

The Outer Circle

The Official Newsletter of the
International Service Organization of SAA, Inc.

PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270

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THE ISO ENCOURAGES GROUPS TO REPRODUCE *THE OUTER CIRCLE* SO THAT COPIES WILL BE AVAILABLE TO ALL MEMBERS. *THE OUTER CIRCLE* IS MAILED FREE TO ALL WHO REQUEST IT.

MEMBER DONATIONS ARE GRATEFULLY ACCEPTED.

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Literature Editor's Note: The ideas expressed in the literature section of *The Outer Circle* reflect the opinions of the authors of those articles and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the ISO or of the SAA fellowship as a whole.

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ISO News

ISO Board Actions

The Board of Trustees of the ISO of SAA, Inc. met on September 22, 2007 by teleconference. The following is a report of significant actions taken:

Elected: Wharton S. as the Board liaison to the Intergroup Communications Committee (ICC).

Approved: The use of a postcard to carry a Literature Committee approved outreach message to announce the website launch – to be sent only to helping professionals in their roles as professionals.

Approved: A silent auction for the 2008 convention.

Approved: The geographic area for the 2008 convention local discount.

Approved: To authorize the transfer of \$3,000.00 from the operating reserve to checking.

Accepted: The job performance evaluation of Jerry B.

Approved: To increase the salary of Jerry B. by \$1,500.00 annually.

Accepted: The job performance evaluation of Carol Ann R. and an increase in salary of \$1,000.00 per year.

Accepted: The Business Transition Proposal as presented. (See page 3)

Accepted: The contract for Jerry B.

Approved: To raise the limit for one-signature checks from \$499.99 to \$999.99.

Approved: To change the name of the Translation Reserves from “Translation Reserves” to “Translations and Literature Projects Reserve” with all expenditures to be approved by the Board.

Approved: To add South Africa to the Northeast (NE) region.

Board Approves Transition Business Services Transition Plan

At its meeting on September 22, the ISO Board of Trustees adopted a plan that will insure continuity of business services after the retirement of Jerry B., Director of Business Services, on December 31.

During a year of transition, Jerry B. will contract with the ISO to provide a wide variety of business products and services essential to financial continuity and integrity. As a contractor, Jerry B. will no longer participate in the day-to-day decision making of the ISO but will be available for consulting and for providing corporate memory.

Beginning January 1, 2008, a full time employee will look after daily business operations, with the help of a part time assistant.

Jerry B.'s contract is for an estimated 1,073 hours of work in the areas of financial and inventory control, legal and tax obligations, employee payroll and benefits, marketing and donor development, consulting, and corporate memory. Altogether, his contract calls for the performance of 44 specific products or services on a weekly, biweekly, monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, annual, or as-needed basis.

Worth \$17,168, the contract will be paid monthly upon receipt of an invoice. Restructuring of the Business Services staff will render the plan budget neutral, meaning it will shift the cost of the contract from wages to professional fees without increasing overall expenses.

The position of Director of Business Services will not be filled immediately. Instead, the full time position of Business Administrator has been created to bridge the gap during the year of transition. After reviewing all aspects of Business Services, the Board will decide when to fill the Director of Business Services position and what other part or full time employees will be needed.

The ISO's contract with Jerry B. includes a review after nine months, at which time a decision will be made whether or not to renew all or part of it beyond 2008.

Jerry B. has been an ISO employee since June 14, 1993, serving first as Office Manager and then as Director of Fellowship Services until August 1, 2006, when he became Director of Business Services.

From the ISO News Editor...

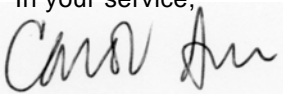
As the ISO approaches the half way point in its service year, I just wanted to write a letter of personal thanks to all those who are working together on various ISO projects to better carry the message to addicts who are still suffering.

First, this new newsletter itself demonstrates the coordinated efforts of the Delegates, the Literature Committee, the Board and its committees and both Business and Fellowship Services within the ISO Office. Other cooperative literature-related progress includes current circulation of the recently revised women's pamphlet, the search for a printer for the pocket-sized basic text, the availability of a Spanish translation of the Group Guide, and the approval of the meditation book submission format and job description of its future editor.

Within the Board committees and subcommittees substantial progress has been made in the first six months of this service year on a number of projects. The most anticipated of these projects is, of course, the new SAA website which is nearing completion. Another is the Intergroup Guide, the initial draft of which the Intergroup Communications Committee has slated for completion by March of 2008. The Public Information Subcommittee of General Outreach is also putting the final touches on a proposed SAA Fact File. This expanded outreach piece will be a ready reference for members of the media or helping professionals who are looking for more information about our fellowship than the basic SAA pamphlet has to offer. Other equally valuable work is being done in each committee.

Last year the ISO service structure grew rapidly in size, and this year it has grown in depth and maturity. Because of our collective commitment to make decisions as a group, progress on our work together is necessarily slow – but that is how we believe our Higher Power is best heard. At the ISO, we are practicing these principles in all our activities. For that, I give my personal thanks for the time and care that so many are investing in our work together this year. I remain grateful to be...

In your service,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Carol Ann R.", is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Carol Ann R.
Director of Fellowship Services

Feedback on *Sex Addicts Anonymous*

The ISO Literature Committee reminds members that the book, *Sex Addicts Anonymous*, remains open for feedback from the SAA fellowship. We are deeply grateful for the time and effort members spend in providing feedback, and all feedback we receive from members and groups is given full and careful consideration.

Please note that, while we do acknowledge initial receipt of feedback, the ISO is not able to communicate beyond that about how or whether a member's feedback will be used for current or future revisions of the book. Any suggested new writing, regardless of length or content, that is sent to the ISO as feedback on ISO approved literature, becomes property of the ISO of SAA, Inc. and is subject to editing and revision.

Please send any feedback to:

E-mail address: info@saa-recovery.org

Mailing address: ISO of SAA
PO Box 70949
Houston, TX 77270 USA



Guidelines for Meditation Book Submissions to the Literature Committee

The Literature Committee welcomes submissions from the wider fellowship regarding the Meditation Book. Every submission needs to follow these guidelines to be considered for inclusion in the book.

The Meditation Book will consist of 366 entries, each entry representing a specific date of any calendar year, such as January 1, etc. Each entry will be one page and placed according to a specific date as decided upon by the Literature Committee. We are asking members to submit one or more complete entries for their consideration in the book.

When submitting, an entry needs to consist of the following elements:

- a) One Quotation. A quotation pulled from ISO-approved literature. Include the exact quote, the title of the literature used, and the page number. Following, in alphabetical order, are the pieces of ISO-approved literature: Abstinence, Abstinence and Boundaries in SAA, The Bubble, First Step to Recovery, From Shame to Grace, Getting Started in Sex Addicts Anonymous, Group Guide, *Sex Addicts Anonymous* (also known as “The Green Book”), Sex Addicts Anonymous (the introductory pamphlet), Sexual Sobriety and the Internet, A Special Welcome to the Woman Newcomer, Three Circles, Tools of Recovery.
- b) Main body. The main body of the entry will consist of text expanding on the thought or principle expressed in the quotation, offering a perspective on a particular aspect of SAA recovery. The writer may touch on any aspect of recovery including the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, other common SAA tools, principles, and shared wisdom of our SAA program and the fellowship.
- c) Meditation / Affirmation. At the bottom of the page there will be a concise statement epitomizing the text of the page into a meditation, thought, or affirmation—i.e., a form customarily used by readers in a daily spiritual practice.
- d) Word total limitation. The total number of words per submission should be approximately 300 words or less, with roughly 3/4 of that total devoted to the main body and 1/4 of the total devoted to the quotation and the meditation/affirmation. These are not hard and fast word counts; rather they are approximate guidelines.

The writer will need to sign a release form that the meditation, if used, becomes the property of the ISO. By signing the release form, the submitter also grants the ISO the right to edit, alter or change the wording of the submission in any way necessary for inclusion in the text.

Upcoming LitCom Deadlines

by Mike L., Editor, *The Outer Circle*

As you may have noticed, the Literature Committee has been very busy of late with new projects. We are now at the point of looking to the fellowship for help and feedback.

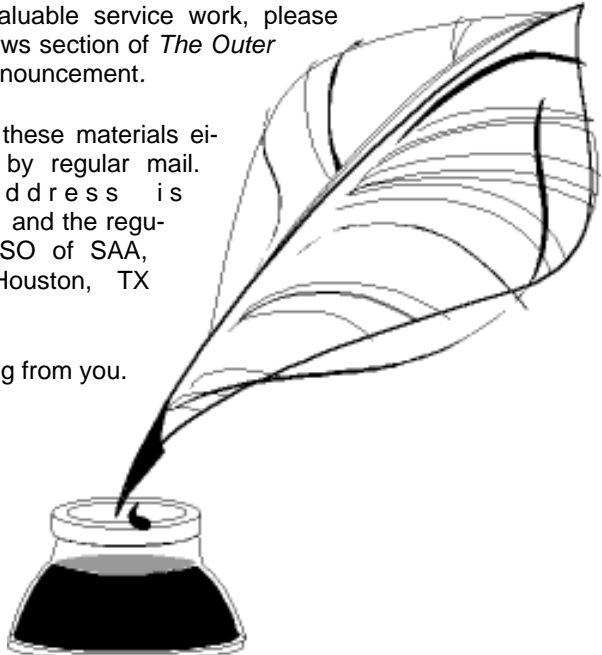
I hope that you have had a chance to review the new Group Guide. The revision, which has been contemplated for quite some time, has been a couple of years in the making. Among other changes and updates, it incorporates a number of readings from *Sex Addicts Anonymous*. Please take a look at it if you have not already done so, and let us have your feedback by December 31. (The Group Guide can be viewed and downloaded from the ISO website, www.saa-recovery.org.)

Also, I hope you like the newly updated design for *The Outer Circle*. In line with the publication's renewed appearance, we are currently accepting submissions for a new logo. If you have a logo you wish to submit, please send it to us. We have not set a fixed deadline for submissions, so the sooner the better.

One of our most exciting upcoming projects is the meditation book. On page 6 of this issue appear the guidelines for submissions. Please consider writing a meditation and sending it to us. The job description for the editor of the mediation book will appear in a forthcoming issue. If you are interested in doing this valuable service work, please keep an eye on the news section of *The Outer Circle* for the formal announcement.

You can send any of these materials either electronically or by regular mail. The e-mail address is toc@saa-recovery.org and the regular mail address is ISO of SAA, P.O. Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270-0949.

I look forward to hearing from you.



Men's Outreach

WANTED:

- Men to provide support to men recovering in isolated areas
- Experienced men willing to be long-distance sponsors

We need your help! We are asking for every group in SAA to provide at least one male volunteer to provide support in one or more of the following ways:

- Serve as a temporary or permanent sponsor for men needing sponsors
- Accept program phone calls from men in remote areas
- Provide guidance & support to men who have started new groups
- Provide guidance & support to men leading groups that have gotten away from the solution – the 12 Steps

The *Men's Support Network* List is a list of men seeking long-distance support (including sponsors) and men willing to provide that support. The biggest call has been from men within our fellowship who are seeking long-distance sponsors.

How to Join

You can join by filling out and mailing in the sign-up sheet below. You can also join by sending an e-mail to men4saa@saa-recovery.org. Or, you can join by calling Tim at the ISO office at (800) 477-8191.

In recovery, Members of the Men's Outreach Sub-committee

P.S. If you have additional ideas, please e-mail the Men's Outreach Sub-committee at men@saa-recovery.org.

----- cut here -----

MEN'S SUPPORT NETWORK LIST SIGN-UP SHEET

First name and initial _____

City & state or Country _____

Email address _____

Time zone _____ Phone number _____

Safe to leave a message? _____ Willing to be a sponsor? _____

Sobriety date _____

Willing to offer help to a new meeting? _____

Mail to: ISO of SAA, PO Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270 USA

Northeast (NE) Regional Planning

Members of the Northeast (NE) Region have been meeting by teleconference to plan cooperative activities during the regular service year. Facilitated by NE Board representative, Gary C., the group is in its second year of service work together. For information on how to participate, please contact Gary at BoardNE@saa-recovery.org.

Members of other regions are encouraged to meet with one another to discuss cooperative planning as well by contacting their regional Board representative. You can find your Board representative's service email address listed in each issue of *The Outer Circle*.

We Are Looking for Our Meditation Book Editor!

The ISO will be recruiting an editor for the planned SAA meditation book over the next few months. If you are interested, please watch *The Outer Circle* for the forthcoming formal announcement of the position.

ISO Websites Committee Report

The ISO's Website Committee (WebCom) is currently engaged in a project to renew SAA's international website at <http://saa-recovery.org>. WebCom's work in this area spans the breadth of those involved in international service in hopes of delivering a useful resource that will meet the needs of both those who seek help and the Fellowship itself. The ambitious goal of a November launch of this new website has had to be postponed for a short time while technical details are worked out, but the WebCom is confident that a new website will be available in early 2008 to those seek our message of recovery on the internet.



21st Annual
SAA International Convention



2008

*Sail with us to the calmer
waters of recovery...*

SAA Basic Text Now Available in Spanish!

The Spanish translation of the SAA basic text, *Sexo Adictos Anónimos*, is now available through the ISO office. Orders from members in California and Puerto Rico have already been fulfilled.

The Spanish translation is currently available only in soft cover, and the price (\$14.00 US) is the same as its English counterpart.

To order, members can go to the SAA Store on the ISO website at www.SAA-Recovery.org, by mail at the following address:

ISO of SAA
P.O. Box 70949
Houston, TX 77270
USA

or by phone (US and Canada) at (800) 477-8191. To call the ISO office from outside the US and Canada, members can use the alternate number 001-713-869-4902. The ISO can ship literature to anywhere in the world.

Please note that the international shipping fee is double that of the US First Class domestic rate. All checks and money orders must be in US dollars.

¡El texto básico de SAA ya disponible en español!

La traducción al castellano del texto básico de SAA, *Sexo Adictos Anónimos*, ya es disponible de la Organización Internacional de Servicios (ISO). Los pedidos del libro de nuestros miembros de California y de Puerto Rico ya se han cumplido.

Actualmente, la traducción castellana es sólo disponible en rústica, y el precio (U.\$14.00) es el mismo que el de la versión inglesa.

Para pedir el libro, los miembros pueden visitar la tienda de SAA en el website www.SAA-Recovery.org; si se quiere pedirlo por correo, se debe usar la dirección siguiente:

ISO of SAA
P.O. Box 70949
Houston, TX 77270
EEUU

o se puede llamar la oficina (desde los EEUU y de Canadá) a (800) 477-8191. Para llamar la ISO desde afuera de los EEUU o de Canadá, los miembros pueden usar el número alternativo 001-713-869-4902. La ISO puede enviar literatura a cualquier parte del mundo.

Favor de anotar que el precio para enviar libros a direcciones internacionales es doble el del precio doméstico Primera Clase de los EEUU. Todo cheque y giro postal debe ser en dólares estadounidenses.

ISO Financial News

ISO Income/Expense Summary As of September 30, 2007

	September	Monthly Average	Year To Date
NET OPERATING INCOME			
Net Sales	6,211	7,117	64,050
Donations	8,458	13,230	119,071
General Donations	3,871	8,685	78,173
LifeLine Partners	4,141	4,229	38,058
Designated Donations	446	316	2,840
Miscellaneous Income	278	1,789	16,101
TOTAL NET OPERATING INCOME	14,947	22,136	199,222
OPERATING EXPENSES			
Wages/Benefits/Taxes	15,843	15,691	141,220
Program Related	8,856	8,629	77,665
Wages - Other	3,531	3,436	30,915
Benefits	2,407	2,060	18,543
Payroll Taxes	1,049	1,566	14,097
Insurance	280	251	2,259
Depreciation	175	158	1,425
Postage	24	115	1,038
Phone	220	214	1,926
Website Related	76	49	442
Occupancy	1,503	1,399	12,594
Office Related	225	785	7,053
Professional Fees	0	82	737
Financial	772	978	8,799
<i>The Outer Circle</i>	2,407	772	6,950
Board & Committees	2,662	1,771	15,943
Translations/Major Literature Projects	2,916	324	2,916
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	27,103	22,589	203,302
TOTAL NET OPERATING SURPLUS	-12,156	-453	-4,080
NONOPERATIONAL INCOME			
2007 ISO Convention	0	7,392	66,531
Delegate Fees	0	616	5,541
TOTAL NONOPERATIONAL INCOME	0	8,008	72,072
NONOPERATIONAL EXPENSES			
2007 ISO Convention	0	5,548	49,932
Delegate Meeting	0	683	6,143
Convention Related Travel	275	1,908	17,174
TOTAL NONOPERATIONAL EXPENSES	275	8,139	73,249
TOTAL NONOPERATIONAL SURPLUS	-275	-131	-1,177
ISO SURPLUS – ALL INCOME/EXPENSES	-12,431	-584	-5,257

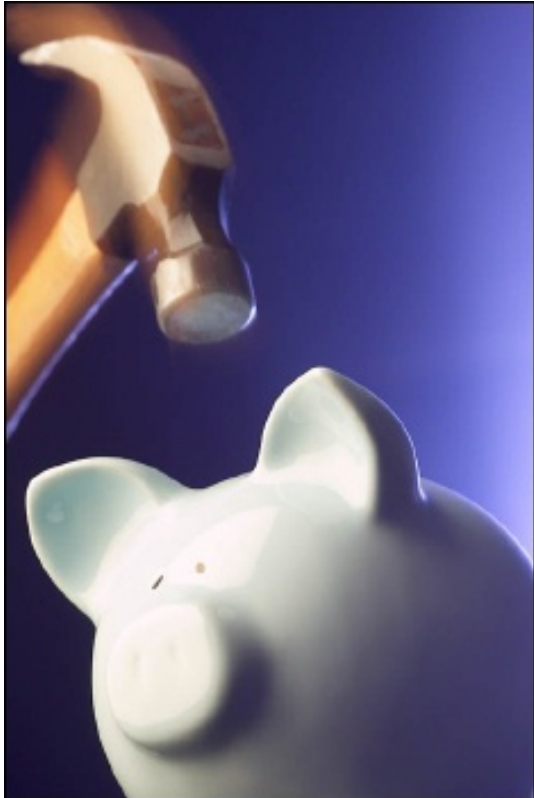
How could the ISO have lost \$12,431 during the month of September? For starters, the summer and fall months are usually low income months, while expenses remain steady. Consequently, the September budget projected a \$5,499 loss. This, combined with shortfalls of \$1,076 in sales and \$5,077 in donations, pretty much tells the story. The fact that operating expenses exceeded budget by \$1,304 did not help matters.

Even so, the dip in sales and the bump in expenses alone could have been weathered. Had not individual general donations fallen short by \$2,289 and group general donations by \$2,984, the loss would have still been greater than projected,

but at least cash flow would have been sufficient to cover bills. Instead, the Board had to approve borrowing \$3,000 from the Operational Reserve. This made it possible to eke through the month. Cash flow will continue to be a problem, if donations continue to lag as they have through the first half of October.

There might be all kind of reasons for lows in donations. During the summer, people are on vacation. During the fall, the children are going back in school. The winter brings holidays. The spring means tax time.

However, the biggest reason that donations are low is because only 222 out of 880 groups support their service organization. It could be said that the 658 that do not contribute directly do so indirectly through their intergroup, if not for the fact that only 13 of 37 intergroups support the ISO. Any way they are analyzed, group donations are a case of the few doing much for the benefit of the many.



Literature

Committed Today

By Jack C.

Where do I begin? After having relapsed following a year of sobriety, I was lost. I first managed to abstain from my bottom line behaviors for three months, then a month, then two weeks, and on the list goes. Eventually, I could hardly keep a day sober, even hours. I was getting desperate. It seemed as though nothing I had tried was working any more to keep myself from acting out. "What am I supposed to do when I cannot trust my own words, my own promises and keep them?" "What am I supposed to do when all I can think of is that I am a failure of the twelve-step program?" I could not think of anything worse than that. But was that really the case or was I just struggling through a relapse?

Fortunately, having tasted a year of honest sobriety, I have learned some invaluable lessons. One thing for sure is what I have always heard said in the rooms, "Keep coming back! It works and we're worth it!" (That is our motto in SAA in our city.) After having acted out repeatedly and admitting that I am insane these several months, I asked a friend, "When is a good time to come back to the rooms?" I asked him this because I thought there has to be a good time to come back, perhaps a time when I can confidently say, "That's it! I am done acting out!" He said that's my "stinkin' thinkin'" talking; instead he suggested to me that I keep coming back even when I'm still acting out. Since there was no doubt in my mind that I am loved and accepted in the fellowship of SAA, his suggestion sounded reasonable, but it was very hard to swallow my pride. "How can I keep coming back when I have to admit every time that I cannot stop acting out?" I felt so much shame.

A lot has happened in between coming back and relapsing. A lot of drama, a lot of crisis, a lot of grief, but also a lot of laughter, a lot of gratitude, and a lot of humility. I did still act out using drugs and acted out in ways that I did not do for over two years. I suppose I would have saved myself a lot of grief if I had stayed sober, but it could have been worse. I could still act out today and prolong my suffering. I know my disease is progressive but so is my recovery.

So I decided to keep coming back. One thing different this time is that I'm not going to say that I've been sober for a week, a month, or any period of time. I felt that was not working for me, because admitting to whatever little time of abstinence I had brought me feelings of shame and guilt. Since I have a hard time believing that I will not act out tomorrow, or next week, or forever, I take the suggestion in our SAA text under Step Two, "Act as if!"

Today, I act as if I am committed to staying sober; so I started sharing that in the rooms. I'm committed today to ask my Higher Power to give me the willingness to stay sober just for today, that's all. Not tomorrow, not one week, or a month, just for today, staying sober today, that's all I'm committing to.

Today is what counts, because I wouldn't have experienced the joy of recovery if I didn't stay sober one day at a time. It's important for me to notice that I would have missed many wonderful experiences, if I decide not to stay sober for each day that I committed to.

Today, I can name many things for which I'm grateful for being sober. One of them is meeting a couple of women friends who are committed to taking care of me after a major surgery, which will incapacitate me for several months. I have a few other friends who are committed in the same way. I realized that the very thing for which I wanted to numb myself, namely, the fear of the suffering I will go through after my surgery, is the very same thing that will make me grateful to be alive and to be taken care of. You see, I feared that I would be unlovable, unworthy to be taken care of, because I thought I was beyond that. I even thought that God had abandoned me. But those are the very lies that my addict tells me to give the excuse to act out.

The truth is that God loves me and I have always known that "Although there were times I stepped out of His will, I've never been out of His care." As simple as it sounds, that is how I know I am worth it.

In addition, I am grateful to be sober today because I would not have known how strong of a person I really am. In spite of all the odds against me, my unwavering spirit keeps pressing to hope, to survive, to live. I really believe that the lesson I am learning is that if I keep coming back, the twelve-step program will eventually work to save my life from utter ruin. Coming back today to the program is saving me from utter ruin. My affirmation is, "When or if I just stay sober just for today, I'm a healthier person today and I will be better tomorrow." And it does get better the longer I stay sober. I know that is God's will.

Finally, I am Jack and I am a grateful recovering sex addict who just wants to give hope to others like me who are struggling to come back from slips and relapses. I heard it said in twelve-step rooms that "We are not bad people trying to be good; we are sick people trying to get well." It does get better! Just keep coming back! It works and we're worth it!

We Live a Life of Choices

by Santi L.

John is the kind of guy one loves to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, John was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

He replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or . . . you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or . . . I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or...I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right; it's not that easy," I protested.

"Yes, it is," he said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life."

I reflected on what he said. Soon thereafter, I left the tower industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it.

Several years later, I heard that he was involved in a serious accident, falling some sixty feet from a communications tower. After eighteen hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, he was released from the hospital with rods placed in his back.

I saw him about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied, "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Want to see my scars?" I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place.

"The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon-to-be born daughter," he replied. "Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to die or...I could choose to

live. I chose to live.”

“Weren’t you scared? Did you lose consciousness?” I asked.

He continued, “The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read “he’s a dead man.” I knew I needed to take action.”

“What did you do?” I asked.

“Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me,” said John. “She asked if I was allergic to anything. ‘Yes,’ I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, ‘Gravity.’ Over their laughter, I told them, ‘I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.’”

He lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully.

“Act As If...”

by Thea D.

There was a period early on in my recovery, when I intentionally and consciously acted exactly contrary to my impulses. I knew that what I was doing was not working, had not worked for years, and probably never would. So, with the help and support of my sponsor and family, I consciously did the exact opposite of whatever I wanted to do at any given moment. If I yearned to call that guy I had had my eye on, I would leave the house without my cell phone. If I wanted to crash and watch TV, I would force myself to keep cleaning house. If I was feeling desperate to get a chore done, I would nap instead.

The constant stopping and changing direction was exhausting and time-consuming at first. It felt crazy, acting sanely. After a while, it became a hoot—my family members would help by suggesting outrageous alternatives to my habitual impulses. We would play with the whole concept of “crazy” as in “What crazy thing could I do/say now?”

That period lasted about two months and was incredibly worthwhile. Among other things, I got in touch with how many different alternatives I had and how many of them I habitually discounted or ignored, how much I had muzzled my creativity and imagination, how limited I had become in my thinking, and how settled in my routine. I am also convinced I avoided many arguments by not calling to force a “discussion.” I learned I could ask for and receive help from my family. Most importantly, I learned that being restored to sanity is possible.

Progressing with My Higher Power out of the Depths

by Anthony X.

According to the SAA Basic Text (p. 55), “As we progress in recovery, we come to realize that our Higher Power has always been with us, even in the depths of our addiction.” Even with some time in early recovery, I found that this was an entirely novel concept. I had turned categorizing my life into an art form, attending church on Sunday mornings and evenings and acting out the rest of the week. There were even times that I would leave the church fellowship and immediately turn to one of my acting out locations or activities. So it was easy for me to believe that there were certain times of the week, normally Sundays, when my Higher Power was with me, and that the rest of the week He was not.

Without trying to initiate or win a game of “can you top this?” I certainly believe that I had a thorough knowledge of what the phrase “depths of [my] addiction” meant. What those “depths” meant for me were engaging myself in ever-more dangerous activities, in the search for that high. When I went to meet that guy with whom I had been anonymously communicating, there was always that fear that the whole thing was a set-up and that there was a policeman waiting to greet me. And of course, that would have been the best of the several negative scenarios I imagined, none of which was frightening enough to keep me away from the situation that I had created. I also imagined that the person I was communicating with was waiting to beat me up or even kill me.

I was fortunate time after time. One time the police did indeed show up and for some reason decided to let me go with just a warning. There were also times when I came close to being beaten up, and yet another time when I was threatened with being killed, as the result of my acting out. Depths, indeed. And yet those depths were not enough to stop me from trying the same thing again the next night.

The Basic Text says that “our Higher Power has always been with us,” with my emphasis on the word “always.” And certainly there was a part of me who was positive that my Higher Power had to have been with me. Who else would have influenced those policemen to set me loose? Who else would have given me the presence of mind calmly to get away from those situations where I was being threatened with violence or in one case death? And yet, to say that this was the extent of what my Higher Power was doing for me would be to sell my Higher Power short.

My Higher Power was also working in my life in more subtle ways that I could not possibly have recognized at the time, since my thought processes were clouded with setting up my next acting-out situation. For one thing, even though Sundays only happened one day a week, I kept my obligations to those friends who expected my presence, as much as I sometimes felt I was doing nothing more than going through the motions.

I was also getting the messages from my Higher Power that there was more to life than what I was choosing to experience. I remember being a volunteer at a public radio station and three times a year participating in their two-week “marathons,” as they called them. They needed me there just about every hour that I was not at work or asleep, and I never even thought about going and acting out while I was taking pledges, entering information on the computer, and even getting on the air myself and asking for donations from time to time.

Also my Higher Power sent me occasional very specific reminders of some of the artistic activities I had enjoyed during my younger years before the addiction took hold, with the hint that perhaps it was time I came back to those activities. Since I was still in my addiction, something in me knew that the proper answer to these reminders was “not yet,” even if I didn’t know what the “yet” was that I was awaiting. It turned out to be SAA.

The SAA Book says that “as we progress in recovery, we come to realize” this role that our Higher Power has consistently played in our lives. So this is something that I didn’t suddenly see written on the wall one morning. Rather it was something of which I gained a gradual awareness, that I “came to realize,” a phrase that reminds me of nothing else as much as it does the words “came to believe” in Step Two. In both cases, it took a while for the fog to clear and for me to be able to see things a little more distinctly. I didn’t know at the time that those two-week marathons at the radio station were saving my life, and I didn’t realize it for a long time afterward. I know it now.

And yes, I have had the opportunity to go back and pick up some of the activities, artistic and otherwise, that I enjoyed when I was younger and that I let drop over the years. Now, when I get in the car late at night and drive to a dark, secluded area, it is not because I am waiting to see what kind of “adventure” I can find behind the next set of lights coming in my direction. It is because I have my star-gazing book and my flashlight, with the lit end painted with nail polish (so as not to blind myself), so that I can lose myself in the infinite stars above, searching out some constellation or star group that has eluded me in the past. What better way to connect with the Higher Power who has indeed been with me all along? Or I might be taking that forty-five-mile drive to the beach on a Sunday evening (seems like a lot, and I have driven a lot farther for a lot less), just to enjoy watching the waves coming in, and to pick up a twelve-step meeting in the town before heading back. And yes, I have reconnected with the artistic things again too; another article for another time.

To quote the Basic Text once more, it is my “progress in recovery” (yes, I’m using “progress” as a noun whereas the SAA Book uses it here as a verb) that has enabled me to look back over these areas of my life and see where my Higher Power has been with me all along. I’ve been blessed to be able to travel from those “depths” to the “heights” that God had in store for me all along.

Prayer

by Barry M.

How is it that prayer is utterly basic and essential in our recovery? Here I want to insert a brief caution not to use prayer as an “alibi,” i.e., to escape from the necessary work to be done in attending meetings, seeing a counselor, asking for a sponsor, working the steps, journaling and so on.

Here are two examples of earnest prayers at work. The first is by Thomas Merton: “My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I *hope* I have that desire in all that I am doing. I *hope* that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

Merton’s above prayer is basic. It is often thought of by professional theologians and spiritual directors. It is a touchstone, a baseline for recovering one’s spiritual sense or discerning why such has been lost. Why? It speaks of hope, which I have italicized in the two places of this frank prayer. As hope, it is not a sure, guaranteed outcome, that our desire to please our “higher power” will for sure result in that—or anyone else’s—desire; not even, with the best of intentions, our own. As hope, it endures as a basic commitment to stay on the road of recovery, even when and as the road itself is not seen ahead. How I have longed for more on the “hope and recovery” theme in our literature. Fortunately, a meditation book that many of us use has a helpful working index, and thus includes several entries to “hope” (though more could be added).

There is a second prayer which is utterly basic, too. I refer to the ever-familiar “serenity prayer.” In its original form: “God grant us the grace to accept with serenity the things we cannot change; the courage to change the things we ought to; and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other” (from the daughter of the author of the serenity prayer, Elisabeth Sifton).

I will resist the temptation to add commentary on this prayer, other than to suggest its use as a mantra or guide when one engages in meditation or centering prayer, when one uses a central theme or image to return to when the mind is distracted, confused, frenetic, frantic, discouraged or obsessed. It is such a balanced prayer and thus offers and aids us to center in the moment and for the purpose of being grounded in “hope and recovery” work.

Thankfully there are many other prayers suggested, as in and from the mother twelve-step program literature of AA. Many further resources on prayer to glean from; and, cautions to not think of prayer as an “alibi.” When not so used as an “alibi,” once again, as a pretext for avoiding the work of recovery which follows from prayer and meditation (though being rooted in these two disciplines), prayer engages the longing for hope and then remaining hopeful, when despair hits us.

A fellow SAA member has been experiencing the sudden and deep, lingering loss of hope in the suicide of a significant other. Despair, according again to Thomas Merton, is very much like hope, in that both open our hands to help. We are both forced to let go—of what, alas, is just not working—and persuaded to open up—to what or to whom is near at hand to accompany us in our healing. This same person has been working his recovery daily, and with open hands. Some hours or days are better than others. What helps the rest of us in the fellowship is his openness and daily faithfulness to “work the program”—seldom according to a neat formula, but working the art of relating to other fellow sufferers, nonetheless.

Let it be, thus...or, “Amen.”



Accountability Is the Key

by Steve W.

Okay, okay, I know, everything turns out to be “the key”: today it’s “offense is the key;” tomorrow “defense is the key;” then “teamwork is the key.” This movement is full of slogans. But yesterday, accountability was the key.

Yesterday I was searching my files and—be still my dopamine gland!—there was a cross-dressing story, a slender little book selling for ten dollars or so with a titillating pen and ink illustration on the cover. I’ve bought hundreds in my time but thought all were trashed. My heart raced, my head throbbed, I felt a jolt of anticipatory pleasure, and—perhaps most importantly—my brain fogged.

I can read this! I thought. But it was all over in an instant (well, the regret, the flashbacks and the yearning lingered on and reoccurred). Why was it over in an instant? Because I knew if I read the story, I would be found out: not necessarily caught in the act, but found out by my wife and forced to face the consequences: her disappointment, anger, sadness; plus, banishment from our home for a week. That’s effective accountability.

After twenty-six years of marriage, after twenty years in the program, I wish I could take some credit for the year of sobriety I have, but what it comes down to is: accountability. And what accountability comes down to is certainty of being caught and fear of that.

So fear as a motivator is nothing to brag about: not like, say, moral character or even will power. But it has worked. And as a result, my life has been pretty serene and untroubled by the addiction. Not free of problems. Oh, no. My life, as they liked to say at one treatment centre I attended, “is still in session.” But as I became more and more accountable, I got freer and freer of the addiction, and better at meeting life on its own terms.

So how did this accountability come about? The simple, brutal and, for many, intolerable answer: regular lie detector tests. After I went to two treatment centers (one for five weeks), after I lost a well-paying job that I hated; after I acted out again after eighteen months of sobriety, my wife insisted we see a marriage counselor. This particular counselor is a big believer in lie detector tests to save those marriages where lying about sexual addiction has destroyed trust. Mine would be one of those.

As long as I thought I could get away with it, I was always at risk of acting out again. Even after treatment, I would draw the line (no prostitutes, no masturbation) and then I would give myself permission to do stuff that did not cross that line. And by doing that stuff, my brain would be clouded; its intellectual faculties would shut down and through increasing inputs of dopamine and other brain chemicals, brain activity would flow to where the sex drive lives. It’s saying: satisfy this drive: have sex! Propagate the race! Go forth and multiply! (and Forget those lines and boundaries, those inner

circles, etc.). And so I would eventually cross the lines obscured by my brain fog.

But fear (fear of abandonment, fear of disappointing my wife, fear of growing old alone, fear of being forced out of the house, fear of confirming my worst opinion of myself) is a powerful, primitive drive in the brain too. And knowing that in two months I would face another lie detector test marshaled that drive against the sexual drive.

Fear doesn't work perfectly. It needs help from the intellect. Two months ago I found that out when I was browsing for a book for a fellow in recovery who had just become a father. The bookstore had a discreet section of "erotica" and I decided to take a look; the fog began setting in as soon as I entered the store because I was in a needy place emotionally and I knew this section was in the store. My story to myself was: I'll only look if I find cross-dressing material, and although I have agreed I won't look at pornography this won't break that promise because this isn't a porn store and anyway I came in to buy my friend a present and it was more an accident and so on: all a story designed to cloud the brain until I open the book and got truly hooked. So I did fast-read the book and I did confess to my wife, just before the lie detector test would have revealed it, and I did spend a week outside the home.

Since then, every day I run down a list of forbidden behaviors with my sponsor: a checklist which covers a number of my middle circle behaviors that aren't captured by the lie detector test but put me in harm's way: going to the cross dressing book site where stories I have myself written are for sale, for one example. Going to strip shows, for another. Reading porn in book stores or anywhere, for a third. This is just to keep in the frontal lobes of my brain what behaviors I cannot do.

The fact is, the list of behaviors covered by the lie detector test is relatively slim. But lie detector tests don't actually measure whether you are lying; they measure how you feel about the questions asked and about the answers you give. Suppose I listened to a pornographic tape, telling myself, "I won't get asked about this, I can still pass the test because it only asks about looking at pornography." When I actually take the test, I will fail the question about looking at pornography. So the checklist is to cover a wider group of behaviors.

Experience with three of these tests now has taught me whatever I do is going to come out. The result is: I keep getting more and more sober. There is no fun, no percentage and no future in contemplating actions whose result is a certain, unhappy confrontation with my wife. Maybe the lie detector test, rather than God, is my Higher Power. But it works. I know there are guys who refuse to do this: they are not as afraid as I am of acting out and losing my marriage. And there are wives who refuse to believe it when their husbands pass the test. But for me: it's a marriage-saver and, most bottom of bottom lines, I'm the most sober I've ever been.

Control Does Not Reside in Me

by John R., Miami, FL

One of the great benefits of working with other sex addicts is that they challenge me to confront some of the Big Questions, and search for solutions. I feel privileged and grateful as a little guy to be able to participate in these great quests for knowledge which have illuminated men over the centuries, and to experience some of the answers. It seems no coincidence that when these topics come up, they apply to my life right now, and I get to investigate them and keep learning more.

So let's talk about control. It doesn't hurt just to talk about it, right? It doesn't mean I have to do anything about it! I find, however, that as I reflect on a subject, healthier ideas begin to seep into my mind, and when a certain saturation point is reached, I may have a shift in consciousness. One of the mysterious ways, I guess...

From a practical viewpoint: Control: How is that working for you?

One of the most basic criteria in any human endeavor must be: how successful or effective is the process? The books say it so much better than I could. Here are some clues in tracking down this mystery (emphases are all mine, except where noted):

AA Big Book, pg. 60: "The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success." AA Big Book, pg. 25: "There is a solution [emphasis in original].... The great fact is just this, and nothing less: that we have had deep and effective spiritual experiences which have revolutionized our whole attitude toward life, toward our fellows and toward God's universe." AA Twelve & Twelve, pg. 37: "Nobody is going to meddle with our personal independence. Besides, we think, there is no one we can surely trust. We are certain that our intelligence, backed by willpower, can rightly control our inner lives and guarantee us success in the world we live in. This brave philosophy, wherein each man plays God, sounds good in the speaking, but it still has to meet the acid test: how well does it actually work? One good look in the mirror ought to be answer enough for any [sex addict]." Also see the paragraph on page 37 that follows this one, and which is also an excellent summary of the results of self-sufficiency in the world at large. AA Twelve & Twelve, pg. 36: "And the facts seem to be these: The more we become willing to depend upon a Higher Power, the more independent we actually are. Therefore, dependence, as A.A. practices it, is really a means of gaining true independence of spirit."

But I don't really think I'm telling any of you anything new here. I'll bet you clearly suspect whose handwriting is on the wall, and just like the rest of us, you all have some last gasps of resistance before we do what we know is really best for us. We are all like fish caught on a hook, aren't we, wanting

to break free; I don't know if that struggle ever completely goes away. Well, I honor that, and just suggest that anyone can do anything he or she wants as long as he or she is willing to live with the consequences of those actions.

My experience is that the twelve-step recovery programs are eminently practical, since one of the most basic criteria for judging the effectiveness of any "design for living" must be "How well is that working for you?" Then, by following the prescribed methods of one's chosen design for living, if one is happily and usefully whole (and if there is an addiction involved, "the obsession is expelled"), that's great! I wish that person a nice life, and that he or she can share those methods with others so they can have a nice life, too. If, for some reason, one is lacking slightly on the happy, useful, whole, or obsession-free components, then there is room for improvement. It's my job to find out what the problem is and how to fix it. Here are some hints: Self-centeredness is the root of our troubles. Instincts running wild cause practically all the trouble there is.

By process of elimination: I can't, God can.

From an historical perspective: control—do I really have any? My conclusion is that I never did have any control—the illusion that I have or had any control over my life is just that—an illusion. From my early days, I seemed to be governed by a fear of abandonment and rejection, which would compel me to do whatever necessary to fit in, belong, be accepted, feel okay. The controlling factors were to gain approval from my parents, teachers, friends. My sexual fantasies and behaviors began early in my life, and I was at their beck and call. They were useful as an escape, to quell the anxiety and fears that had surfaced. This early addictive thinking and behavior carved pathways into my brain and psyche. In college, drugs and alcohol were added to my tool kit for feelings management. Even with sobriety in AA, sex and money compulsions governed my behavior for the most part. Ultimately, alcohol and sex were used as shortcuts to a spiritual experience; they may have worked that way initially, but failed in the long run.

I have heard people suggest that if I do not think I am powerless, I can try white-knuckling it on my sex addiction; that is to say, I can just stop and stay stopped on my own will power alone. That never worked for me! Maybe I have other characteristics or behaviors that don't yield to self-control: eating or anger or sadness or loneliness, being discontent or irrita-

ble. The question is, how is my control working on them? If I were able to control my emotions and fix myself inside, I would have done it by now. I would be out there having a great life. And the idea of controlling other people is silly, when I cannot even control myself. By process of elimination: I can't, God can.

A cornerstone of my understanding of addiction and recovery is that control does not reside in me. An oft-quoted passage from AA's Big Book pg. 30, expresses this well:

"Most of us have been unwilling to admit we were real [sex addicts]. No person likes to think he is bodily and mentally different from his fellows. Therefore, it is not surprising that our [sex behaviors] have been characterized by countless vain attempts to prove we could [have sex] like other people. The idea that somehow, someday he will control and enjoy his [sex behavior] is the great obsession of every [sex addict]. The persistence of this illusion is astonishing. Many pursue it into the gates of insanity and death.

"We learned that we had to concede to our innermost selves that we were [sex addicts]. This is the first step in recovery. The delusion that we are like other people, or presently may be, has to be smashed."

AA Big Book, pg. 52, in the paragraph which I understand to be a pretty comprehensive description of the "spiritual malady" aspect of my addictions: "We were having trouble with personal relationships, we couldn't control our emotional natures, we were a prey to misery and depression, we couldn't make a living, we had a feeling of uselessness, we were full of fear, we were unhappy, we couldn't seem to be of real help to other people..."

So what's the solution? See the quote on page 25 above, the one about the spiritual experiences.

And this, from page. 34: "Whether such a person can quit upon a non-spiritual basis depends upon the extent to which he has already lost the power to choose whether he will [sexually-act-out] or not."

I actually feel a beautiful yielding in surrendering control—my control turns into cooperation, I am aligning myself with the stream of Power flowing through my life, instead of fighting to go upstream. What a relief...I don't have to do it all on my own anymore. AA Big Book, pg. 85: "Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into all our activities. . . . We can exercise our will power along this line all we wish. It is the proper use of the will."

Dear Grace

Submitted by SAA Women's Outreach

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 receives.

Names have been changed to protect anonymity

Dear Grace:

I'm the only woman at my meeting; how do I know I belong if I'm not hearing my story?

Do I Really Belong Here?

Hi, Do I Really Belong Here:

When I first came to SAA I was the only woman in my group, too. There is a pamphlet called Sex Addicts Anonymous, and in it are twelve questions you can ask yourself to find out if you are a sex addict. You can also view these same questions on the SAA website. SAA has only one requirement for membership: a desire to stop addictive sexual behaviors. If you have this and say you are a member of SAA, you are. I hope that you have taken the time to read your SAA Basic Text, as it contains many stories of women in SAA. Also, we have a book called From Shame to Grace, which contains stories of people in SAA as well. Also, if you have not used the SAA Women's Outreach List, you are welcome to send me an email at grace@saa-recovery.org and request the list of women in SAA who choose to be available for communication in that medium. Please keep going to meetings and staying sober! One day other women will walk into your meeting and you will be there to welcome them.

Grace

From the Editor

by Mike L.

I remember hearing someone at a speaker meeting years ago make a suggestion that has always stuck with me. He said that all of us listening to him would do well to immerse ourselves in the program and start having some spiritual experiences. I have always understood a spiritual experience to be something that immediately caused me to see things in a different light than I had seen it just five minutes (or seconds) before. I recently had one of those spiritual experiences.

The other day, I ran across a copy of one of those novels I had inflicted upon me in high school. I hated it at the time, and out of some sense of morbid curiosity I picked it up and looked at the first page. There I ran across these words that the author's father had once said to him (remember that spellings and the like have changed since 1925): "Whenever you feel like criticising any one," he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.'" Maybe this book isn't as horrible as I once thought.

I think the author's father was referring to material advantages here, and I can't claim any special distinction along those lines. At the same time, I think back on all the wonderful things I've had the opportunity to experience in my life. And indeed one of the most special is the wonderful opportunity I have had to experience recovery over the last fifteen or so years.

And yet the part of the phrase that struck me the hardest was "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one." This part hit me over the head like a hammer. I certainly can't claim any kind of immunity to the desire to criticize others; I look at this individual or that and say to myself that he or she isn't living life the way I think would be most beneficial. This one really needs recovery; why isn't he getting it, especially now that I've explained it all to him?

My spiritual experience? Maybe I would benefit from being a little less judgmental of others, and allow that Higher Power is working with each person in his or her own time. What a concept...

I've been really happy with the number of articles that have been coming in lately. That doesn't mean, however, that I'm not going to keep asking. We've got a couple of articles this month that latch onto phrases in *Sex Addicts Anonymous* and expand upon them. I'm looking to see more articles that talk about what the writers are get-

ting out of our Basic Text (even if I did include a quote in this article that is not from our book).

Please keep your articles coming. You can send them to me through the ISO office at P.O. Box 70949, Houston, TX 77270-0949 or you can send them by e-mail to toc@saa-recovery.org

Enjoy this third issue of *The Outer Circle*. I'll be back in touch soon with the first issue of the new year. Have a wonderful holiday season!



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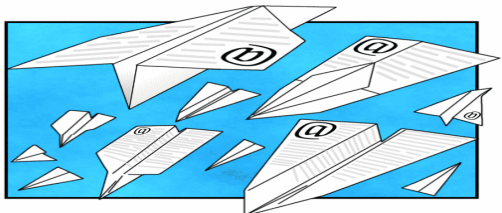
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The SAA-ISO Board of Directors has established an e-mail box which may be used to register complaints from the fellowship about the ISO staff.

OOCchair@SAA-Recovery.org



How to Submit an Article to *The Outer Circle*

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: toc@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:

**Jan/Feb, 2008: November 12, 2007; Mar/Apr, 2008: January 7, 2008;
May/June, 2008: March 10, 2008; July/Aug, 2008: May 12, 2008; Sept/Oct,
2008: July 7, 2008; Nov/Dec, 2008: September, 8 2008**

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