor and Self. I cried through the rest of the Mass as I realized that I absolutely did NOT love myself! On Monday my partner and I went out to eat. He asked more about the trip, and I told him I thought I had a drinking problem. I told him I had gone to bars and got drunk (but nothing about the going home with others). I got into AA and counseling.

Four years into AA I realized I was sober, but was still acting out sexually. I had heard people talk about sex addiction but didn't believe it was real.

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("Duh...") As I worked the steps in AA, I began to see that I did have an addiction to sex. At that time there was no meeting here, but when I was out of town I would go to SLAA meetings. Finally I think I saw an ad that just said Sexual Compulsives Anonymous and a phone number. I called, went to a meeting (which ironically enough was in what had been the XXX rated films room of a former gay video store). I got a sponsor and began working the program. I still have this same sponsor. What an absolute gift he is. And that seems really weird, having a straight man as a sponsor when I had thought that all straight men were homophobic. Yet it is this man who taught me to accept myself as I am and to love myself unconditionally as he loves me that way.

It took me a couple of years in the program and counseling to muster the courage to tell my partner about the addiction. During that time my progress was two steps forward, three back. Sobriety, slip, slip, sobriety, sobriety, etc. The year after I told my partner, I probably slipped only 3 times, and always got right back up. However, my SO and I never talked about the addiction: I think he was lulled into a sense of safety because of my very positive record of working my AA program and not drinking, so he figured I was working my program and not having sex outside the relationship.

Whenever I get under stress my pattern has been to stop taking care of myself and stop working the program, so when that would happen, I would find myself acting out. Only now I had learned to use pay-for-sex so that I didn't have to waste time cruising or being in bars. That was a real trap because I was seeing these hot young guys who would have never given me the time of the day if I weren't paying them for it. It was also after getting into the program that I started facing childhood abuse that I had denied ever existed. I did make progress. There were times when I would go out of town and NOT act out, but attend meetings, call my sponsor, etc.

In Spring of 2000, I told my counselor that I was upset that my S.O. and I were not growing in intimacy, that we were unable to talk, and that our relationship was becoming like that of roommates, not life partners. I knew that I was going to have to tell him about the acting out (at least in general terms), etc., etc. Of course, I just knew he would abandon me, that the relationship would be over, that I'd be out of his life and out of the relationship forever, and that then I'd kill myself. Yes, I do love drama! That kind of attitude didn't help me move closer to telling him, rather it was a perfect set up for acting out.... and guess what: I was about to go back to the same city where I had been on a 3 day binge in 1990.... here it was 10 years later.... what would I do?

Looking back I can see how I set myself up for a recurrence of 10 years before, just with no booze. And -surprise! Surprise! - My addict had a wonderful time. I came back home and basically abandoned the program for a while and was

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getting deeper and deeper into more risky behavior and more humiliating and shame-producing behavior. I was actually considering and fantasizing more and more about giving up my home, my job, my life to become someone's S & M slave 24/7. WOW! I have no idea how I got saved from that. I was really on a downward slide.

Getting picked back up was really hard. At times I just wouldn't care. I might get two weeks of sobriety, but that was it. And I did break off the S&M relationship... mostly out of fear. I also kept seeing the counselor and gradually got better. We were talking in November about what I needed to say to my partner. I was dragging my feet.

I had been using the computer at home to download certain pics and to locate guys into S&M, etc. My S.O. saw the evidence. It made him wonder. He started exploring sex addiction sites. He began to understand the nature of the addiction more. He was also hurting, knowing that I wasn't being honest with him, hurting too knowing that I was in pain but not talking about it.

One morning in December 2000, he told me we had to talk about the elephant in our living room.

"Shit!" I thought, "I've been uncovered!" but I also felt, "Whew, what a relief! I don't have to go on lying."

Anyway, from December 22 till late March 2001, I was clean and sober from my bottom line: no sex outside my relationship. Then stress hit again, and I started acting out again.

In May 2001, my partner and I were in a foreign country celebrating our 25th anniversary. He had again found that I had been visiting web sites that were inappropriate for me, and that I had created a false sexually -intense identity on another provider.

Looking over the Gulf of Naples, I knew it was time for me to quit. He told me that he would only stay with me if I became serious about not acting out, and really learned to live a day at a time. I acted out two times in August. And through the grace of God and the fellowship of the program, only once since. For me this is a miracle!

And that's pretty much my story to date.

The one thing that I am proudest about in my recovery is that I have kept coming back, no matter what... I see that as having remained faithful to the

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goal and direction in which I am going. For me, progress not perfection has become more than a motto.

Today I am sober because I am taking it one day at a time.

This really is a program of progress not perfection and of more being revealed. It is a program of learning how to live one's life in balance. It is a program in which many lessons are learned.

I have learned that I am unconditionally loved. I learned that first with my sponsor. He never gave up on me, and sometimes it seems as if I was giving him plenty of reason to do so. I came to believe in a God of mercy and love and forgiveness who is very unlike the God of Vengeance and Condemnation of my childhood. Later I learned to love myself unconditionally, to accept myself as being a good person even if I am a flawed person with many imperfections. I have learned that I have many good qualities too. I have learned to be honest, to try to stay in the present and feel feelings. I have learned that feelings are not facts. I have learned how much I really love my partner and how much he really loves me. I have learned that I am an OK guy.

My relationship today with my partner is incredibly wonderful (most days!)... I finally have someone I can be intimate with in all ways. He's not my therapist or my sponsor, so he doesn't hear everything... but I think I am actually regaining his trust, and hopefully someday his forgiveness. I know he loves me after all we have been through and I love him.

I don't count sobriety days because it really has to be one day at a time for me. And yesterday's sobriety means nothing if I act out today. I acted out once between summer and February 2002. My next slip was a year and a half later, in the fall of last year. For me, that is a miracle! Sometimes I have gotten very close to the edge and the only thing that saved me was HP, but the more I work my program on a continuing (and mostly consistent basis) and the more that I am honest with myself about my feelings and talk openly with my partner, the easier it becomes.

I am enjoying this journey of self-discovery and am meeting some wonderful people whom I would never have met - folks who are part of my recovery life and who enrich me in many ways.

3/17/97 with updates on 1/01/01,4/24/01,9/06/01,11/5/01,12/31/01, 2/13/02, 3/24/04

Tom B.

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My First Year...

My path to SCA started years ago.

I was abused as a child from a family member, not encouraged in sharing my needs or feelings. The only real attention I received was when I got in trouble in school. Otherwise I was nearly invisible or at least I felt that way. I longed for girl friend when I was a teenager but low self-esteem was a major roadblock. Who would want me?

I masturbated to relieve the anxiety and my self-loathing.

Yet, I was popular in high school, was on the baseball team, engaged in student government and civic affairs. A paradox? Perhaps.

I went to college, did drugs and still spent countless hours engaging in sexual fantasy. I got involved in relationships that became love obsessions. I fell in love with unreachable women, women who could never live up to my unrealistic expectations. I eventually did get married but my marriage grew sour pretty quickly.

I acted out with other women and when I got caught said it would never happen again. But it did. I lived in the Internet world, becoming aware of new sexual frontiers. This road was fueled by pornography, countless hours of sexual fantasy. I found solace in Internet sex, phone sex, meeting nameless people for a tryst and then pretending it never happened.

The story may sound familiar to sex addicts but I did not know I was one.

Fast forward to the almost present.

I met a woman who loved me, accepted me and it was pretty clear there was a future together. The sex we shared was intimate, wonderful and full of life. You would think I finally found the golden ring.

I am sure you can figure it out that this was not enough. I acted out as much as I could. Despite getting caught again and again, swearing I saw the light, my promises were empty.

As any addict knows, hitting your bottom line behavior comes in different venues. Whatever it was, the realization finally came that you better do something about it.

Through a series of events, I finally went to an SCA meeting in November 2003.

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Like most, I did not know what to expect. The program members were polite, welcoming and non judgmental. I shared at that first meeting and have never failed to share in any meeting since.

It took me 6 months to come up with a sex plan, and a little longer to find a sponsor. I am still working on my first step.

How has program changed me?

I am presently sober for over 6 months; do not engage in sexual encounters outside of the relationship. I share my thoughts with my fiancé; let her know what I am feeling and what I need. I do not always agree with her but I let her know that.

I take care of myself and acknowledge when I need help. I have a good active relationship with my sponsor. Before the program, I would spend wasted hours engaging in the search for sexual activity.

Am I perfect? Of course not.

Will I slip? Hopefully not but with the help of my higher power and the program's tools. I believe it becomes less likely every day. I plan to get married in the summer of 2005. Without the support of the program I would never have been even close to this. My relationship would never have lasted this long.

I do not think my change of behavior is just pure luck.

I thank all the members of SCA for their continued support.

It is true; you need to keep coming back.

Frank G.

By the grace of God, 2 years, 2 months, 18 days free from acting out.

To the newcomer:

Welcome to SCA, welcome home. I would like to take a moment to share with you my experience, strength and hope. A little bit of what I learned along the way.

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When I came to the SCA site I had lived in active addiction for about 25 years. I started acting out at about 8 years of age, and started recovery at 33. In those 25 years I had sworn off sex hundreds of times. Countless times throwing out my stash. Countless times cleaning out my hard drive. Countless times trying to turn my life over to God. And each and every time I meant it from the very bottom of my heart. I really, truly, meant it. And each time I failed. Sometimes I lasted a few days and other times I lasted a few hours, but each time I failed.

Then one day I read "Lucky Man" by Michael J. Fox. It is a biography of sorts, both about his life as an actor and also his life as an addict. (I feel that I can use his name in within the spirit of anonymity since he has "come out" in his book.) Finally it all made sense. I would like to think that I could make it make sense for you the way that he made it make sense for me, but I suspect that my writing style is lacking in this regard. There were two themes in his book that really sung to my heart: A – the bill pile and B – trading recovery for Parkinson's disease.

The bill pile; I know that well. I know bills. I knew unpaid bills. I knew overdraft notices. I knew late fees. I knew calls from bill collectors. I just didn't get that the bill pile was connected to my addiction. It seems so obvious now. See, in step one we admit that our lives are unmanageable. Not just our sex (or substitute the addiction of choice) lives, our whole lives were unmanageable. My eating was out of whack, my checkbook was out of whack, my family life was out of whack, my work was out of whack, my whole life was in shambles and I never knew why. I make a professional wage, not getting rich by any means, but I am above the statistics for average income. Why in the world would a person with a professional wage and above average income be getting late notices from the dentist with "120+" circled in red marker? Why would I only balance my checkbook after the overdraft notices came? Why would I react with fear and stress each and every time that I would get the mail, often leaving the mail in the box of days so that I would not have to look at the over draft notices? What kind of logic was that? Why would I be \$20,000 into credit card type debt and still be 90+ days over due to everyone who had ever made the mistake of granting me credit? Finally in reading "Lucky Man" it clicked that my addiction was causing my irresponsibility and by licking the addiction I could lick the bill pile. And I have.

Trading recovery for Parkinson's disease. This floored me. Parkinson's disease is an evil, horrible disease where the future is known and the body fails and the mind is still sharp and it just doesn't seem to get much worse than that to me. Michael J. Fox told me (and everyone else who would read his book) that he would rather have his disease and his recovery than to be Parkinson's free and back in his drinking days. Ponder that for just a moment...the miracle of recovery really is that profound. Recently at a local meeting I heard an addict

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say that they would gladly give up recovery to have a deceased pet back. Not me. As I write this I am unable to come up with the words to communicate how much my recovery means to me. Finally, I can look the world in the eye for who I am. Finally, I am not slinking around adult bookstores wondering if I am going to catch a disease from the filth on the seats. Finally, I can be a good father to my children. Finally, I do not need to worry about my wife finding my stash. Finally, I do not need to worry about people who I have acted out with ruining my reputation. Finally, I know true confession and forgiveness. Finally, I can go on a business trip and not try to trump up the expense report to cover acting out expenses. Finally, I can go on a trip and not search the web for acting out opportunities. Finally I know God and I know recovery and I am learning to know myself.

I have been in recovery long enough to know that there are winners and losers at recovery. The winners are the ones who keep coming back.

Peace,
Randy S.

Over 13 Years...

I went to my first SCA meeting almost 20 years ago in May of 1985 and have been sober on my sex plan over 13 years since July 22, 1991. In the 6 years it took to stop acting out, I learned a lot about sexual addiction. Since then I've discovered much more about the never-ending process of recovery. There are no experts in our program. I'm a fallible human being suffering from sexual addiction like everybody else. However I have some opinions about the key to long-term sobriety that I formed along the way.

FELLOWSHIP is one of the most important factors in my recovery. I couldn't have maintained sobriety all these years without helping others to stay sober. It has saved my life at every step of the process. When I was new, I was fortunate enough to have Hunt B. as a sponsor. He had 11 years sobriety in AA and was using his experience to support SCA in Los Angeles. At that time, we had only 2 meetings a week. Hunt believed that he couldn't stay sober without a meeting a day so he directed all his sponsees to help start meetings every day of the week. He thought no meeting was complete without fellowship afterwards and told us to always invite the newcomers. He often felt that more healing took place one-on-one over a cup of coffee than in a meeting where you could isolate in the anonymity of the group.

Right from the beginning, Hunt made me take service commitments at several meetings and always invite someone to fellowship. I had a lot of resistance. My

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sexual addiction had isolated me for so long that people made me very uncomfortable, I didn't know how to act or what to say. I also thought that I was too busy to go to a meeting every day or block out enough time to include fellowship. Both objections were just my addict trying to keep me isolated and away from my recovery.

After a while, I was so busy helping others stay sober that it became harder to act out myself. I have an addict brain that is very self-destructive - it would have killed me long ago if my body had let it. Service commitments at meetings, taking newcomers to fellowship, making outreach calls to others in pain, volunteering for inter-group, conventions and retreats got me out of my disease. They forced me to show up no matter how rotten my addiction made me feel. They kept the sexual obsession and the underlying depression at bay long enough for sobriety to begin to take hold.

STEPS have been essential to my long-term sobriety. When I was new, I thought working the steps were like homework and graduation from high school. You buy a book, like "Gentle Path Through the Twelve Steps" or "Hope and Recovery Workbook", complete the suggested writing, and then move on to the next Step. When you finish all twelve, you get to stay sober, find a boyfriend and move on with your life.

Today I realize that no matter how long I'm sober, I'll always be an addict. I see the steps as tools for living that provide a daily reprieve from sex addiction. They're a way of life that helps me deal with the mental/emotional distress caused by my underlying spiritual disease. As a result, I believe that it's never too early to start using the steps and you don't need to have mastery to benefit from giving it a try. The steps are in a specific order because each step builds upon the one before. Formally working the steps taught me how they worked and got me started, but like any other tool, you learn by doing and get better with practice over time. Whether you're a newcomer or old-timer, we all face the same issues:

Motivation (step 1) is a process I go through with every problem I have. I'm never willing to try new actions until the discomfort of old actions become intolerable. Surrender (steps 2/3) helps my pervasive fear of coping with the world. Turning it over provides support to tolerate change, the unknown and life on life's terms. Examination (steps 4/5) is essential to break through rationalization and look at what's really going on in my life. Unless I get a reality check from someone else, I'm susceptible to self-delusion and beating myself up. Action (steps 6/7) is inherent to changing my experience. If I just continue the same old conduct, I get the same old results and nothing ever changes. Accountability (steps 8/9/10) is required to be part of the human community. If I don't clean up my mistakes, how will I earn a living, build

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friendships, keep a boyfriend or get my needs met. Direction (step 11) is essential to maintain a fit spiritual condition and grow as a human being. I must expand my connection to a Higher Power for guidance and strength to develop and mature. Service (step 12) is vital to stay out of my self-centered disease. I need to practice these principles and help others to keep my own recovery.

Today, I believe that each Step represents a fundamental shift in thought, attitude and belief. Worksheets, workbooks and writing assignments are tools to facilitate this growth, but completing them does not mean that you have made the basic change embodied in each step. I can write sex histories until my fingers cramp up, but they're useless when the insanity hits and I forget why I shouldn't act out. I can write descriptions of my Higher Power and recite the Third Step Prayer till I'm blue in the face, but they won't make me trust when fear rises up to shred my faith. I can write inventories and list all the character defects I could find, but until I let go of the pay-off behind each behavior, things will always stay the same. I have found each step is a process that takes however long it takes, and is never really complete.

SPONSORSHIP helped me be more honest with myself and more willing to use the steps. After I got sober, I was squarely confronted with all the things I'd been avoiding by acting out. I had no choice but to work a program and change the reasons why I needed to act out in the first place.

Unfortunately dishonesty and self will were the biggest hurdles I had to face in working the steps. I had denied, minimized, rationalized and justified my beliefs and behaviors for so long that it was hard to be honest with myself. I had hung on to control for so long that it was hard to submit to the program, take direction from my sponsor and surrender to a Higher Power. My sponsor would often give feedback that didn't make sense or make suggestions that I didn't want to do.

But when another addict called with exactly the same problem, his insane thinking was obvious and the course of action called for in the steps made perfect sense. I would see myself in him and realize that I had the same thinking and had to take the same actions. I was blind to my own disease, but could see it reflected in another person's experience. In addition, I have never been able to consistently abstain from any harmful behavior because it was good for me. I have however been able to abstain because it would have felt ridiculous or hypocritical to help someone to avoid an activity, and then go do it myself.

Another big hurdle I had to face was complacency. I couldn't get sober without hitting bottom and it was impossible to stay sober unless I remembered the pain and suffering of those final days. The longer I enjoyed sobriety, the harder it was to remember the torment and misery my addiction will cause. As my life

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changed, compulsive sex was replaced with things like hobbies, career, relationship, friends and family. It became difficult to get to meetings, call my sponsor, help the newcomer, set aside time in the morning for prayer and meditation, or remember who was really running the show.

Without unmanageability from acting out, I forgot I was powerless and wasn't as motivated to surrender and work the program. Pretty soon my daily reprieve started running out, I'd consider gray area behaviors, and my life would get rather ragged around the edges. The only thing that saved me from complacency was Sponsorship. My Higher Power can't help when self-will decides to take back control and the insanity justifies my behavior. Fortunately, sponsees would call in pain from acting out, or struggling to stay sober. Helping them reminded me of my own powerlessness, and refreshed my memory of the grief and suffering caused by anonymous sex. It broke through my denial about gray area behaviors and kept me honest about my own abstinence.

Keep it Simple has been a cornerstone of my sobriety. During my first 6 years in program, I tried everything to fix the disease. I attended individual therapy, group therapy and read every book on recovery that I could find. I went to sex addiction treatment with Patrick Carnes at Golden Valley, love addiction treatment with Pia Melody at The Meadows and codependency treatment at Hoag Hospital. I took all the newest anti-depressants like they were going out of style. I studied "A Course in Miracles with Mary-Ann Williamson, did guided meditations with Louise Hays, and attended anger workshops with John Bradshaw. I even tried acupuncture, re-birthing, herbs, aerobics, affirmations, "The Artist's Way", and neural linguistic programming. No matter what I did, I just couldn't seem to stay sober.

After hitting bottom, I had a complete collapse of self-will and stopped trying to run my own recovery. I got a new sponsor who limited my efforts to following direction from the AA Big Book and Twelve and Twelve. Through them, I learned that my disease is very simple. It attacks me physically - I don't react to sexual situations like normal people; they create a craving for more I can't deny no matter how bad the consequences. It attacks me mentally - from time to time I am temporarily insane and it makes perfect sense to act out; I am without defense against the first slip. It attacks me spiritually - I'm selfish, self-centered, and suffer debilitating fears that lead to anger and resentments toward others or guilt and shame about myself; inevitably life gets so uncomfortable I must relieve the pressure by acting out.

The treatment for my physical disease is to stay very active in the fellowship. As long as I'm constantly helping someone else to stay sober, survive withdrawal, or work the program, I'm less susceptible to putting myself in situations where I might act out. The treatment for my mental disease is to work

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the steps. When I run my resentments, fears and shame through the steps, I end up choosing different actions and getting different results; I act myself into better thinking, the emotions follow, and sanity returns. The treatment for my spiritual disease is to surrender to my higher power and get out of myself through sponsorship. When I pray, meditate and turn my thoughts to helping others, it gets me out of my self-centered fears. I become more open to trusting God and able to put my problems in perspective.

This union of mental, physical and spiritual recovery is symbolized in the emblem Bill Wilson adopted for AA. The triangle within a circle is an ancient spiritual image, representing the unity of mind, body and spirit. Bill recognized that it took the combination of recovery of the mind (steps), unity of the body (fellowship), and surrender of self through service (sponsorship) to heal from alcoholism. When I simplified my program to focus on the fundamentals, long-term sobriety became possible. Other tools like therapy and medication were helpful to my recovery, but they were powerless over keeping me sober.

I have come to see my recovery as a 3-legged stool: each leg of fellowship, steps and sponsorship supports the seat of my sobriety. If I shorten a leg, my sobriety gets wobbly and my recovery falls apart. Sometimes I've worked the steps and kept in touch with sponsees, but life got so full that I cut back on meetings. Pretty soon I started to feel isolated, more needy in relationships and constantly thinking about sex. Other times I have attended meetings and helped sponsees, but got careless about using the steps. It wasn't long before I was constantly resentful, full of fear, and beating myself up. I have also been at meetings and used the steps, but stopped sponsoring newcomers. Soon I became self centered and focused on problems, my sobriety suffered and serenity slipped away.

After 20 years, I regard my sexual addiction as a chronic condition like diabetes. As long as the diabetic takes his insulin he can live as a normal person. When he skips a dose, he gets sick. If he stops the medication he can die from diabetic shock. As long as I stay active in the fellowship, work the steps, and sponsor newcomers, I can live like a normal person. If I cut back on meetings, get lazy about the steps, or too busy for sponsees, my disease gets worse. If I quit working a program, my addiction could progress to death from AIDS, suicide over emotions, or the living death of chronic depression. I view the combination therapy of fellowship, steps and sponsorship as "insulin for the sex addict". Just like a diabetic, I can maintain my sobriety and serenity to the extent I keep taking my medication.

Peter C.

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15 ½ Years...

When I was first introduced to the Fellowship in 1988, it was unbelievable to me that I could stay sober for 5 minutes. As I started attending meetings and began listening to others who had accepted their sexual compulsion, I began to realize the exact nature of my problem. With the help of a sponsor, I wrote a sexual recovery plan and, with very few changes, it is the same plan that I have today. After three relapses into sexually compulsive behavior in my first year and a half, my sponsor said, "If you don't begin to take your sobriety in SCA as seriously as you take your sobriety in AA, I don't hold out much hope for you." It was that statement, along with the Grace from a Higher Power that enabled me to surrender my power over sexually compulsive behavior. I have been sober ever since, a period of 15 ½ years.

What has helped me to want to stay sober for all these years? I am a steady meeting attendee who believes in the concept of the "home group". I prefer "structured meetings", Step, Topic, etc. to the more general type of meeting where everything is discussed. I also attend meetings where attendees are not hesitant to give feedback to each other. I have a sponsor to whom I give permission to take my inventory. It has been my experience that God talks to me through other people. I actively sponsor other sex addicts, giving me the opportunity to learn from their experience. I am very involved in Service. Without this Fellowship, I would be in serious trouble. It is my responsibility to contribute to the longevity of SCA so that others may be able to find what I have found.

I had no idea when I joined SCA that I would receive so much more than abstinence from sexually compulsive behavior. The Promises have definitely come to be part of my life. The Steps have become my philosophy of life. They help me to stay sober, but I really work them, because I am sober. It is only because I am sober and active in the Fellowship attending meetings, sponsoring and being sponsored, and doing service, that I am able to regularly work out at the gym, a place that, before sobriety, was an acting out place for me. Also, I love to swim and surf at a beach where there is occasional acting out. Now that I am sober for a long time, I am able to frequent this venue without it being a threat to my sobriety. I am able to have a computer in my home only because I am sober.

The most important benefit of having long- term sobriety is that I am able to be me for the first time in my life. I am dependent only on a Higher Power from whom I have received the gift of life on a daily basis.

Joe S.

21 Years of Sobriety

By long-term sobriety I mean that I've been on my plan for 21 years. I have had a variety of recovery plans. My last plan, which has been in operation for the last 19 years, is quite simply sex within my monogamous relationship. All of my plans have been very simple and none was written down. My first plan, "sex in a bed" was not subject to any confusion. My plan over the next few years changed a number of times and allowed a varying range of sexual activity and restrictions on some of that activity.

There are a number of issues that arise for me as someone who has been around since the beginning. The first is that of sponsorship. At the beginning no one sponsored anyone since no one had any experience. As time wore on, I recall that I did have a sponsor for a time, but he later left the program and I didn't replace him. I haven't had a sponsor in many years. I do have a co-sponsor, but we really don't make much use of one another. This isn't a lack I felt particularly strongly until recently, since I spoke with other long-time members of SCA about issues as they would arise and in some sense they took the place of a sponsor.

However, recently, becoming unemployed, I have had time to attend a lot more meetings and have become interested in a more focused review of step work for myself. I have begun to reconsider the need for a sponsor. I have made contact with someone whom I knew from national service work and whose sobriety I admired, and agreed to speak with him at least once a week. This may result in my eventually asking him to be my sponsor, but for the moment is an action aiming in the direction of step-work guidance.

Although a concept of God is not really a function of the length of sobriety it is something worth mentioning. I don't have a concept of God. I came into the program as an atheist, and continued throughout the years as an atheistic Buddhist. I believe in grace and certainly don't believe that of my own accord I would or could have let go of alcohol, cigarettes, or my sexual acting. But on the other hand, I don't think someone or something out there had a hand in making this happen. I was given grace but no one gave it to me. This is how I see it. And once I was given this grace it was up to me to act in accord with it, one day at a time.

Since God appears in quite a few of the steps, I cannot always make a literal interpretation of their meaning. And for the most part I haven't made an explicit effort to verbalize the meaning some of these steps have for me. For example, "humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings." Well certainly I would like the grace of at least some of my shortcomings being reduced, so I can express a wish that these shortcomings be lifted. And I can pray that they be lifted and

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believe that prayer is efficacious, but still don't believe that any divine being is going to take some action. Rather I believe that the prayer sort of combines asking for help and indicating a willingness to change. It is certainly paradoxical to ask for help and yet believe that the help comes from "within." I have to say that I have a long way to go in trying to understand all of this.

Service work has formed an important part of my recovery process. For the most part I like doing these things that at the same time helped keep me sober and helped the program to persist and to grow. I think my most consistent service has been sticking around and believing it was going to work, even when there was only one meeting a week, and maybe only one or two other people at the meeting. But I have also enjoyed participating in the creation of New York Intergroup, the establishment of ISO (the International Service Organization) and the beginnings of the Interfellowship Forum (an annual meeting to discuss the commonalities of the "S" programs). Nowadays, my service tends to be more on the meeting level, since I have for the most part withdrawn from the larger picture, at least for the time being.

Over the course of the years, I've sponsored a number of people. Some of these sponsorships have lasted for a long time. Others have been fairly short-term. Most have been amicable. Some have been tempestuous. Overall I have benefited greatly from the sponsoring that I have done. They say that in all teaching, it is the teacher who learns the most. It is certain that I have benefited a great deal from what sponsoring I've been given to do.

Another factor in having a long time on my plan (I don't necessarily equate this with long-term sobriety) is the delusion that I should therefore have it all together and that it would be scandalous to let members younger in the program know the issues I continue to face. On the other hand, I also am often not able to see the sobriety I actually do have, the useful things I do have to offer, being prone to look at the dark side of things.

Still and all, I'm proud that I have, through grace and my own work, been able to stay on my plan for all this time. I know that there is always much more work to be done.

Frank, NYC

Creativity in Recovery

" The Addict "

Remorsefully speak,
"Never again" -- A promise
You could never keep.

Cast the wretched freak,
Who is your self -- hurl it down
In the pit to weep.

Sapient

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The Twelve Suggested Steps of SCA

1. We admitted we were powerless over sexual compulsion -- that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, *as we understood God*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood God*, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sexually compulsive people and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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The Twelve Traditions of SCA

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon SCA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one authority -- a loving God as may be expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for SCA membership is a desire to stop having compulsive sex.
4. Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or SCA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the sexual compulsive who still suffers.
6. An SCA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the SCA name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SCA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Sexual Compulsives Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SCA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. SCA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SCA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, television and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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The SCAnner is meant to serve as a forum for SCA members who want to share their experience, strength and hope with other members. This is particularly useful for those who may be isolated or cannot reach a meeting easily or regularly. Your contributions and comments are greatly encouraged, and always sincerely invited. Please send your contributions to SCAnnereditor@sca-recovery.org or The SCAnner, c/o SCA NY, P.O. Box 1585 Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10011.

The next issue of the SCAnner will be published in the winter of 2005-2006. The topic will be “Disclosure of Sexual Compulsion: Who, What, When, How and Why?” Share your Experience, Strength and Hope with other members:

- **How have you disclosed your addiction?**
- **Who needs to know (and who doesn't)?**
- **How have you told your partners, husband or wife?**
- **Do we tell our children?**
- **And how do we do it?**

Please send your submissions as soon as possible for a deadline of November 1, 2005.

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