

THE OUTER CIRCLE

An Unlikely Path to Forgiveness
Lessons on forgiveness sometimes
come from surprising places

PLUS

New Public Information Handbook

The Key to Step Three

Giving up Control





International Service Organization of SAA, Inc.

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The Outer Circle Mission

The mission of *The Outer Circle* is to provide information from the ISO and to share the experience, strength, and hope members have obtained from working the SAA program of recovery. As the first iteration put it in 1998, *The Outer Circle* newsletter “carries the message of hope to the sex addict who still suffers” — especially prisoners and others who don’t have the Internet.

Through *TOC*, SAA members contribute articles and poems that focus on working the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. It also communicates ISO news, regional activities, and other items of interest.

SAA meetings are encouraged to reproduce *TOC* at no charge and display it alongside other SAA literature. To keep costs down, please print out the online version.

If you have comments or suggestions, please see contact information on p. 29. To have an article considered for publication, see our Submission Guidelines on page 31.

To ensure that future issues can be offered without cost, please consider making a tax-deductible donation now to support publication of the newsletter.

May - June 2016

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FROM THE EDITOR

Hearing the Message of Recovery, Again

BY GARY T.

What I kept hearing over and over was an invitation to trust.

The longer I live life in recovery, the more I see how the benefits extend beyond just abstinence from addictive sexual behavior — and how the tools of recovery help me lead a happier existence.

The latest example is my recent surgery to correct some degenerative hearing loss. Though I could function fine, tests showed that I actually needed hearing aids. I'd often notice my deficiency in meetings, when I'd have trouble hearing a share, or struggle to catch conversation in the din of the “after meeting.”

I was grateful surgery could help. It even had a 97 percent success rate. But I had some trepidation, because I've never gone under “the knife” before. Rather than try to deal with my fears on my own, I used the recovery tool of asking for help. I actually talked about my concerns — to my husband, fellows and my sponsor — and heard their support.

Then I used another recovery go to: I prayed and meditated about it. What I kept hearing over and over was an invitation to trust. Trust in the doctor who specialized in this type of surgery. Trust in myself to make a healthy choice. And most importantly, trust in my Higher Power's loving care.

When I really listened, I realized it was God's will I have the surgery simply because it would allow me to connect better to others — and to myself. Thanks to that spiritual work, I went into the surgery feeling confident, cared for and even a bit courageous.

It went great.

Now, just as I did in my early recovery, I'm rediscovering a world I had lost: The strum of rain on the roof. The rhythmic thud of my footfalls. The gentle purr of my cats. And just as in recovery, I'm excited that more will be revealed.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Is Your Meeting Ready for SAA's Growth?

BY JOE H.

Our meeting growth is great news, but with the growth comes growing pains.

As a fellowship, we have grown from 730 weekly meetings in 2005 to more than 1,625 weekly meetings as of the end of March, 2016. This is an increase of 122 percent or approximately 11 percent a year. Our meeting growth is great news, but with the growth comes growing pains.

What I mean by that is we are in need of more sponsors. Many of our newer meetings struggle with attendance and sobriety. Our newcomers may walk into meetings that have not planned in advance how to properly welcome a newcomer. And there may be too much focus on the problem and not the solution. These are just a few areas that are challenging because of our growth. What can we do to help overcome these challenges?

As a member of a meeting you can ask for a group conscience to consider going through a group inventory which can be found in the ISO Group Guide.

The best way for us to prepare for future growth is for our meetings to be healthy and safe places for our recovery. The ISO Group Guide should help your meeting group identify where it is doing a good job and where it may need to improve. The Group Guide can be downloaded at our website, at <https://saa-recovery.org/Meetings/GroupGuide/>.

A good place to start is the "Group Inventory" which can be found on page 28. Please take advantage of this tool to improve our fellowship's ability to serve our members.

I would like to thank all of our members who have worked hard to start new meetings. It takes courage and commitment, and you have my Gratitude! You also have the support of the ISO staff and member volunteers should you have questions or need support with getting a new meeting started.

ISO NEWS

Revised Public Information Handbook Now Available

The ISO is pleased to announce the publication of a newly revised and updated Public Information Handbook. Public information (PI) is the term used to describe how we inform people outside of SAA about our fellowship and our program of recovery. It is, in effect, public outreach.

The purpose of the handbook is to serve as a guide for members of the fellowship who wish to share their experience, strength, and hope as an act of service to their communities – outreach beyond the walls of our rooms.

The PI Handbook is a compilation of the experience of numerous members of the fellowship from many different locations. In responding to the suggestion in Step Twelve to “carry the message to other sex addicts” and guided by the principles laid down in the Twelve Traditions of SAA, the handbook is loaded with useful tips about how local groups or intergroups can make their presence known within their communities in ways that are honest and discreet.

Since the primary purpose of an SAA group is to carry our message to the addict who still suffers (Tradition Five), we need to reach out to people outside of SAA who might have an interest in our program of recovery. They need to know we exist and what our program offers. Such interested parties may include therapists, counselors, clergy, social workers, police officers, physicians, nurses, and teachers, as well as addicts themselves and concerned family members.

Informing the public that SAA is available in our communities means that, when someone with addictive sexual behavior seeks help, there is a high probability that they will be able to find our fellowship.

The PI Handbook is available for download on the ISO service website in the Member Services area. Hard copies may be obtained from the ISO office.

Hosting Sought for Future ISO Conventions

Dear Colleagues in Recovery,

The ISO and the SAA Fellowship have been blessed with members stepping up to serve as hosts for our Annual ISO Convention, resulting in high quality meetings. This success has occurred because of the commitment to service

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by the hosting group. In addition, experience hosting has had a very positive impact on the hosting groups, as evidenced by the response to our survey by former Convention Chairs. The complete results of the survey can be made available to you by contacting our committee at info@saa-recovery.org.

Former hosts have stated that the support provided by the ISO Office has been instrumental in the entire process of organizing the Convention. The ISO has certain requirements for hosting groups, but the Office can help with these activities. For example, the fundraising amount is not written in stone, so a committed group can get help if their fundraising efforts fall short. Also, the ISO can provide support for volunteer manpower during the Convention if needed. In addition, there is a lot of information from previous hosts that can be shared.

Opportunities for hosting conventions are available each Memorial Day Weekend, starting in 2018. We would ask that you share the information about this service project with your groups.

We appreciate your consideration.

In Service,

The Long Range Convention Planning Committee (LRPC).

Women's Outreach Subcommittee Seeks Proposals for Next Retreat

The Women's Outreach Sub Committee of the ISO of SAA is accepting proposals for a host group/city for a 5th International Women's Retreat in 2016 or 2017. Groups (meetings, Intergroups, members) wishing to plan and host this event will have the full support of the WOSC and our Women's retreat standing workgroup. Proposals should include contact information for at least two local hostesses who will be attending.

The retreat has been held at retreat centers/campgrounds where the cost is lower to encourage participation. It should be within reasonable driving distance of a major airport, with local members (men and women) providing transportation.

Retreat weekends usually include meetings, workshops, breakout sessions, activities offered by the venue, meditation room, and other fun activities. Host

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groups and committees are encouraged to create their own retreats as new ideas are always welcome.

The WOSC has a budget to help financially with startup expenses such as the site deposit. It is our intention that the retreat be self-supporting, thus freeing that budget for the following year's start-up expenses. We ask that the event not be in April or May. (Past retreats have been in March and September.)

Groups may express their interest by filling out the proposal form and sending it to the WOSC chair at genoutreach.wosc.chair@saa-recovery.org.

WOSC Women's Retreat Proposal

The WOSC thanks you for your expression of interest in serving as the local hostess for the SAA International Women's Retreat. The annual retreat is a fairly new tradition; we have sponsored four so far. The purpose of this communication is to share what we have learned so far from our experience and to ask for your ideas.

Historically, retreat registrations have been between 15-50 attendees. Because women travel from all over the world, they may spend significant money in travel. Therefore, the cost of the retreat itself needs to be quite minimal, in the \$75 - \$250 range. Previous retreats have all been held in established retreat centers within a 90-minute drive of a major airport. In each case, members of the local intergroup (either men or women) volunteered to drive out-of-town guests to the retreat location.

We avoid competing with the International Conference and Convention (so no April or May) and other major SAA retreats (many of which seem to happen in October). Previous years' retreats were scheduled in March or September, and we are open to other months as well. It's helpful to check in with the ISO to see when other regional events are scheduled.

The WOSC dedicates significant resources to this event each year. We have approximately \$3000 to serve as a deposit at the retreat center. We create a workgroup that meets as needed to approve the site and cost, publicize the event, handle registrations, and coordinate details with the retreat center. The workgroup members attend the event.

What is needed and expected from the local hostess? Several critical things: find the site, select the dates, request donations from local and neighboring intergroups, and provide local volunteers and attendees. Several (at least two) local members would need to attend the WOSC retreat workgroup meetings in free teleconferences.

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What is the next step? Please complete the attached sheet with as much detail as possible and return it to the chair of the WOSC at: genoutreach.wosc.chair@saa-recovery.org.

Again, thank you on behalf of the Women's Outreach Subcommittee.

WOSC Women's Retreat Proposal

Your name and contact information	
Possible Dates	
Nearest major airport (name and miles from event)	
Transportation to/from event location	
Rough estimate of registration cost	
Facility (large meetings space, breakout rooms, amenities, space limitations, etc.)	
Accommodations (max & min attendees, are these shared rooms, private rooms, prices, are linens included?)	
Eating arrangements (include prepared meals, kitchen, snacks, drinks, special dietary accommodations)	

Return to: genoutreach.wosc.chair@saa-recovery.org. Thank you.

Board Approves Strategy Development Contract

The ISO Board of Trustees approved a major contract for strategy development for the fellowship. Here's a look at all the Board actions:

February

- » Approved funding for up to eleven Conference Steering Committee representatives for two days of face-to-face meetings prior to the annual delegate meeting of the ISO in Chicago, two days of Conference participation at the Conference, and one day for meeting to convene the new CSC. Standard travel reimbursements are requested for seven days (five service days and two travel days) and six nights.
- » Approved the expenditure of \$6000 - \$10,000 to cover the cost of Message Strategy Development with Softway, which includes the following steps and activities:
 - » Conversation between SAA representatives and creative and writing team
 - » Deeper research of SAA
 - » Create Message Hierarchy (top level, secondary messages)
 - » Create a tagline (if deemed appropriate)
 - » Deliverable: Message Strategy document

March

- » Approved the theme and the logo for the 2017 ISO Convention.
- » Approved a 4% pay increase for the Executive Director effective April 1, 2016.

Literature Committee Invites Submissions

The ISO Literature Committee invites members of the fellowship to submit original writings about the SAA program of recovery (such as pamphlets or booklets) for consideration and possible publication by the ISO.

The guidelines for submission of literature, as well as a pre-review questionnaire and release form, are available at http://saa-recovery.org/doc/Info_for_submissions_to_LitCom.pdf

'Houston Giving Thanks' Event Boosts Financial Outlook

In the month of March, our budget showed a surplus of \$5,749.33. We had estimated a surplus of \$895.50. The increase in our budget surplus was due in part to an additional \$7,000 donated to the "Houston Giving Thanks" event.

Our gross sales revenue for the SAA Green Book was below our estimate by \$1,253.85 in March and is below our estimate by \$1,351.01 for the year.

Our pamphlet and booklet sales were below our estimate by \$469.83 for March but has exceeded our estimate by \$463.33 for the year. Our bronze medallion sales were below our estimate \$545.02 in March but has exceeded our estimate by \$107.25 for the year.

Our total sales for March was below our estimate by \$2,720.21 and is below our estimate by \$1,558.75 for the year.

Individual donations exceeded our estimate by \$6,606.06 for March but is below our estimate by \$4,853.67. Group donations exceeded our estimate by \$293.32 in March and is below our estimate by \$5,227.31 for the year.

Our product inventory is valued at \$54,464.62.

Our expenses exceeded our estimate by \$44.67 in March but are below our estimate by \$753.93 for the year.

Summary of the annual budget (January 1, 2016, to March 31, 2016):

- » Gross sales are below our estimate by \$1,558.75.
- » Donations are below our estimate by \$10,080.98.
- » Expenses are below our estimate by \$753.93.

Our operational reserve is fully funded.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

In Your Service,

Joe H.

Executive Director

DEAR GRACE

It's Time for Women to Claim Their Seat in SAA

BY WOMEN'S
OUTREACH
SUBCOMMITTEE

In the long run, some of the healthiest meetings include both men and women committed to recovery.

Dear Grace,

I attended my first SAA meeting last week. It was listed on your website as mixed, but there were only men there that night. I felt uncomfortable being the only woman, but I could relate to some of the shares. After the meeting, a man told me that there were other meetings that would fit me better in a different fellowship and gave me the time and place of one. But the name of that fellowship was sex and love. I use men just like the men who shared use women. No love there.

Why do I have to go somewhere else?

Loveless

Dear Loveless,

I'm sorry to hear a man suggested you attend a different twelve step program. It's unfortunate that not everyone welcomed you into the meeting. If you related to some of the shares and you used others addictively, this fellowship is for you! Please keep in mind that the opinion expressed by the man who referred you to another fellowship was not the opinion of SAA as a whole.

SAA is a fellowship of men and women who share a journey of recovery through the Twelve Steps, experiencing recovery, bonding, and fellowship through meetings. The primary purpose of every meeting is to bring the message of recovery to the sex addict who struggles (the Fifth Tradition), and every sex addict who desires recovery is welcome (the 3rd Tradition).

It is possible that a member of that meeting felt uncomfortable with your presence, either because of his own issues or because his partner might not



approve of him attending a meeting with women sex addicts. Sadly, this happens. However, we have found in the long run that some of the healthiest meetings include both men and women committed to recovery through the Twelve Steps.

You have several choices. You can disregard the suggestion of that one person and continue to attend the meeting, or you can try another meeting in your area. You might ask men there if there are women sex addicts in your town willing to take phone calls. You could join the Women's Outreach List. You could attend telephone meetings, either mixed or women-only. To contact other women: visit saa-recovery.org and click the "Women" tab, then click "Contacting Other Women" and click "Grace." To find a Telemeeting: visit saa-recovery.org and click the

"Meetings" tab, then click "Electronic Meetings (Telephone and Web based)" and then click "Telemeetings."

The Fellowship is all inclusive. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior. There is a seat for you. Show up and claim it — you belong!

Welcome!

Grace

*Statement of Purpose for Dear Grace: To reach out to all women with a desire to stop addictive sexual behavior through this printed medium and share with the fellowship the types of questions the Grace e-mail (grace@saa-women.org) receives. *Names have been changed to protect anonymity.**

DEAR WILL

Sobriety and Religion are Apples and Oranges in Recovery

BY WILL

Sponsors should be aware that religious teachers are one issue and the teachings of the SAA program are another.

Dear Will,

I am gay, and all of my acting-out behavior involves compulsive sex with men. My sponsor, basing himself on his religious beliefs, considers all same-sex sexual activity to be acting out and so wants me to remain celibate. He is himself celibate, so he is not asking me to do something that he would not do. As I am concerned that I do not know how to be sexual in a non-compulsive way, I have been working a program of celibacy as well. Accordingly, I have not sought out any dating relationships because they will inevitably lead to sex.

However, with same-sex marriage now legal, I wonder if I can start to think along the lines of a relationship that would eventually lead to marriage. My sponsor would oppose any such notions on my part, and I am hesitant to stop working with him merely for the sake of a relationship that may never materialize. What do I do?

Sincerely,

Possibly Celibate Forever

Dear PCF,

The matter you discuss is complicated, on some levels at least. Will is glad to see that you are considering this option as it becomes more widely available.

You don't mention how long you have been with your sponsor or how long you have been sober. Especially if the answer to the latter question is "less than a year," you can safely refrain from doing anything right now.

However, assuming that you stay with the SAA program, you will eventually accrue more than a



year of sobriety, if indeed you haven't already, and you may want to consider this issue again at that time.

Remember, the SAA program does not take a position on same-sex relationships, let alone same-sex marriages, or same-sex sexual activity, so ultimately this is a decision that you will have to make.

The Green Book offers some guidance here in our Introduction: "Just as we do not define in advance what behaviors constitute addictive sexual behavior for individual members, SAA does not endorse any specific definition of healthy sexuality. There is no formula, no single answer to our questions. We can explore this realm whether we are single, dating, or in partnerships."

Will is aware of sponsors who are very religious. He even worked with one who was a daily churchgoer. Nonethe-

less, this particular sponsor was aware that religious teachings were one issue and the teachings of the SAA program were another; he guided his sponsees based solely on the SAA program and not on his religious beliefs, other than when the two coincided. This was a very valuable lesson.

When speaking to your sponsor about your plans, you might mention that the religious book he most likely references also says to honor the decisions of the government, which now allows same-sex marriage. That's the whole "render unto Caesar" thing; at least that is the way it was explained to Will.

Blessings, Will

*If you have a question for Will,
please send an email to [men4saa@
saa-recovery.org](mailto:men4saa@saa-recovery.org).*

LIVING IN SOBRIETY

Cultivating a Daily Spiritual Connection

BY KEVIN C.

**I am now
enjoying more
than eight and
a half years of
sobriety, one
day at a time,
'contingent on
the maintenance
of my spiritual
condition.'**

In the course of being battered and pummeled by sex addiction for some 35 years, I could occasionally muster as many as five or six days of freedom from compulsive masturbation. But I could never have imagined living into the five years of steady sobriety required to write this column. By the grace of the Higher Power of my understanding, I am now enjoying more than eight and a half years of sobriety, one day at a time, “contingent on the maintenance of my spiritual condition,” as the AA Big Book puts it.

I actually came into SAA twenty years ago after having found good recovery in two other Twelve Step programs and about ten years after having heard our founder speak at a professional workshop. (Some of us are slow to get a clue!) What a surprise to finally walk into that church basement for my first meeting and discover the attendees weren't a bunch of weirdos after all — at least no weirder than I! That was actually the first of many surprises I would find in my SAA recovery journey, including learning to integrate my sexuality as one part of a rich and healthy life, rooted in a loving relationship of joy rather than the desperation and futility of addiction.

Living in sobriety today starts with cultivating a daily spiritual connection and being open to the variety of ways this unfolds. Paradoxically, this takes the onus of responsibility off my shoulders and, at the same time, empowers me to take full responsibility for my own recovery. So I become willing to go to meetings regularly and share honestly, to work the steps to the best of my ability, to sponsor and be sponsored, to read and grow emotionally and spiritually, to practice early intervention whenever I stray into fantasy and intrigue and objectifying — I still get plenty of opportunities to practice this — and to do my part to keep my marriage healthy, mutually fulfilling, and joyful.

One of the best hands-on (or, more accurately, hands-off!) tools I use often is to pray for anyone I find myself sexualizing or objectifying or intriguing about, to pray for her (in my case as a heterosexual) well-being, for her happiness, for her relationships and significant other, etc. My partners in recovery remind me that she is someone's daughter or sister or spouse or mother, in other words a real person who doesn't deserve to be ogled. Cultivating empathy is enormously helpful in derailing the addictive train. Would I want someone looking at my daughter or sister or spouse inappropriately? Would I want to be on the other end of cheating? Would I want to be exploited by a person in a position of trust?

Laughter, in meetings and in all areas of my life, plays a critical role in helping me not take myself too seriously and to feel good about myself and life in general so that I'm less likely to want to practice my sex addiction in any of its potential manifestations. This is part of the repertoire of outer circle activities and foci that enlarge my life and help me be of better use to my program sisters and brothers and in the larger community and world. Surprise! Working my SAA program and living in sobriety ends up making me a better person than I would have been without the gift of recovery.

Like many in recovery, I have had significant struggles with self-esteem... or the lack thereof. Living in sobriety gives

me the daily gift of self-respect, and I am more and more able to like the person I see in the mirror. This change in self-perception makes me less likely to be looking for affirmation through addictive behavior and less vulnerable to the persistent and persuasive voice of the addict doing push-ups in the corner. Another surprise is how good it feels to simply move through a day in sobriety and to be trustworthy in all kinds of circumstances.

Living in sobriety means "suiing up and showing up" in all realms of my life, practicing recovery in tasks that aren't recovery related per se and yet play a part in maintaining sobriety. So, I am practicing recovery whenever I: put on new license plates before the old ones expire, pay bills on time, follow up on routine car maintenance, or deal with mountains of recycling that piles up. And I am practicing recovery whenever I face the things I don't want to do and do them anyway, maybe even first!

Finally, it's imperative that I remain humble and not become complacent, remembering to be grateful each day for the amazing gift of sobriety and being willing to do whatever it takes to keep living in sobriety.

If you have five or more years of sobriety and would like to celebrate by writing a Living in Sobriety column, please contact toc@saa-recovery.org.



Learning to Light a Fire

Lessons on forgiveness sometimes
come from unlikely places

BY NICOLE S.

Traveling an hour and a half from my real home to see my mother is what I used to call “going home.” The trip was always difficult for me. Just riding through my hometown was triggering for me. I saw the park where I lost friends to drugs and alcohol, the now abandoned roller skating rink where I got my first taste of stigma and ostracism, the haunts I had when I was psychotic due to untreated schizophrenia. But I wanted to have a relationship with my mother, so I went on the trips anyway.

Being in my mother’s home isn’t easy for me either. Being there brings up memories of hurts on Sundays when my maternal grandmother and family would gather. My mother’s mother was a really difficult person — hard, bitter, with little good to say

about the world. Sometimes I think about my maternal grandmother, and it helps me understand my mother a little bit better.

Still, it is hard to forgive. The biggest issue is my father's sexual abuse of me. I have never tried to tell my mom what my father did to me, and I don't think I ever will. She just isn't in a space where she could hear me.

My sponsor told me to make a list of all my resentments and put my mother at the top. That made sense. But then he told me I did not have the right to hold onto those resentments.

When I first came to the program, I realized that I needed to work on my relationship with my mother, but I put it off for the first three steps.

Then, I had to inventory my resentments in Step Four. My sponsor told me to make a list of all my resentments and put my mother at the top. That made sense. But then he told me I did not have the right to hold onto those resentments, and that later, in Step Nine, I would have to make amends for those resentments. I thought he was

kidding. Didn't he understand how I had been wronged? How could he possibly expect me to let go?

There were many issues in my relationship with my mother, and sometimes it felt as if I was trying to navigate a minefield in order to get through them all. My mother abused me in subtle but real ways. I was her surrogate spouse. I still remember being about seven years old and my mother adamantly demanding advice about our family's dire financial predicaments. I took my father's place when he was often physically or psychologically absent.

When he died, my mother turned to me, twelve at the time, to fill the void. As a child, I had no control over my mother's poor boundaries. But I do now. Rather than resent her, I have learned that it is my responsibility to let her know when I am prepared to be an emotional support for her. Today, I can listen, have a conversation, and feel good about it.

Also, my mother tries to express love by buying me things. It is hard for her to understand my desire to be financially independent. I have no problem turning to family in an economic crisis, but I have learned to turn down expensive gifts and pay for my own meals. I feel better, and I think she does, too.

My mother is a severe hoarder, which means that despite the fact that she lives in a spacious three-bedroom house, there's no room for me to just be alone. I don't own a car so "going home"

meant long car rides up and back with her and difficulty getting space if I needed it. The accumulated pains threatened to overwhelm me, and I resented going to see her.

The last time I was up to see my mother, I was cold because she has an old house, which is drafty and she keeps the heat down to save electricity. I was angry again. When I said I was cold, she suggested I light a fire in her spacious fireplace.

“I don’t know how,” I answered.

She came forward and carefully showed me all the steps to making a fire. First, shred paper and light it in more than one place. Next put

Today I have a healthy relationship with my mother. It started when I realized I did not have the right to hold on to old hurts. It was wrong and it was tearing me apart.

twigs on the flame, then sticks, then logs. Suddenly, as the fire came to life, something finally clicked. I realized that my mother did not hate me. She

Sabbatical

*A long sigh of exhaustion
after a lifetime of love
and of things resembling love
I wasn't perfect
I committed myself when
commitment was clearly wrong
and I withdrew myself
when I felt threatened
I married and married
like a mail-order bride
without a dowry
and I was passed around
like a dollar bill*

*until I felt used and dirty
I woke up in a foreign country
with another ring upon my
finger
and nothing inside
to claim as my own
so I started on this
sabbatical
vowing to study myself
for as long as it took
to reclaim my honor
to love myself
and become an honest person*

had tried hard to be the best mother she could. And all my resentments and rage were about the past. I didn't have to live there anymore. I finally realized the truth about Steps Four and Nine.

Today, I have a healthy relationship with my mother. It started when I realized I did not have the right to hold on to old hurts. It was wrong and it was tearing me apart.

I had to accept that nothing gave me the right to hate her, to approach our relationship with a well of animosity just beneath the surface.

Now I no longer go "home" because I already have a home. I have learned to ask my mother to come to me. She

comes down on Sundays, and we spend time together. My mother can never give me a home. She couldn't when I was a child and she can't now.

But I don't have to hate her for that. I can't control who my mother is or what she is willing to believe, but I can change how I see her. I can choose to accept she will never be able to give me a home and a family.

The last time I saw my mother, we had lunch and went to a local play. We had some time just to enjoy the weather.

Soon she will be coming down for a Renaissance festival. I am looking forward to it. I am glad I asked her how to light a fire.

*Every day requires courage
to look into that mirror
admit my transgressions
then fix them
My addiction to relationships
sends out little hooks
to catch fish
and then I realize
I don't want them
and take the barbs out
of my own skin
I'm on sabbatical
I remind myself*

*I'm not lonely
only growing
millimeter by millimeter
It doesn't matter
As long as it takes
as high as it goes
as deep as the ocean is
the love in my own soul*

- Laura T

The Key to Belief

Getting past the concept of 'God' may be the place to start Step Three

BY BRUCE M.

W

hen I entered recovery through SAA three years ago at age 60, I had already spent a lifetime denigrating recovery groups (AA, primarily). They had always seemed to me very frivolous, contrived, not-for-real. I imagined a lot of people sitting around sipping coffee and trying to act sober for an hour before going off to drink themselves silly. How wrong I was!

Now, three years in, I am beginning to get what it means to be sober and free from the oppression of sexual addiction. The process is starting to take its toll on me and allow me to be free. Yahoo! But it has not been easy, especially due to the fact that I am not a believer in any religion or religious practice; I do not acknowledge any Creator of mankind or omnipresent being. So how does this very spiritual program of recovery — and specifically Step Three — work for me?

When I started, I was taken aback at the number of times “God” was mentioned in the preliminary meeting literature and Twelve Steps. “Oh no,” I thought. “These nuts are going to try to convert me.” That’s not what I needed; I needed help recovering from my addiction.

But again I was wrong. That was not what the focus of the group was about. The

readings and the literature just set a groundwork, allowing each participant to proceed in accordance with their own beliefs.

I learned the reality of a “Higher Power,” something greater than myself. As a well-educated person, a professional, I was aware of so many things bigger than myself: nature, weather, the government, prejudice, love, etc. So it was not difficult to imagine some “power greater than myself” that could help me through this journey towards recovery. That most others in the group leaned on their religious beliefs (almost always Christian in nature) did not dissuade me. That was where they were coming from. I was just coming from a different perspective.

Of course, the dichotomy between their beliefs and the absence of mine created rifts at times. It was hard to hear someone invoke the name of Jesus, as if that was the only power greater than ourselves. While that may describe their Higher Power, it certainly did not describe mine.

So I used to think, “Well if he’s so powerful, why doesn’t he cure you?” But that missed the point, which is: We must all be ready to accept that a power greater than ourselves can lead us back to sanity. If they chose Jesus and I chose something else, more power to both of us!

There is an adage that says you never talk about politics or religion unless you want trouble. And that holds true in SAA as well as anywhere else. People do not want their religious beliefs questioned because that questions their very existence. So in-

stead of concentrating on what a person’s Higher Power might be, I look instead at what the person is seeking to gain from his or her belief in that power. And in SAA, it’s simple: We all want to recover from our behaviors that had gripped us and pulled us into the mire of addiction.

So now, as I sit and listen to my fellow travelers discuss their battle with addiction and share their victories and defeats, I tune out the references to their Higher Power and hear only the sweet joy of recovery. That is all that matters anyway. Not how we got there but that we were able to stop our addictive sexual behavior at all.

I’ve heard it said that some people choose a tree or a doorknob as their Higher Power. That seems a little trite to me, and I don’t know how they pull it off. But every single one of us has to approach recovery in the manner in which we feel most comfortable.

For me, it’s the knowledge that this program (SAA) and its tenets have been powerful enough to bring thousands of suffering individuals back to sanity. For me, it’s the sweet promise that if I continue to go to meetings, read, journal, and meditate, I can remain sober. What joy that is, and all without having to accept some other person’s idea of what God is, what Higher Power means.

So, it really does not matter how we interpret or accept the concept of “Higher Power” in recovery. It’s that we do so in some fashion as part of our overall process — and that we keep coming back!

Why Surrender?

Understanding the true meaning of powerlessness

BY KEITH G.

In the SAA fellowship, it is common to say that our program is all about surrender. In fact, the First Step says it's crucial to recovery.

“We surrender, raise the white flag, and accept that the battle is over.”

Surrender? Really? Is that a good thing? Surrender is a military term. The closest I've come to serving in the military is seeing the movie, “Saving Private Ryan,” so I'm hardly a military expert. But isn't surrender the act of placing my weapons on the ground and letting my enemy have them? Wouldn't I be disarming myself in the presence of my foe, who is fully armed?

So, let me get this straight: When I work the SAA program of recovery, I am supposed to get rid of my weapons and make myself totally vulnerable. Totally defenseless.

That's freaking stupid!

I mean, come on... take my best means of protection and just hand it over? No questions asked? Imagine a police officer or soldier willingly doing what I've just described: Here, sir... let me give you my rifle.

Are you kidding me? Surrender? I mean, what moron... what idiot... what fool... would lay down his weapons and become totally defenseless??!

Answer: one who has been defeated. One who has lost the war. What must occur before I surrender? Defeat. This is Step One; this is where it all begins.

I will never surrender until I realize I have lost. The battle is over, and I am defeated. I lay down my weapons because they are useless. My weapons will not do what I had hoped or wished they would do: they cannot enable me to win. If I insist on maintaining possession of those weapons, I will likely find myself in great personal danger.

Twelve-step recovery begins with Step One, but Step One is not actually a work; Step One is a realization. We admitted. We don't "work" our powerlessness; we admit it. We realize it. It is already true, and we finally understand that painful truth. We admit that we have lost the war. There is nothing left to try. No question in our minds. We are defeated. We. Are. Powerless.

And therefore, we are willing to lay down our weapons. We are willing to surrender.

Until I realize that the battle is over and that I have lost... I will never surrender. I suspect that's true for you, too. So what weapon are we discussing here? What is it that I have used to defend myself, to try to defeat this enemy called sex addiction? What is it that I need to lay down?

Answer: control.

Whether we are hard-charging type-A personalities or meek, mild-mannered,

quiet souls or something in-between, we seek to protect ourselves by exerting some type of control over the situation or the people involved. Our character defects are extremely useful as we try to maintain control. We might use manipulation or defensiveness; we might use arrogance or procrastination. But all of these are in the ultimate service of the weaponry of control.

The war is over and we have lost. When we realize that, we will be willing to lay down our weapons, our control. Once we realize that we are defeated, only then will we be open to considering a power who is greater than we are. In other words, after that realization, we are ready for Step Two. But not before.

Is the SAA twelve-step recovery program all about surrender? Absolutely. But my willingness to surrender is directly related to my acceptance that I have been defeated. It's done. It's over.

So, do I realize that I've been defeated? Or am I still holding out hope that I can win the war? Perhaps the ultimate question is this: How severe will the consequences have to become before I realize that the war is over and I have lost?

The solution to our addiction awaits all who realize and accept their defeat. In other words, all who are willing to surrender.

Step One: We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior – that our lives had become unmanageable.

ISO ANNOUNCEMENTS

IASA Outreach Submits new Guide to Literature Committee

The Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance Outreach Committee is pleased to announce that the *Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance First Step Guide* has been submitted to the Literature Committee of SAA. In addition, we'd like to make available our contact email for anyone interested in finding out more about intimacy and sexual avoidance recovery. The contact email is avoidance@saa-recovery.org. To see when the IASA meets, go to p. 30.

SAA Pamphlets Now Available to Read Online

The ISO is pleased to announce the availability of SAA pamphlets on the SAA website (saa-recovery.org). The pamphlets may be found by following the “SAA Literature” sub-tab from the home page. Also included are the pamphlets in Spanish and the “Pathway to Recovery” pamphlet in French.

This milestone has been accomplished by the combined efforts of the ISO Literature Committee, the ISO office, and the ISO Board of Trustees and its committees, specifically the Online Presence Committee and the International Development Committee. We believe that ready access to SAA literature online will greatly enhance the capacity of member groups and individual members of the fellowship to carry the SAA message of recovery more effectively and efficiently.

As before, the printed pamphlets are available for purchase from the ISO — either through the online SAA Store or by telephone or postal mail from the ISO office. Don't forget to ask about our volume discount.

Submissions Sought for SAA Meditation Book

The ISO Literature Committee welcomes submission of entries from the fellowship-at-large for possible inclusion in the SAA Meditation Book. The Meditation Book will consist of 366 entries, one for each day of the calendar year.

To ensure consideration, submissions should contain the following:

- » A short quotation taken from SAA publications that are Literature Committee approved or Conference approved (see list below). The quote must include the source and page number, using the following style: Sex Addicts Anonymous, page 20. Quotes from other sources will not be considered.
- » The main body is an expansion of the topic or principle, ideally including perspective on a particular aspect of SAA recovery through your experience, your strength,

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your hope, and your voice. Please note that we have found that using “I” rather than “we” in the body of the meditation makes for a stronger message. This is the critical component of your submission. We can add a quote or an affirmation, but only you can provide your ES&H.



- » At the bottom of the page, a concise statement to summarize the main idea of the meditation or to offer a poignant challenge or affirmation.

Each entry should be 200-350 words including the quotation and the closing affirmation (1.5 - 3 sides, handwritten). Submissions must include your name and contact information to be cross-referenced with your release form.

Sources for Opening Quotation:

Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA Green Book); Sex Addicts Anonymous (Pamphlet); Abstinence; The Bubble; Three Circles; Getting a Sponsor; Writing to Prisoners; Sexual Sobriety and the Internet; Safe and Sexually Sober Meetings; Getting Started in Sex Addicts Anonymous; A Special Welcome to the Woman Newcomer; Recovery from Compulsive Sexual Avoidance; Group Guide; Intergroup Guide; Tools of Recovery; First Step to Recovery; Abstinence and Boundaries in SAA; SAA and the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Sex Addict

Release Form: The ISO must have a signed release before a submission can be considered. By signing the release, the author grants the ISO of SAA, Inc. sole rights to edit, alter, publish, or reject any submission. A blank release form is available in this newsletter or may be obtained from the ISO office or downloaded and printed from the SAA website.

Please send a digital copy of your submission (attached as .doc, .docx, .rtf, .txt, or in the body of the email) to: meditation@saa-recovery.org.

Include complete contact information and, if possible, a signed scanned release. All submitters must send or have sent a release form - one per author - before submissions can be considered.

You can also send your meditation, contact information, and signed release by postal mail to: Meditation Book, ISO, PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270.

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SAA Group Inventory Form

Take time to reflect on your group's strengths and weaknesses in each of the following areas. Briefly mention one or more concrete examples in answer to each question.

1. Staying rooted in the Twelve Steps

- » Are the steps being discussed in the group?
- » Does the group give adequate time for First Step Presentations?
- » Are we emphasizing practicing the steps?

2. Knowledge of, adherence to, and fidelity to the Twelve Traditions.

- » Are principles being kept above personalities in our group?
- » Are we providing adequate financial support for our group and fellowship?
- » Are we always mindful of anonymity?

3. Newcomers

- » Are twelfth-step calls being answered in a timely fashion?
- » Is attention being given to the needs of the newcomer?
- » Are we taking temporary sponsorship seriously?

4. Primary purpose: Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sex addict who still suffers (Tradition Five).

- » How is outreach being addressed by our group?
- » Are we using attraction rather than promotion?

5. Tools of the program: How are these tools being used by the group?

- » Sponsorship
- » Literature
- » Service
- » Phone list
- » Medallions
- » Other

6. Meetings (write in suggestions for improvement)

- » Topic or step presentations
- » Membership attendance
- » Format

7. Other areas where we are doing well or need improvement

- » Group's sexual sobriety
- » Fellowship outside meetings
- » Other

CONTACT THE ISO

Want to connect with the International Service Organization website, staff, board of trustees, trusted servants, or special workers? Here's the contact info you need:

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The ISO of SAA Board of Trustees also has an e-mail box, which may be used to register comments, positive or negative, from the fellowship about the ISO staff: oocchair@saa-recovery.org.

Board of Trustees and Literature Committee

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LitComAL@saa-litcom.org

CALENDAR

Here are tentative ISO outreach and committee meeting times for the next several months. Meetings times change often. All times are Central Standard Time.

First Sunday of the month

Audio Review Committee (odd months only)
— 2:30 p.m.

LGBT Outreach — 1:00 p.m.

Conference Steering Committee (CSC) -
Policy & Procedure — 2:00 p.m.

Prisoner Outreach — 8:00 p.m.

Second Saturday of the month

Intimacy and Sexual Avoidance — 8 a.m.

Author's Group — 4:30 p.m.

Women's Outreach — 5:00 p.m.

Second Sunday of the month

CSC - Area Formation — 2:00 p.m.

CSC - Nominating — 3:00 p.m.

Literature Committee — 4:00 p.m.

General Outreach — 6:30 p.m.

Third Tuesday of the month

CSC - Policy Structure Work Group — 5:00 p.m.

Third Thursday of the month

Seventh Tradition — 6:00 p.m.

2016 Convention — 7:00 p.m.

Third Saturday of the month

CSC - Twelve Concepts Work Group — 12:00 p.m.

Third Sunday of the month

CSC - Charter & Bylaws — 2:00 p.m.

Information Systems and Online Presence
Committee — 2:00 p.m.

SE Region — 6:00 p.m.

Fourth Sunday of the month

CSC — 2:00 p.m.

Meditation Writing Workshop — 5:00 p.m.

Intergroup Communications — 8:00 p.m.

To attend a committee meeting, you must be a member or be invited. If you're interested in joining a committee, email info@saa-recovery.org or call the ISO office.

Here's a listing of upcoming SAA events from around the fellowship.

May

The North Carolina Triangle Area Intergroup is sponsoring a structured, writing-based approach to the Steps May 6-8. It is possible to work Steps One through Nine during the retreat. The beautiful camp

ground setting in rural NC has climate-controlled accommodations for men and women. For more information, contact Bob D. at 800-921-1896 or email triangle.step.retreat@gmail.com.

If you'd like your event to be listed in the Calendar section, please send it to toc@saa-recovery.org. To ensure your listing gets published in time, please send it at least two months in advance of the event.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Get Your Story Published in *The Outer Circle*

The Outer Circle newsletter relies on submissions from the Fellowship. It's a great way to carry the message to other sex addicts!

Articles may be submitted by email to toc@saa-recovery.org or by mail to the ISO office. If possible, please submit articles via email in Microsoft Word format. All articles must be accompanied by the **RELEASE FORM** at the bottom of this page.

Deadlines for Submission

Jan/Feb:	Nov 5
Mar/Apr:	Jan 5
May/June:	Mar 5
July/Aug:	May 5
Sept/Oct:	July 5
Nov/Dec:	Sept 5

Here are some general writing guidelines:

Personal stories can be anywhere from 500-1,000 words. The main guideline is to share your experience, strength, and hope in the principle of Step Twelve. It may be helpful to think of your submission as a written form of a share you'd give in a meeting — something that's working for you or that you're struggling with.

Also, please consider writing a 500- to 1,000-word article based on a workshop or talk you've given around the Steps and Traditions. Again, the key is sharing your experience, strength, and hope with other sex addicts. Please don't worry about grammar and spelling. We'll clean that up for you.

General Release Form

In consideration of being reviewed for possible publication, I hereby transfer and release to the ISO of SAA, Inc (assignee) all legal rights to the publication of my submission(s) or any edited version thereof in any official ISO publication, including Sex Addicts Anonymous, The Outer Circle, the SAA meditation book, the SAA websites, or any other SAA program material, such as pamphlets, booklets and audio recordings.

With this submission, I transfer to the assignee without limitation the legal title and all literary rights, including copyright and/or trademark and the full right and license to reproduce, copy, edit for content, modify, distribute, and create derivatives from the submitted work. I understand that every effort will be made to safeguard my personal anonymity in the publication and distribution of this material. I also understand that I may or may not receive further communication regarding my submission prior to its publication.

I hereby further attest that I possess full legal capacity to exercise this authorization, and I hereby Release the assignee from any claim whatsoever by me or my successors.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

SAA TWELVE STEPS

- 1.** We admitted we were powerless over addictive sexual behavior - 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 other sex addicts and to practice these principles in our lives.