

The Plain Brown Rapper

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“we begin to come to terms with the specific inner workings of our disease, and discover that it is a disease of mistaken identity.”

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“I am blessed to know that, for me, service work is the best thing I can do for my recovery and happiness.”

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Unity Dallas—Ft. Worth SAA 17th Annual International Convention

By Staci

My name is Staci and I am a gratefully recovering sex addict. I am writing my story of attending the 2004 SAA convention as a gift of gratitude for the generous fellow addicts and my local Intergroup who donated a scholarship so that I could attend. I had an awesome, life-changing experience, and I'd like to share some of that with you.

Thursday

The night before the convention I was so excited that my normal bedtime got pushed back a couple of hours. Packing was fun—I couldn't afford the new clothes I'd wanted to take with me to the sunny land of Texas, but had been fortunate enough to have complained about this to my older sister, who said, "Come shopping in my closet!" So now I had some summery clothes, new to me, to put in my suitcase. I considered just bringing a travel bag because I would only be gone Friday through Monday, but I'm a pack rat and needed a suitcase. I thought it might be a hassle checking a bag, but Higher Power took wonderful care of me and I ended up glad I'd taken what I had. I packed for self-care, bringing a candle, a pillow for the bath, my swimsuit for the pool and hot tub, and moisturizer

and chapstick for the heat. I also packed a whole food granola mix, soymilk, a bowl and a spoon for breakfast each day. That turned out to be a real fit with the packed convention schedule, because I was able to eat in my room in the mornings and start the day feeling nutritionally balanced.

Friday

Due to the fabulous planning of a fellow addict in recovery, there were five local SAA'ers all on the same flight--a direct route from Seattle to Dallas, Texas. We'd agreed to carpool to the airport, which was a delight. Having someone to pick me up helped me shift my fear into excitement, as we "got current" and talked about our plans and hopes for the trip. My intentions were to have fun, to spread the word about our upcoming Puget Sound Retreat (September 9-12, 2004), and to get ideas for our retreat program to bring home. As I look back now, I realize that I did not foresee two of the biggest gifts that awaited me in Dallas: incredible fellowship and something similar yet different--a deep, healing, spiritual energy that would envelope me and nurture me to the core. Even as I write this I miss it...yet it is still here...and I can't WAIT to go to my next Convention!

Unity Continued

By Staci

The plane ride was enjoyable, and we were on the ground in Dallas in a blink or two of an eye. If you haven't been to Dallas before, let me tell you--it's hot! Hot and humid, about 92 degrees, compared to low 60's and Seattle rain. We coordinated via cell phones with three other addicts from our Puget Sound area (there were ten of us total at the convention, including SAA and COSA!) and soon had a gathering to carpool to the hotels in two rental cars. I considered getting some food at the airport but decided not to because of the expense. Next year I will bring more snacks like nuts, fruit, and a portable sandwich for food on the go. As we waited, a fellow addict came over to me and said excitedly, "I just saw a real cowboy! He had a hat on and looked me straight in the eye and said 'How y'all doin'?" We smiled together and I felt joy to have such traveling companions.

Arrival at the hotel was a blessing. It was a Marriott, quite nice and comfortable, but the best gift of all was my roommate. I had used the SAA convention website bulletin board to find another woman looking for a roommate, and we'd set up the arrangements through email. By the time I got the room I had let myself get too hot and too hungry, and I was tired from less than normal sleep. Meeting my roommate was a comfort--she was kind and insightful, and somehow I felt her to be a dear friend even though we had just met. We went

together to get some lunch and talked about our lives and our recovery. For the rest of the weekend she was like a home base--we checked in about our feelings, our daily experiences of workshops (she led one!) and interactions. I felt supported by her and we are still keeping in touch post-convention. I used to consider myself a loner, but one thing I learned from this trip is that although I need quality solitude, I love people and need fellowship like I need air, water and food. For me, S-Recovery is the gourmet of world fellowship.

The first official convention event I went to was the opening speaker. A woman shared her story and I was inspired by her ability to be present in the moment and authentic about both her pain and her joy. Following this I attended my first meeting--an SAA women's only meeting. As with all convention events, it was attended by fellow addicts from all over the country. I breathed deeply and my spirit drank in the words I heard. I was home.

Saturday

Saturday dawned sunny and bright. I went to the exercise room to work out, then back to my room to study Dallas maps in an effort to get to know the new area. I learned I was in the neighborhood of Addison, which

seemed a bit like Fremont in Seattle (where I live), and I saw that there was an art festival all weekend within walking distance. I decided to check it out if time permitted, and headed off to the delegate meeting.

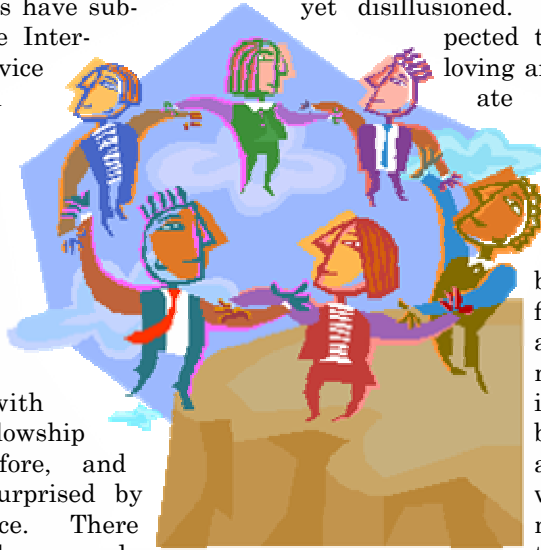
This was my first SAA delegate meeting, representing my home group. To sign up I had had to register a form and pay \$20. The delegate meeting meets yearly to work on issues that

SAA members have submitted to the International Service Organization (I S O) throughout the year. Being a delegate gave me the right to vote on these issues. I hadn't gotten involved with national fellowship business before, and was quite surprised by my experience. There were several proposals

up for consideration, and one in particular that literally divided the room. I watched as fellow addicts from cities I'd never seen stood before the group and shared their opinions and feelings. I felt the tension in the room rise as the opposing sides heated up their arguments. The parliamentary procedure seemed to break down as people raised

their voices in an effort to be heard. I started to feel scared and found my concentration diminishing, so on two occasions I abstained from voting. I was having a hard time following what was going on, slipping into a semi-trauma response at the conflict--I grew up in a family with domestic violence, so raised energy and voices is sometimes triggering for me. When the group decided (along with my ye a vote) to end early, I felt relieved yet disillusioned. I had ex-

pected to find only loving and considerate communication at the national level of business, but instead found other addicts like myself, doing their best to serve and using ways of communicating that I didn't



like. I wondered how a more congenial atmosphere could be fostered for future business. What I didn't know then was how my higher power was using this experience to prepare me for the conflicts that awaited me at home, after the convention. By witnessing the delegate meeting conflict, being present to my reactions and processing them openly with other

Unity Continued

By Staci

addicts, I became better able to handle heated disagreements and stay mentally focused. Although I prefer collaborative discussions where everyone stays calm, I feel better prepared for real-world negotiations. There is nothing my higher power cannot use to bring me closer to a deeper spiritual understanding!

Saturday was lunch on your own, so I got my purse and headed down to the lobby. I knew a few people from past retreats and one previous convention and was hoping to run into someone I could join for lunch. I found several members of my hometown fellowship heading out to lunch and gratefully went along. We walked to a nearby restaurant and were slammed with the heat and humidity. That's when I started to notice a big difference between Dallas and Seattle--people don't really walk around much outside in Dallas. Too hot! Lunch was lovely as we shared our experiences so far--we ordered an appetizer, which I don't usually do at home, and I felt the abundance of loving fellowship and yummy food. Afterwards I decided to take a break from the convention happenings and walk to that arts festival, which was a joy. I was charmed by the live music, various art media and people talking with Texas twangs. I decided Dallas was a marvelous city and I would be happy to return there should the opportunity come my way.

I went to two different workshops Saturday afternoon, one on

"Creating Your Own Healthy, Intimate Relationships Meeting" and one called "Oh My God I Think I'm Ready to Date!" I was glad to see others in recovery interested in creating intimacy and especially liked the dating workshop for its humor and start-where-you-are approach. As a person interested in dating for the first time in sobriety, I needed ideas as to how to bridge the gap between my old patterns and new visions, and I got exactly that. The facilitators were knowledgeable and I enjoyed learning from them and from others who shared. In the afternoon I attended another women's SAA meeting, and surrounded by other women addicts I declared: "I love sex!" I felt safe to affirm my own sexuality as a spiritual gift that I was grateful for. I found myself able to openly challenge some of my oppressive childhood beliefs for the first time in my life, and I was amazed. Connecting with other women sex addicts after the meeting and for the rest of the weekend was a highlight of my trip.

Saturday dinner was a banquet, and some people dressed up! I had wished I'd brought a dress to wear, but felt comfortable in casual clothes. I enjoyed meeting people at the round dinner table and this was my first opportunity to really talk with COSA members. Their concurrent convention joined SAA for

dinner and speakers Saturday night. Two stirring tributes occurred in addition to the speakers, one for a fellow addict who was dying of a terminal disease, and another call for contributions for the publication of the SAA big book. Although I had a hard time staying alert through several hours of sitting and listening on a full stomach, I appreciated the courage shown by each speaker to stand up in front of hundreds of people (audiotaped, no less), and tell their truth. I learned a new term from the SAA speaker: “other esteem” as opposed to “self-esteem.” I related to struggling with wanting to fill up my sense of self through someone else’s admiration. I thought: I want to be spiritually-esteemed. I’m still trying to figure out what this means.

Saturday night several members of our local fellowship communed in one of our rooms. We had four cell phones between us and (almost) perfectly timed our calls to four members back home who we knew were together for a weekly Saturday night fellowship dinner. It was hilarious to hear all the laughing and loud talking in the room as we connected with our friends from home. I felt such a sense of belonging and love—to be at a new place learning new things, yet still a part of my core fellowship. Experiences like this, and others, put the “gratefully” in front of “recovering sex addict.”

Sunday

Sunday I slept in a bit. My body felt sore and I awoke groggy. I had breakfast and headed off to a workshop called “Having Fun is Serious Business.” I learned that one person’s thrill (bungee jumping) is another person’s nightmare, and that addicts are sometimes “funorexic.” I liked the challenge to make a commitment to fun, starting by figuring out what I really loved to do. Sunday lunch was provided along with a speaker, providing yet another source of experience, strength and hope. I loved hearing the thunderous applause following his story. There was another round of raucous applause, after the announcement that in one day our fellowship had raised the money needed to publish our book! The air was filled with promise and excitement, and I felt grateful to have contributed. I also enjoyed talking more at lunch with COSA members, finding connections and mutual support. Now I was meeting more people I really liked—both men and women. We talked about a great new movie we’d seen called “What the Bleep Do We Know?” as well as other topics. After lunch I connected with my home group members to make dinner plans, then headed off to the meditation room for some quiet time. I was starting to notice some uncomfortable feelings—more of that physical pain and something else, a sense of hopelessness and loneliness. I found the

Unity Continued

By Staci

meditation room decorated with a fountain, meditation books, and strings of soft lights. I sat in the quiet for a while and felt a powerful longing to be held and nurtured. I was both in the present--adult woman meditating at the SAA convention--and in the past--a desperately lonely little girl in her deeply wounded family, starving for affection and physical touch. I breathed and prayed and lost track of time, until a little internal nudge reminded me it was time for a workshop I'd been looking forward to..."The Many Faces of Healing the Perpetrator and Survivor." I attended this fabulous gathering and felt the safety necessary to let myself cry openly (and I wasn't the only one!). I was blessed by having sat next to a woman in recovery who offered comfort in the form of touching my shoulder while I cried. I left the workshop feeling subdued yet refreshed.

I wandered over to the SAA/COSA bookstore area, where I found large printouts hung on the wall of pages from the new SAA big book. The authors and literature committee had placed the pages there for addicts to read and write comments on the margins. I read every word, offering feedback. I was thrilled to get to be a part of the process yet again of our fellowship growing and expanding. I will say from what I read that

the book is spectacular! After this I went for a quick swim, floating on my back in the pool under the sunlit sky. I felt gracefully free of obsessive thinking and fantasy, even though swimming pools have been places I have acted out in the past.

Our Puget Sound fellowship dinner was delicious. We originally sought out Texas BBQ, but due to having two vegetarians among us, decided to visit an upscale Tex-Mex restaurant instead. We were surprised and especially gifted to be joined by a fellow addict who had driven from Washington to Texas! Our table conversation was animated and relaxed, and again I felt a deep belonging.

Back at the hotel I headed to the Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer Candlelight Memorial. As a newly identified bisexual woman, I was especially interested to attend, though the meeting was open to all. I heard shares from the heart



as people remembered fellow addicts who had died and cried their loss and joy. I also heard songs, prayers and even shared a poem myself! The meeting ended when hotel employees needed to prepare the room for the next morning (it was about 2am), but I stayed up later talking with a new friend from Minnesota about boundaries, relationships, and healthy non-sexual touch. I rolled into bed about 3am and slept like a baby.

Monday

I awoke energized on Monday, and got current with my roommate. I again marveled in the opportunity to share intimately with someone first thing in the morning (I live alone and only talk with my cat at home...). I went to my first mixed SAA meeting of the convention and my spirit bathed in the warmth and connectedness we shared. I was a little distracted during the meeting by a man who was fiddling with some rope and some marbles. He was an elder I hadn't met before who after the meeting asked if everyone there had one of his marbles. I said no along with several others, and he gathered us around him like a mother hen with her chicks. He handed out little poems he had with him and explained a special story involving the marbles wrapped in the protection of the 12 steps and 12 traditions, entwined in a monkey knot. He gave each of us a rope-wrapped

marble and said they make great key chains. Mine is hanging by my door right now, a beloved reminder of my convention experience, and of the everlasting protection provided by my fellowship.

My last official convention event was the brunch and speaker. I was very inspired by his message that we recovering addicts must be society's teachers of spirit-based sexuality. What I heard was that we who have descended to the depths and are capable of surviving them can show others another way. The sober choices we make model sobriety for others, even if they don't know about our addiction. This is significant to me on the eve of publication of our book!

Now good-byes were happening, and some people were exchanging numbers and email addresses. I knew on one level that it was my last day there, yet on another was pretending I would be there forever. I did share some contact information, but not as much as I wished I had. People were leaving now, heading back to their home groups and cities, and the energy was ebbing from the Marriott. I joined some local fellows for a quick swim, and we floated together in the pool on "noodles" and watched the clouds drift by. I imagined creating a recovery commune with a pool so I could live like this forever. Afterwards the late-leavers sat around in the lobby and dreamed of conventions to come.

My Will and Life's Grace

By Steve

The above title says it for me: My years in recovery have been all about the shift from shame to grace and the shift from my willfulness to trusting in the good will of others and the will of the Higher Power as I understand it.

My first contact with SAA happened over ten years ago, at a time when my life caught up with me. My sexual acting out had been revealed and confronted. Crisis followed. My wife and I separated and my kids left home or town. My boss was informed. My world spun completely out of my control.

Miracles followed too, lots of miracles, once I understood that I was no longer in charge of the universe. The first miracle was my secrets being ripped away from me. I had long held a belief that revealing my hidden life would lead directly to my death. It must remain hidden at all costs. When neither suicide nor homicide happened, it began to dawn on me that it was my keeping secrets that was killing me, dissolving my sanity, eating my soul. Release from my secrets was the first freeing moment that I had experienced in decades.

The second miracle was that my isolation was stripped away also. This cracked open my other hang-up: It seemed that I could not get honest without getting help and I could not get help without getting honest. Now I had no choice but to reach out.

With the astonishing grace of these miracles stirring in me, I began real communication with a

counselor, and I got a sense of how messed up I was. I asked if I should get tested as a sociopath. My counselor's response set the tone for all the healing his guidance brought to me: He said not to bother, that I felt much too crappy about my acting out to be a sociopath. Instead, he pointed me to a local SAA group and insisted on my attendance as part of treatment.

The next miracle was a healthy SAA group: they welcomed my attendance and listened respectfully to my story. And they did so without judgmental advice; they did strongly encourage my step work. I recognized that shame has been almost a lifelong shadow. Nevertheless, I told and retold my story with more detail and deepening honesty. Each time I did, some of the spikes of shame that have helped drive my compulsions fell out.

What the program offered was support to put down the tools that I had carried with me from young adulthood: the willingness to hide and deceive, the ability to manipulate, the crowing thrill of claiming victimhood, the pleasure of embracing my precious resentments, and the sheer excitement of risk taking. I am still wired for all these feelings and behaviors. I can feel their attraction as I name them.

I continue learning a new set of tools: to lead out with honesty and genuine emotion, to immediately accept responsibility in the name of integrity, to avoid mistaking intensity for intimacy, and to help to build a climate of appreciation in my corner of the world. All in all, to reflect the values that the program has revealed to me.

Inventory--the Key to Character Transformation

By Nate C.

Introductory note: I wrote this article in first person plural ("we") not because I wanted to impose my view on others, but as a way to express my belief that this is a shared experience of addicts in recovery.

"Step 4: We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

As sex addicts in the gutter we found that we had developed major character defects that had led us into a cycle of addiction characterized by depression (or desperation), rampaging ego, and a selfish search for a "quick fix"--something to fill the gaping void in our hearts.

When we got started in recovery we found that there is no quick fix. When we thought we had recovered and let down our guard, we slipped back into addictive thinking patterns and some of us even acted out again.

So we started to apply ourselves. We went to meetings, worked on our sex plan, tried to wrap our brains around the Three Circles analogy, talked to our sponsor, read literature. But in this period, it was painfully obvious to us that we still had a long way to go. Between meetings, we were still confronted with our addictive tendencies, which set up all kinds of traps and trick situations, cravings, and all the other things we know so well.

This is the reality of our

situation. We suspect we are in a bind, and we know on an intellectual level that we need to keep working on the Steps, but that Fourth Step is looming and we don't know how to face it.

If we go forward, we face that ominous Fourth Step. If we go back, we face temptation, relapse, or worse. We keep going to meetings and saying the Serenity Prayer. But let's face it -- an addict in recovery does not live by meetings alone.

Before we can succeed in making our inventory, there are two preconditions that we have to fulfill, signified by the words "searching" and "fearless": First, we have to learn how to search in our inner self and, second, we have to deal with our fear of doing so.

A lot of what makes the Fourth Step so scary for some is that it is a big unknown. Until we got to this point in our recovery, we may not have been aware that our addiction is caused by that dark side of our character and we may never have given any thought to the idea that the roots of our addiction lie in our subconscious. The subconscious is something that we are not generally aware of--we can't view it with our eyes or touch it with our hands. We are always more afraid of what is intangible. So, fear is natural.

So, part of the Fourth Step process is getting over our fears and misgivings concerning the inner search.

Inventory--the Key to Character Transformation Continued

By Nate C.

There are many things that can cast some light into those dark corners. It's all about learning: learning by listening at meetings, learning by reading books about addiction, learning by having confidence in our sponsor and doing what he or she recommends, learning to be humble, and learning that we have to learn.

We can read about the Fourth Step, but that only takes us part of the distance. To really find out what the Fourth Step is about, we have to turn the lens around and focus on what's inside. The Fourth Step is all about finding out who we are--mapping out the darker side of our character.

But let's move back a bit first and look at it from another perspective. The first and most basic question is: If it's true that we know we are addicts and must not engage in addictive behavior under any circumstances, what is it that causes us to let down our guard?

The Big Book says it's a momentary bout of insanity caused by the illness of addiction. Step Four, the personal inventory, allows us to find the roots of that illness and the mechanism that causes that insanity.

The inventory is the first, necessary step towards purification. Before we can ask God to remove our defects, we must first identify them and come to terms with their existence in us.

Just as the causes and roots differ from person to person (addict to addict), the means of carrying out a searching and fearless moral inventory vary. Everything about the inventory is individual. It can take a few minutes or a few years. It can be written or verbal (or mental), effective or ineffective. It all depends on us. There is no prescribed method, though the Big Book does provide useful guidelines. In general, however, the process of taking inventory involves contemplating the past and trying to learn for one's self what kinds of moral failings and character defects led to the various debacles we as addicts experienced and perpetrated.

Help and support from sponsor and home group are probably indispensable, but when push comes to shove, it is the addict her- or himself that has to do the work. This scares a lot of people away. But the old timers are here and we listen to their message: "Get down to work--the results make it all worthwhile!"

So, discovering and defining our defects of character, we make an important discovery. We were identifying ourselves with these negative qualities!

This is the turning point. Those defects of character were the basis of our self-identity and, even worse, to a large extent that is still the case! We don't have a new identity in place yet so we are balancing on a knife-edge, always in

danger of “defaulting” back to the only identity we know and are so familiar with. An important part of really taking the Fourth Step (like any other Step) is developing a sense of urgency--recognizing how desperately we need to take this Step. It's also very useful in overcoming the fear.

The inventory process is an inner search: self-analysis, or contemplation of what we have been identifying our “self” with up to now. In other words, the inventory is the process that leads to a frank, true, and (as much as possible) unbiased statement of who we thought we were.

Of course that old addictive “self” was a mistake. Our real self is still out there waiting to be found. Finding that real self is what the 12 Steps are all about. Realizing that we were identifying ourselves with something that is not our real self and mapping out exactly what that was--that's what the Fourth Step is all about.

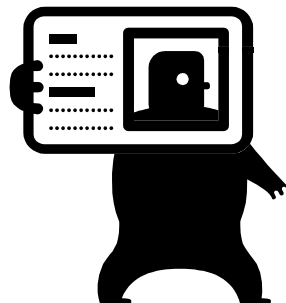
A few words about how we introduce ourselves at meetings, as that bears on the question of identity.

In the past, before we came to SAA, we thought we knew ourselves, but we found out we were wrong. We found that we were addicts and affirmed that for the first time out loud while introducing ourselves at the meeting. Now, in the present, we continue to introduce ourselves as addicts at meetings as a simple, realistic

assessment of our state. And, in the future, as long as we can keep coming to meetings, we should always keep introducing ourselves as sex addicts in order to keep the focus on recovery, keeping in mind where we're coming from and why we're here.

In the beginning we were sex addicts in denial, in the middle we are sex addicts in recovery, and in the end we will be sex addicts in name only--because we will have been transformed by the purifying grace of our Higher Power, on His terms, not ours. Throughout the process, the outer appellation “sex addict” remains the same, but its inner meaning to us changes as we grow in the program.

Until we did the Fourth Step, we were identifying ourselves with defective qualities, rather than good, useful qualities. Those defects were not “us.” Because that false self-identification was always at odds with reality, we constantly forced ourselves into the Bubble. The Fourth Step is very, very important in that it marks the first time in the program when we begin to come to terms with the specific inner workings of our disease, and discover that it is a disease of mistaken identity.



A Letter from a Woman Prison Outreach Volunteer

By Gina J.

[Editor's Note: For the most part it is the policy of the SAA prison outreach committee to refer female prisoners to female volunteers and male prisoners to male volunteers. There have been rare exceptions, as here, when there has been an extreme shortage of volunteers.]

Dear PBR,

My name is Gina J. I have been an SAA member since late 1999 and celibate by choice since March 2000, and now have been divorced over 15 months, single by choice and not ready to practice dating.

I read the article on prison outreach in the September-October 2003 PBR. Last I knew, I was the national women's prison outreach coordinator and I've been writing to SAA inmates for years now, mostly women but also one man, successfully. Nothing helps my recovery more than doing this type of service and the inmates are often so grateful that they can't believe it when *I* thank *them* for helping *my* recovery by writing to *me*! Eventually they do come to understand that the more we share our recovery, the more we receive the gifts of the SAA program, and of healing self-acceptance. Just as being a sponsor helps me as much or more than my sponsee, the same is true of writing to inmates and sharing ES&H by mail.

I am partially disabled and

unable to work even part-time for now. I can't remember if I withdrew as coordinator, but I am always willing to write to any SAA members, including inmates. I prefer female when possible, but I've found that gender is not an issue with the male inmate I took on two years ago when there were no volunteers willing or able to respond. I relate to either gender based on similar feelings if not always the same experiences. I'm very grateful for the service opportunity prison outreach provides, as a constant blessing to my recovery as both a sex addict and a co-sex addict. Prison outreach is *not* a one-way street! I get as much out of sharing recovery correspondence as I give, sometimes much more.

About a year ago, when I was divorced from my ex-husband, I came close to relapse by placing personal ads in an effort to replace the man I'd been addicted to, as well as seeking meaningless sex with strangers to distract me from my shame, self-disgust and emotional pain. I had always used sex to define not only my worth, but also my very identity. If a man didn't want me sexually, I would do anything to find a man—even if

just for a night—so I could see myself as worthy. I had no concept of self-worth or self-love, and the shame cycle kept me sick, whether acting out my sex addiction or my addiction to sex addicts I believed I could fix. SAA helped me recognize my patterns and I chose abstinence as a way to stop distracting myself from working on my own recovery. This was the first time in my life that I chose to face my fears of aloneness, abandonment, worthlessness and self-hatred. Volunteering to write SAA inmates has enabled me to grow in leaps and bounds.

One of the female inmates was being released from prison about the same time as my divorce was finalized. I hoped she would keep writing; she did. I seemed to entrap myself in her choices to act out, even envying her sexual adventures because they reminded me of how I used to act out. That's when I placed a personal ad, seeking men for friendship, yet using erotic adjectives to describe myself. I was in denial all over again. Thank HP for the woman inmate I was writing to, who shared her highs *and lows* while trying to control herself, her addictive cravings and behaviors.

At first, my co-addict kicked in; it had to be my fault she was acting out. Maybe my letters had somehow caused her to relapse. And that quick, I lost my focus and started trying to "fix" her. My HP gives me exactly

what I need in the most unexpected ways, sometimes repeatedly until I learn the lesson I need for continued growth.

One letter, from my female inmate/SAA pen pal, was so out of control she even tried to pull me into her acting out, encouraging me to meet a dangerous stranger in a hotel—one of my personal ad responses I had told her about in a previous letter—that I'd been holding back on out of fear. I felt excited and terrified, by her "permission" or approval, and thank HP I listened to my fear. I withdrew my ad and wrote "refused" on all the responses, returning them to the postmaster. By the grace of God, I had not acted out when finally faced with the opportunity, and the experience gave me empathy for my SAA pen pal. I realized misery loves company and decided to opt out of her party invitation. Instead I sent her a long letter, pouring out my renewed commitment to SAA recovery, sharing ES&H, and shining a light on the path back from insanity by sharing my own journey, in writing.

My next letter from her was very different—she'd overcome her own shame and self-disgust with the help of her HP and stopped acting out. She got back to SAA meetings, now an ex-inmate and struggling with fitting back into society, yet very grateful for she now knew how much worse her life could get.

We still write over a year after her release, and her fifth step

A Letter from a Woman Prison Outreach Volunteer Continued

By Gina J.

sounded so much like my own. I felt so much positive, loving energy between us while sharing in her relief at discovering she is *not* the monster she had thought she was, grinning as I see her start to forgive and love herself, as if seeing my own recovery all over again.

I needed to write to SAA inmates, because there were many lessons and blessings awaiting me and each of my SAA pen pals. In reaching out to give, I have received more than I ever thought possible and my recovery has deeper meaning as a result.

I wanted to share my experience with you, and if you feel it might help encourage new prison outreach volunteers, please print my letter in our PBR with my full permission to use in SAA in any way needed.

For the cost of a stamp or two, I get as long a meeting with another SAA in recovery as I need and want; I am blessed with friendship; I receive an abundance of positive ES&H; I get much laughter, love and support, and many opportunities to pick up new recovery tools in each reply my mailman delivers. I can spend as little or as much time as I like, choosing how many people I can write and how often.

I have been in several 12-step programs of recovery. I am

blessed to know that, for me, service work is the best thing I can do for my recovery and happiness. SAA inmates often receive no other contact from family or society, and all have written to SAA to ask for recovery correspondence. Some SAA people judge inmates as sicker sex addicts than themselves. I say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." For anyone who fears they don't have the time, you can choose how much time you give, from the equivalent of one meeting per week (an hour) or once a month, writing one inmate once or twice a month or biweekly. The rewards are priceless and the service much appreciated by those who have all the time to listen and give back.

Please feel free to send me another two names to write to, whoever has been waiting the longest. I don't want to prolong anyone's welcome to recovery if I still have time to share and a couple of stamps.

Keep on keeping on ODAAT,

Gina J.



A Letter from a Prisoner

By Bill

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I am writing this with some trepidation. As an incarcerated sex addict (the State calls me a Sex Offender), I worry at times that anything I write may be used against me. But I've needed to write this for some time so here goes.

I have been back in prison now for almost eight years. I was recently interviewed to attend the Sex Offender Treatment Program (S.O.T.P) in the system. I declined. Next I was interviewed as being considered for submission for possible involuntary commission proceedings. I have not heard back from them and it has been a while.

I have really gotten to the point that I choose not to commit any more of the type of crimes that got me incarcerated. As such any restriction they put on me can only help me. That's my attitude now as I approach my release in November. Yet I still find myself wanting to share what has been happening, my experience, strength and hope. Not feeling comfortable to put anything in writing I asked my Higher Power and he sent me trustworthy people to share with.

In the years I have been incarcerated I have done much, denied for a while, run away some, glazed over (or tried to). Finally I reached out. I have been in one of the very few SAA fellowships in prison in this state and in fact helped to get it started. I attended SAA while I was out and continue to write my sponsor. In short I keep working my program and my program keeps working.

Asked why I did not want to participate in the S.O.T.P. I asked what being in it and finishing it would do for me. The answer was nothing I had not already done. It is funny that even the people who promote the "treatment" don't expect anything from it or are unable to explain what it is they do expect. I think they just want to feel safe, and sexual predators, as they have labeled me a time or two, don't make them feel safe. So my question, why treat them?

All that I know is this: I am responsible for my actions. To be a sexual predator or not is my choice. I choose not to be and I am the only one I have to convince of that. That gives me strength and peace.

I believe I am ready to be free again on the outside. I am free now as it is.

Thanks for letting me share this. I hope it helps someone. I am looking forward to my first meeting.

In recovery for life,
Bill

From the Editor

By Mike L.

Last Friday night, I went to see an outdoor performance of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with my roommate/friend/companion/partner/whatever he is (we're still trying to figure that out if indeed it is even appropriate to put a label on it). We took a blanket and sat on the grassy area behind the covered seating section and watched the play. I haven't read or seen this play in many years, even if Verdi's operatic adaptation of it does find its way to my turntable or CD player every few months. On the way home, my companion mentioned that he glanced over at me from time to time during the evening and had never seen me so focused on anything before. It was true; it was wonderful to hear "fair is foul, and foul is fair" and "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" once again. Aside from the occasional surreptitious glance over at my friend to see how he was enjoying his first exposure to Shakespeare, I paid no attention to anything else for those two-and-a-half hours.

Yet it was not always this way. I can think back to a time in the 1980s when going to see a Shakespeare play in the park meant trying to establish some sort of physical contact with the stranger sitting next to me with the hopes of acting out later. I didn't give this change in my life a thought either during the play or even when my friend pointed out how attentive to it I was the entire evening. It was just while sitting here today that I realized how much I had changed. I can't say it is because I had somebody with me either, because even the next night, when my partner chose to stay home and miss a delightful production of *The Taming of the Shrew* set in the Old West, aside from some sadness that he had not joined me, I still concentrated on the production and even shifted my position when my hand would accidentally touch the sandal-shod foot of the man sitting behind me. What a gift recovery is!

And another gift, as you have no doubt read elsewhere in this issue, is that the literature committee has approved the SAA Book for publication, and it will be available beginning at the convention at the end of next May. I think back to the 1996 convention in Minneapolis and the SAA Book workshop that was attended by the vast majority of attendees to that convention, where we all talked and wrote about the things we wanted to see in the book. I'm very excited to see that the book, these many years later, is finally about to become a reality.

The articles in this issue of the PBR focus on some of the things that it takes some real walking through fear to accomplish, whether it's going to SAA for the first time, doing a fourth step, writing to a prisoner,

or going to a convention. The first time I did all of these things, I needed a great deal of willingness, and I never regretted doing any of them.

Another thing that takes some willingness is writing something for the PBR. I'm always looking for articles, so if you've got one that has been taking shape in your mind, now is the time to put it down on paper or your computer screen and send it in. You can send it to pbr@saa-recovery.org or send it to the ISO office at P.O. Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270-0949.

In the meantime, enjoy this issue of the PBR. I look forward to talking with you again next time.





ISO News



ISO Literature Committee, ISO Board, & Board Committees

ISO Board Minutes

**The Board of Trustees of the ISO of SAA, Inc.,
met via teleconference on August 21, 2004.
The following is a report of actions taken.**

Approved: That a line editor for the book "Sex Addicts Anonymous" be compensated for his work at an amount not to exceed \$500.00, payable upon notification of the approval of his work by the SAA Book editors.

Accepted: The following Literature Committee SAA Book editors reports for the months of July and August:

July Monthly Report

In July, we focused on integrating the enormous amount of feedback we collected in Dallas, as well as the feedback submitted to us by groups and individuals since the convention. This included feedback collected at the basic text workshop in Dallas, comments written on the draft pages posted in the convention bookstore, comments made by Literature Committee reps at the LitCom meetings in Dallas, and comments sent to us over email in the last month. We received extensive feedback and quotes from several regions. This included comprehensive feedback from members attending a "basic text" workshop at the Portland retreat, at which the entire draft was read. Incorporating this feedback required revisions of every aspect of the text, from making one-word changes to adding extensive new material. Steps One through Four underwent thorough re-revision. New material on withdrawal was incorporated into Chapters One and Four. The Introduction was revamped for more inclusivity. The order of topics in Chapter Four was rearranged. New material was added to Chapter Five, including a new paragraph on personal service. We are confident that the draft, although certainly imperfect, reflects substantial polishing and review by the fellowship.

The stories underwent further editing for anonymity and other concerns. We also worked on creating titles for the untitled stories, as well as on arranging the stories in a suggested order. We

secured permission from the Southern California Intergroup to reprint stories from their pamphlet, "Exploring Healthy Sexuality," and drew several stories from that piece to add to the mix. We thank the Southern California Intergroup for their kind permission to let us use whatever we thought would be helpful to the sex addict who still suffers and Thea D. for preparing electronic versions of the stories on short notice. We now have over fifty stories under consideration, representing a wide range of fellowship experience, strength, and hope.

We have not met with the authors since the convention, or received any feedback. One missed the July 13 call. In consultation with his assistant, we arranged our next conference call for August 3. The other communicated with us by e-mail that although he did not have any feedback on the text, he wanted to be included in the August 3 call to discuss issues of line editing, design, and printing.

The text is substantially ready for LitCom review and approval at the August 15 teleconference. Our gratitude to all who have contributed to this phase of the work is almost inexpressible. This book is truly becoming our book.

In service,
Chris D.
Elizabeth S.

August Monthly Report

We met with one of the authors by teleconference on August 3. He made some general comments about the book as a whole and some detailed comments about Tradition Eleven in particular. The majority of our discussion centered on the next phase of the book. He was very helpful in outlining the usual steps in the production phase and giving us a sense of a timeline. He argued for the need for a professional line editor to proofread the book one final time to remove any typos or grammatical errors before it went into the design phase. He also strongly recommended that we enlist an experienced "production manager" to guide the book through production and serve as a liaison between designers and printers and the LitCom. He said he had some names he could suggest to us if we decided to hire a professional for this position. We decided to pitch this idea to the LitCom first and see if we could enlist experienced members on the LitCom to do the job.

We completed our own final proofreading of the text and submitted our final version of the draft to the LitCom on August 8.

ISO Board Minutes Continued

This version encompasses about 70 pages of text (in five chapters: "Our Addiction," "Our Fellowship," "Our Program," "Our Life in Recovery," and "Our Purpose") and about 150 pages of personal stories. We submitted a final selection of 46 stories, including most of the stories from the first draft of the book, four stories taken from "From Shame to Grace," four stories taken from "Exploring Healthy Sexuality," and the rest drawn from submissions to the LitCom over the last four years. One weakness of the book is that despite our best efforts to solicit such stories, we never received any submissions from members of ethnic minorities. However, the final selection of 46 stories includes 14 stories by women; gay and lesbian members are also well-represented. A wide variety of acting-out behaviors are represented for identification purposes, including stories from prisoners and anorexics.

The text as we submitted it does not include sidebar quotes from the fellowship. This is a change from our original plan formulated at the Houston retreat in 2003. Although quotes were solicited and received at several workshops over the past few years, once we started working with the quotes, we realized we did not have enough quotes of sufficiently high quality (short, pithy, and concrete) to make this workable in this edition of the text. Regretfully, we decided to not recommend using quotes in this edition.

At the August 15 teleconference, the Literature Committee voted to approve the book "Sex Addicts Anonymous" as submitted by the editors. It truly felt like an historic event. Tears were shed and joy was experienced by all. One of the authors was also present, to receive thanks and share his appreciation. Words cannot really express how grateful we are to have had the opportunity to serve the fellowship in this capacity and help guide this book to completion. Although we expect to be involved as the Literature Committee proceeds with the next phase of book production (with the goal of presenting the published book in May of 2005), our work as editors is done, and this will be our last editors' report.

God bless you all and thank you for your prayers and support.

In service,
Chris D.
Elizabeth S.

Approved: A motion to establish a policy that future ISO convention events be open except for workshops that are closed at the request of the presenter and specified SAA meetings.

Approved: Permission for the Convention Committee to develop a cookbook that can be sold before the convention and in the ISO bookstore.

Approved: Holding the Celebration of Recovery Creativity with items from the membership for sale and also for display only at future conventions.

Approved: A motion to change the name "Scholarship" to "Financial Assistance" and to make convention financial assistance a one-time award.

Approved: Renewal of a policy for Directors' and Officers' Liability Insurance for the coming year, with the annual premium being paid from reserves and then repaid monthly.

Approved: A plan to change the ISO shopping cart service within a year and a half.

Approved: A motion to raise the annual salary of the Director of Fellowship Services to \$43,442.00.

Approved: A raise of the Assistant Director of Fellowship Service's hourly rate to \$14.25.

Approved: Compensation not to exceed \$500.00 for work done on converting the ISO database to a new software program.

Approved: An invitation to the Literature Committee to attend the November Board meeting, setting aside an additional 30 minutes for literature related issues.

Approved: A motion to delegate Francie E. and Ken S. to represent SAA at the 2004 Interfellowship Forum in Pasadena, CA, in November.



ISO Literature Committee Minutes

**The ISO Literature Committee met by teleconference
on Sunday, August 15, 2004.**

The following is a report on approved motions.

Approved: A motion to approve the book *Sex Addicts Anonymous* as submitted by the editors, allowing for any final proofreading or corrections.

Approved: A motion to empower the Literature Committee chair to recommend hiring an individual from the fellowship to line-edit the book and to contact the ISO Office and let it know what that will cost.

Approved: Creation of a book publication committee, with the Literature Committee alternate from the North Pacific Region as chair, to coordinate the design and printing of our book.

Approved: A motion to recommend to the Board the following mechanisms for keeping the LitCom informed of Board discussions pertaining to literature.

1. That when the Board agenda is prepared and distributed, the office will send all members of the LitCom a truncated version of the agenda covering all items that involve literature.
2. That the Board be requested to communicate to us specific questions they may have on any upcoming issues involving literature. This may be done either through the Board liaison to the LitCom by e-mail, at the LitCom teleconferences, or by some other means.
3. That a "liaison to the Board" be invited to attend all Board discussions of issues involving literature.
4. That the Board set a date for a joint Board/LitCom teleconference for issues involving literature at least once a year at some point mid-point between the conventions.



ISO Financial News

ISO Income/Expense Summary Daily Operations January - August

This report does not include income and expenses associated with the annual ISO Convention or the Delegate Meeting nor does it include travel expenses, which are for the most part funded by the convention surplus. Any convention surplus not used for travel expenses is used to fund the ISO's various reserves.

ISO Income/Expense

Income	August	Monthly Average	Year To Date
Net Sales	3,302	3,477	27,815
Undesignated Donations	7,777	9,986	79,889
General	4,913	7,280	58,240
LifeLine Partners	2,864	2,706	21,649
Miscellaneous	169	515	4,117
Total Income	11,248	13,978	111,821
Expenses			
Wages/Benefits/Taxes	7,099	7,683	61,462
Wages - Outreach Related	2,004	1,924	15,393
Wages - Other	4,081	4,706	37,642
Benefits	546	546	4,368
Taxes	468	507	4,059
Insurance	101	193	1,547
Committee Expense	869	727	5,818
Postage	385	285	2,284
Communications	745	634	5,075
Rent/Utilities	1,169	1,160	9,280
Office Related	799	694	5,553
Financial	856	575	4,598
Plain Brown Rapper	1,711	995	7,957
Translations	0	435	3,477
Total Expenses	13,734	13,381	107,051
Surplus/Shortfall	-2,486	597	4,770

The two months since June have not been good. August was particularly low in revenue and higher than usual in expenses. On the income side, sales were \$175 below the average for the year, with donations lagging \$2,209 behind. This made for a rough month. To meet the August shortfall, the Board officers had to authorize an emergency use of money from the ISO's Operational Reserve Fund.

August illustrates once again the ISO's delicate balance between income and expenses. A drop of \$2,000 in donations is significant and serves as a reminder that consistent support is essential. It is a message that must be impressed over and over again at the group level. Without citing specific examples, it becomes clear during the course of the year that the message is being delivered more consistently and persuasively in some parts of the fellowship than it is in others. For those who would like to know how their region compares with others, please feel free to contact the ISO Office.

The annual appeal will be put in the mail soon. Please be generous in your response, both on the group and intergroup level and as individuals.





Prison Outreach News

By Mike L.

Things have really been hopping in the South Central region as far as prison outreach goes. I have been wearing two hats, prison outreach chair and South Central prison outreach coordinator, for several years now, and so this year the South Central caucus gave me an assistant. This has been a real boon for this region, as my assistant has been lining up letter-writing volunteers right and left.

Enthusiasm for prison outreach in this region, one of the largest in terms of mail volume, has really been growing. Last night our local intergroup asked me to put together a flyer to pass out at meetings asking for more volunteers to write letters and I said I would. Now I have to figure out how to do a flyer...

The need for volunteers to write to prisoners remains strong. Receiving a letter from the outside is often the main highlight—or the *only* highlight—of a prisoner's day. But why listen to me? Here is what David, a Texas prisoner, has to say on the subject:

I hope you're successful in recruiting more prison writers. Tell them that for most inmates, this is their lifeline to the world. Because of their crimes and lifestyles, they lost loved ones and burned bridges with family and friends. The only help out there for them is through the help of caring people who also suffer with addictions. We are bonded together with this terrible disease. Only an addicted person can understand and relate to another addict, and share their love in a pure way. Please give the suffering addict the connection that our support groups give on the outside. Please help those of us who are locked away behind these walls of concrete, wire and the prison of the mind. Please open your heart.

As usual, we have several specific requests from prisoners. I'm passing them along and so if you find you are able to help with these specific requests, please contact me at P.O. Box 27544, Houston, TX 77227-7544 or else at elrojo9701@yahoo.com:

Volunteers are being sought to facilitate meetings in the following cities:

Kincheloe, MI

Farmington, MO

Columbia, SC (this is actually a mental health facility rather than a prison)

Sponsors are needed in the following areas:

Columbia, SC

Farmington, MO

Lake City, FL (this is more of a contact than an actual sponsor)

Finally, an SAA member behind the walls in Vinita, OK, is looking for a by-mail sponsor from any area.

If you find you can help with any of these requests, please get in touch with me. It's a great form of service work that will help the ones making the requests. Most folks who get involved in this kind of service report back that they are being helped more than the prisoner is.

Thanks for reading this article. I will be in touch again next month.



Translation News

Herramientas Para La Recuperación

Una Guía Practica para Miembros de Nuevo Ingreso de SAA



Tools of Recovery is now available in Spanish. Translation of this popular booklet brings to nine the number of pieces of approved SAA literature now available in Spanish for outreach and for sale through the ISO. Now, only the *Group Guide* and *From Shame To Grace* have not been translated. Moreover, there are no plans to do so until the final disposition of these two works has been decided. The *Group Guide* will likely either undergo extensive revision or be replaced by an entirely new document. The fate of *From Shame To Grace* will be determined after publication of the book *Sex Addicts Anonymous*.

Containing more than 12,000 words and covering 46 pages, *Herramientas Para La Recuperación* is the ISO's most ambitious translation project to date. Since it was introduced two years ago, the English version has become one of the most popular pieces of literature offered by the ISO.

Like its English counterpart, *Herramientas Para La Recuperación* sells for \$4 and is available through the SAA website store (www.saa-recovery.org), by phone, or via postal mail.

**RESERVE YOUR COPIES
OF THE SOON TO BE PUBLISHED SAA BOOK**

The SAA book will describe our addiction and tell about the effect it has on our lives and the lives of our friends and family. It will describe our purpose, our program and our fellowship. It will tell how working the program can lead to recovery from our addiction and to a spiritual awakening. It will tell what our life will be like in recovery. It will describe The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of SAA and how these and service to others are key components of our recovery program.

There will also be stories written by SAA members who tell how they became addicted, the nature of their addiction, and how the program has led them to recovery.

You have the opportunity now to fill out the form below to tell us how many copies of the SAA Book you want to reserve. This will be used to determine how many copies to print in the first run and to insure that you will be able to order yours once the price has been set. Reserving copies **does not** obligate you to buy them. You will actually order and receive your book(s) after you know their price.

Please indicate how many hardbound and paperback copies you want for personal use and for group use.

You will be notified when the price is determined.

✕.....

Please Print Clearly

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Your Name _____

Your Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ and/or e-mail _____

	<u>Hard Bound</u>	<u>Paperback</u>
Personal Copies	_____	_____
Group Copies	_____	_____

Mail to: ISO of SAA, P.O. Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270
Please Make Copies For Your Group!

How to Submit a PBR Article

First:

Write from your experience, strength, and hope. Others may need to hear exactly what you have to say.

Second:

Send your article by e-mail to: PBR@saa-recovery.org

or mail to: ISO
P. O. Box 70949
Houston, TX 77270

Third:

Send the **Article Release Form** below. Download an extra from the SAA website if needed or feel free to make copies.

“Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts...” Step 12

Submission deadlines:

Dec. 1, Feb. 1, April 1, June 1, Aug. 1, Oct. 1

Release Form: I hereby give this newsletter, its successors, assignees, and those acting on its authority permission to copyright and/or publish any articles, poems, other written material, or art work pertaining to my personal story of recovery from addiction and my personal experience with or opinions about the SAA fellowship or program. I understand that additions may be made to my written material and that it may be changed or edited. I further understand that every effort will be made to assure my anonymity. I possess full legal capacity to exercise this authorization and hereby release the ISO newsletter from any claim by myself or my successors.

SIGNED: _____ **DATE:** _____

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4 ISSIE 5
3890-D North Freeway
Houston, TX 77022

Phone: 713-869-4902
Toll Free: 800-477-8191

web: <http://www.saa-recovery.org>

Office e-mail: info@saa-recovery.org

PBR e-mail: PBR@saa-recovery.org

Office Staff

Jerry B.

Director of Fellowship Services

Klaus P.

Assistant Director of Fellowship Services

Jonathan C.

Publications and Administrative Assistant

PBR Staff

Mike L.

Literature Editor

Jerry B.

ISO News

Jonathan C.

Layout Editor

Sex Addicts Anonymous is a twelve-step program of recovery based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. Our primary purpose is to stop our addictive sexual behavior and to help others recover from their sexual addiction. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior. Our fellowship is open to women and men regardless of religion, race, ethnic background, marital status, sexual orientation, or profession. Our members define their own sexual boundaries with the guidance of their sponsors and other group members. We encourage our members to discover and explore what healthy sexuality means to them.

Region

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Board Alternate

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Lit. Com. Alternate

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