

Gentle Currents



The Newsletter for People Recovering from Sex and Love Addiction



SLAA Helpline (727) 896-SLAA February 2016 TampaBaySLAA.com

The Promises: 2. We will begin to feel dignity and respect for ourselves

The Rewards: 2. Faith instead of despair.

Tom's Story

All my adult life I've sought and craved for intimacy with women without being aware that I was also scared to death of intimacy. After a string of unsuccessful and painful attempts at creating a lasting intimate relationship, I finally found myself, in my late thirties, "knocking at the door" of S.L.A.A. When I came into S.L.A.A. I had no real expectations of what the recovery process would hold for me. I only knew that I couldn't keep roaming from one falling-in-love experience to the next. I was weary of looking to women for companionship, sustenance, and salvation and always ending up disappointed. What I found in S.L.A.A. was a strong community of men that supported and nurtured me. For a man who had had only a couple of close friendships with men in his adult life (neither of which lasted more than a few months), it was great to discover this unexpected source of intimacy. After a time in S.L.A.A. I recognized the difference between sexual and emotional intimacy, and I welcomed the opportunity to experience and practice emotional intimacy with the new men in my life. I found that by creating a temporary boundary around sex, I could concentrate on the emotional issues that brought me into S.L.A.A. I had always confused sex with love, and I realized that working out intimacy issues with men in my life could serve as a training ground for creating intimacy with a woman. I learned that sexual intimacy was not a solid foundation for a healthy relationship.

And that brings me to my relationship with Ann. I had known Ann since my second month in recovery. I had pretty clear boundaries with women, so I was able to acknowledge her as a fellow member in recovery, but in our early acquaintance, I did not attempt any kind of relationship with her. Through hearing and respecting each other's shares, though, after five or six months we did become friends in a relaxed way. I had no expectations for our friendship because of my boundaries. I knew that I could not sustain a romantic relationship with a woman, so at that time there wasn't any point in attempting anything other than a friendship. However, in our friendship I noticed two significant things. First, I saw that we were able to weather and resolve conflicts through honesty and openness. And then after a time of getting closer as friends I realized another significant quality: I felt nurtured whenever I was with her.

After knowing her for nine months, I realized that I wanted a deeper relationship with her. Instead of jumping into a relationship based on physical/sexual attraction, it seemed healthy to me to consciously pursue a relationship based on an ability to communicate and create nurturing. I did not know at that time whether it was meant to be sexual or not, but I knew I could practice deeper emotional intimacy with her if nothing else.

So my decision to pursue this relationship was based on both a heart-felt desire and a conscious thought process. And I also prayed. I wasn't sure whether pursuing a relationship, no matter how healthy it seemed, and was the best thing for me to do. So I decided to take a prayerful step and trusted that, if this was not the best thing for me, then God would gently shut the door. I was open to either possibility because my emotional needs were getting met (mostly through my male friends), and finding a relationship with a woman, just for the sake of having a relationship, no longer seemed as important as it once was.

But, as it turned out, Ann was interested in pursuing a relationship with me. While I have been able to do some things differently in this relationship than in the past, (e.g. not making hasty decisions, letting it develop slowly, maintaining boundaries, etc.), I have to keep reminding myself that I am still in recovery. My issues in S.L.A.A. involve anorexia; in the past I had gotten involved in relationships very quickly, thinking that sexuality was intimacy.

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Forgiveness

All of us have struggled to find the best way to forgive ourselves and others. Forgiving isn't easy. In fact, when we've been deeply hurt or victimized by someone else, we may feel we can't forgive. Yet, for our own peace of mind and to let go, we may finally try. It's been suggested that forgiveness is easier under certain conditions: a positive connection with the person we want to forgive, a deep relationship with God as we understand God, and lots of time.

Forgiveness is often preceded by grieving fully; we must first heal from the harm that was done to us. In their honesty, power and wisdom, the Twelve Steps lead us gently through the process of forgiving ourselves and others. Many of us also experienced our Higher Power's unconditional forgiveness, which gives us a model. We acknowledge our responsibility for our actions, we let go of resentment, we grieve, and, finally we forgive.

Tom's Story (cont'd)

Because I did not have the skills or knowledge to develop and achieve emotional intimacy, each relationship was like a vacuum and collapsed in upon itself from the "weight" of what was repressed and unresolved in each of us. This has been the living legacy of my unhealthy family system, and I find that in relationships (with either men or women), I unconsciously seek to recreate my old family system of repression and emotional distance. These are issues that come up for me every day, and I believe that this current relationship can only be as healthy as each of our own individual recovery programs.

So I've learned that a relationship will not save me and that it can only sustain me to the degree that I can sustain myself through my relationships with God and with my recovery family. My issues are the same whether I'm building a relationship or not, and my individual recovery is just as important as it was before Ann and I started a relationship. Sometimes I've lost focus of my individual recovery, but I think that I've gained insights into my own recovery process

— a relationship can be a painfully accurate mirror. Fortunately, I have a recovery family that supports my re-creation of a new family system, and I'm grateful for both my recovery family and this relationship. They both give me ample opportunities (sometimes joyful, sometimes painful) to explore a new world of real intimacy.

Recovery Has Given Me a Life

My name is Bob and I am a grateful recovering sex and love addict.

The first years in elementary school were quite normal. I played exclusively with other boys and not much with little girls. Before I graduated fifth grade my family moved where I started junior high school. My grades were good but I was very shy thus I was not socializing with girls. After a year we moved again. This time the academics were more challenging and my grades began to slip from A's and B's to C's and D's. This affected my confidence in myself and made me withdraw when confronting girls. I felt unworthy and just plain stupid. I was playing sports and interacting only with boys.

When I started high school my family moved again. This time I was put in the accelerated curriculum. I failed miserably. I was failing many of my subjects. In my junior year I was put back into the regular academic classes. I barely graduated.

Recovery Has Given Me a Life (Cont'd)

My parents knew a prominent pharmacist. Only through his political pull was I able to attend college. I lasted just two years in college and once again failed. I played baseball and basketball while attending college but my failing grades couldn't justify any way to keep me in school. After college I was drafted into the Army but managed to keep out of the Army by enlisting in the Air Force.

There is more to my story than I have written so far but suffice it to say my life has been dull and uneventful. I have had sexual relations with women which I thought was intimacy. I realize now that it was only sex and there was no emotional intimacy. What I wanted was sex but what I needed was intimacy.

One night eight months ago my acting out on my worst bottom line behavior came to an abrupt end when I was arrested for taking indecent liberties (inappropriate touching) with women. I was taken to the police station and charged with simple assault and indecent assault. I spent that night in jail. All night long I prayed to God to help me, not knowing if God would listen to my pleas. I did not sleep that night. I felt quite alone.

When morning came I was released on my own recognizance. I did not have to post bail. I went straight to a lawyer and asked for help -not only for my legal defense but also for some counseling. He referred me to a psychotherapist who in turn told me about S.L.A.A.

I have been in S.L.A.A. for eight months. I have not acted out on my bottom line since that infamous night in jail. My first S.L.A.A. meeting, was a beginners meeting. I felt very nervous at that first meeting, suspicious of the people there and fearful they would judge me harshly for what I had done. This fear was quickly dispelled. As I listened to others sharing I knew this was the right environment that I needed. I could not believe people were so honest and open about their addiction. I felt so comfortable that I started sharing how I felt. I shared my pain about shame, guilt, anger and fear. I was ashamed of what I had done to the women I had victimized and fearful I would go to prison. I had cried out to God many times to help me. I was fearful God would not listen because I never believed in a Higher Power. Why would God help me now?

I prayed to God every day asking only for a chance to prove I can change. God listened to me. I was given six months' probation. When the six months are over my record will be expunged and I will have no criminal record. After hearing this I realized that God would help me if I'd let God and accept God. I am grateful for that.

I am studying the Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A. and working them to increase the quality of my sobriety. Eight months of sobriety is a long time, but just abstinence is not enough in this program. Only by living sober will I achieve quality recovery.

I have heard it said that service helps keep us sober. Service has kept me close and in daily contact with S.L.A.A. giving me the opportunity to give something back to the program. I have chaired many meetings, carried literature, served as treasurer and intergroup representative. In recovery I realize that I don't have to have sex to achieve intimacy with women. What is more important is to develop healthy friendships.

Before I realized this I had to forgive myself for what I had done in the past. When people in the program heard my story, they forgave me. God also forgave me and the woman who I victimized forgave me and wished me good luck in my therapy.



To forgive myself — that was difficult. Recovery is difficult. Recovery is not perfect. I am not perfect. But if I practice the principles of the Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A. in all areas of my life, I will be as good as I can be.

It is my hope that my article is published in the Journal so that beginners like myself, just coming into S.L.A.A., can read what a beginner feels. They can understand the pain, shame, guilt and fears they have suffered for so long are the same feelings I felt. In S.L.A.A. I found a refreshing, powerful, healthy program with knowledgeable, experienced, caring people.

Between legal fees and therapy I have spent a lot of money, but I had to do it. I have a sponsor who I consider my friend. I owe my emotional sobriety and spiritual awakening to this Twelve Step program and it didn't cost me a cent. When I was acting out my life was not life. When I stopped acting out I regained my sanity. When I regained some of my sanity God gave me courage to change the things I can.

S.L.A.A. has given me the tools. Recovery has given me a life.

-Bob

We are not always clear about what we are experiencing, or why.

In the midst of grief, transition, transformation, learning, healing, or discipline — it's difficult to have perspective.

That's because we have not learned the lesson yet. We are in the midst of it. The gift of clarity has not yet arrived.

Our need to control can manifest itself as a need to know exactly what's going on. We cannot always know. Sometimes, we need to let ourselves be and trust that clarity will come later, in retrospect.

If we are confused, that is what we are supposed to be. The confusion is temporary. We shall see. The lesson, the purpose, shall reveal itself — in time, in its own time*.

It will all make perfect sense — later.

SHARING THE STEPS

When: Saturday, February 27, 2016
Where: Unitarian Universalist Church (West Wing)
3975 Fruitville, Road
Sarasota, FL 34232

Cost: \$10.00 in advance or at door
Limited to 40 people

Schedule: 8:00-9:00 Coffee/Registration/Social
9:00-9:15 Opening Remarks
10:00-10:10 Speaker and Feedback
10:10-11:00 4th Step Experience
11:00-11:10 Break
11:10-12:15 Steps 8 & (and The Promises
12:15-12:30 Wrap Up, Lunch to follow (brownbag)

Coffee, tea, juice water and snacks provided. Bring your own pen and notebook.

